

Japan stem cell body splashes cash on luxury furniture

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A publicly-funded research institute in Japan, already embattled after accusing one of its own stem cell scientists of faking data, has spent tens of thousands of dollars on designer Italian furniture, reportedly to use up its budget.

The respected Riken Institute, headed by Nobel chemistry laureate Ryoji Noyori, spent almost 10 million yen (\$100,000) on two shopping sprees in March 2011 at Cassina Inc., a maker and importer of top-range [furniture](#), publicly-released information shows.

In its latest edition, Shukan Bunshun magazine cites a former Riken researcher as saying the lavish spending was part of a drive to use up its approximately 100 billion yen budget before the April 1 end of the fiscal year.

"When I was at the institute, it was having a tough time spending its budget within a fiscal year, so it would frequently do interior renovations," the researcher, who was not identified, was quoted as saying.

A Riken spokesman said the furniture was appropriate for a building that receives "guests from overseas".

"The building where the furniture is located was completed in February of that year, and the furniture was ordered to be on schedule for the completion of the new building," he said.

The luxurious furniture was purchased for the [stem cell research](#) and development facilities in western Kobe city, where under-fire Haruko Obokata is accused of fabricating data.

Obokata was feted as a modern-day Marie Curie after unveiling research that showed a simple way to re-programme adult cells to become a kind of stem cell, a breakthrough that could provide a ready supply of the base material for transplant tissue.

But Riken has since distanced itself from the study, which was published in the British journal *Nature*, after it came to light that some of Obokata's data was faulty.

The 30-year-old scientist has acknowledged errors, but defends her conclusions.

The scandal, which has played out emotively and very publicly as a David-and-Goliath tale of a lone young woman battling an establishment body, has tarnished the image of Riken, and prompted Japanese media to scrutinise the taxpayer-funded institute.

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