



Fukuoka Growth Next offers a range of consultancy services for new businesses at its Startup Cafe in Fukuoka City
Photo: Courtesy of Fukuoka City Startup Cafe

Fukuoka Incubator Helps Dreams Come True



Fukuoka Growth Next's Startup Cafe
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The city of Fukuoka, Fukuoka Prefecture on the northern shore of Kyushu is drawing in entrepreneurs from Japan and abroad in part thanks to the range of business-support initiatives and subsidies the City provides.

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FUKUOKA City was selected as a National Strategic Special Zone for Global Startups & Job Creation in May 2014, a designation which has enabled the City to introduce initiatives such as a “start-up visa,” exempting foreign entrepreneurs from some of Japan’s standard “business visa” requirements, as well as a variety of “Business Establishment Support” subsidies.

In addition to being well known as a city open to the world, being located close to major cities in Asia, Fukuoka is now also attracting attention as an important incubator in Japan of domestic and overseas start-up businesses.

One such business is NewroCare Institute Japan, the brainchild of Dr. Xiaoping Li.

Dr. Xiaoping Li is a pioneer in the field of neuroengineering. The former National University of Singapore professor has had more than 400 peer-reviewed articles published in the field, including a report in *Scientific Reports* (Nov. 4, 2014), an online science journal published by Nature Research, announcing the development of two breakthrough technologies: the non-contact, non-invasive (1) imaging and (2) modulating of the brain’s neurotransmitters’ activities. When commercialized, Dr. Li believes that these non-contact, non-invasive and therefore



Dr. Xiaoping Li shows a video of a cat being induced to sleep by the PowerDreaming signal. In clinical trials on fifty people, human subjects fell asleep on average within just 10 minutes (compared to 30 minutes control) and achieved REM (deep) sleep time of 85.5% (compared to 47.5% control)

Photo: Alex Hendy



The sleep inducing and modulating PowerDreaming device (center); DreamTector (right), which detects the level of sleep hormone release in the brain to measure and monitor the depth of sleep; and VigiLor (left), which enhances wakefulness, having possible applications for long-distance driving, for example

Photo: Alex Hendy

safe technologies could offer solutions to a range of human health problems, starting with insomnia.

The product Dr. Li aims to launch first is called “PowerDreaming,” a device fitted with a neural IC chip, manufactured in Japan, that can be slipped under a pillow and turned on to induce sleep and modulate the brain’s neurotransmitters’ activities. For the millions worldwide who suffer from insomnia or take sleeping pills, the sleep-induction device could be life changing. Further, by inducing longer, deeper sleep, the device is also designed to efficiently refresh the brain’s neurons, providing for a heightened feeling of wakefulness after sleep.

To commercialize the core technologies, Dr. Li and his wife, Dr. Qian Xia, established NewroCare Institute in Singapore in 2016 and NewroCare Institute Japan, in Fukuoka, the following year.

On a flight to Fukuoka in September 2016 to meet with former colleagues at Kyushu University, which is located in the city, Dr. Li and Dr. Xia happened to read an article in a newspaper about Fukuoka Growth Next, an initiative of Fukuoka City providing facilities, programs and administrators that aims to foster start-ups and accelerate their growth. The chance encounter has brought Dr. Li’s dreams to the very brink of fruition.

“We happened to have the PowerDreaming device with us in our luggage, so we went directly from the airport to the Startup Cafe in Fukuoka that we had read about on the plane,” says Dr. Li. “We arrived at the Café at 5:00 p.m., and within two hours, the

staff had arranged applications including our start-up visas and the necessary medical certification for our business. Thanks to Startup Cafe staff, we could also find an office. The support we have received has been fantastic and is why we have established our business, NewroCare Institute Japan, in Fukuoka.”

Specifically, Fukuoka Growth Next introduced NewroCare to Fukuoka City’s Business Establishment Support Programs (for Foreign and Foreign Affiliated Enterprises), which provides subsidies for office rent, new employment for citizens of Fukuoka, and consultation support, in the case of NewroCare to help with the company’s products’ PDMA [Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Agency] certification. Fukuoka City has also implemented a Startup Corporate Tax Cut initiative. Dr. Li and Dr. Xia received their start-up visas just one week after they applied and established NewroCare Institute Japan in May, 2017.

In the near future, Dr. Li intends to apply his core technologies to a range of other human health conditions including Alzheimer’s Disease, epilepsy and dyslexia, as well as to the detection of pain felt by patients under anesthesia.

“Products using these technologies will give rise to a whole new industrial field, the neural industry,” Dr. Li predicts.

Fukuoka City’s efforts to attract and support overseas startups demonstrate its character as an open international city and could see the emergence of the city as an innovation center much like Silicon Valley. 