

Session Report of Parallel Session 1: Gender Equality

In this parallel session chaired by Sigal Spigel from the University of Cambridge Centre for Gender Studies, we invited four speakers to present and discuss gender equality.

The first speaker was Dr Mariko Ogawa, from the Office for Gender Equality at the University of Tokyo. Dr Ogawa discussed the current state of gender equality in Japan. She introduced gender statistics of the University of Tokyo and initiatives taken by UTokyo to improve equality, diversity and inclusion, such as education and training for all university members, housing support, hiring support, networking event and so on. Each school is also encouraged to formulate its own acceleration plan to increase the number of female faculty members.

The second speaker was Prof Lucy Delap from the Faculty of History, University of Cambridge. Prof Delap introduced the history of how women at Cambridge University struggled for equal rights. The implication is that the institutional histories of gender equality are rarely completed and gender justice is an ongoing journey. Women's contributions from many directions including those outside of formal academic structures should be recognised. Intersectional approaches to gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality etc. are productive and inclusive, and methodologies to understand and study gender should also be inclusive.

The third speaker was Prof Yuki Honda from the Graduate School of Education, University of Tokyo. Prof Honda introduced the gender gap in Japan and at the University of Tokyo, and analysed reasons for the gender gap, including the impact of traditional socio-economic model, conservative policies, gender stereotypes, unconscious gender bias and so on. To support her thesis, she presented striking data regarding various aspects of the gap and raised difficult questions about the way women are being treated in the academia. Prof Honda emphasised the importance of a determined policy to realise a social model where every person can pursue a life in which their public and private lives are balanced. Some fundamental changes or transformation are needed to achieve it.

The fourth speaker was Dr Brigitte Steger from the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge. Dr Steger started with sharing her personal account of studying/teaching Japanese culture in Cambridge university. She talked about the imbalance between genders where female staff seem to dominate support and academic-related positions, with senior and academic positions overwhelmingly filled by men. She analysed reasons for it, including unconscious bias, lack of role models, lack of attention to workload and welfare, unequal assignment of supporting roles and leadership roles and so on. Dr Steger also introduced gender studies in the Cambridge curriculum and her project on circular plastics centre.

During the panel discussion, the panel answered questions from the audience and discussed the impact of gender inequality on women's behaviours and voices in academia, and ways to share lessons and increase engagement between the two universities.

Overall, the four speakers and the audience shared an understanding that it takes time to achieve gender equality. It also became clear that each university is at a different phase in terms of the achievements women already made, and each academic community has its own struggles when it comes to closing the gender gap. Yet, the journey towards these accomplishments is similar in spite of the differences.

The panel ended with all participants united in their wish to strengthen the academic links and to continue with these inspiring conversations where academics from both universities share personal and research accounts as part of a joint endeavour to learn from each other and to support each other in the gender equality journey.