

Message to Our Readers

An Aim of the Publication, Reflections on Supporting Women Researchers

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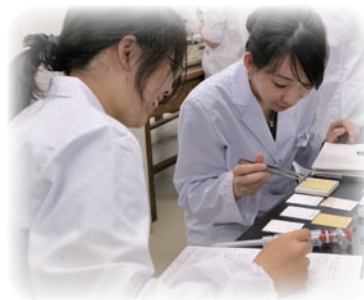
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AS ONE OF THE LEADING RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITIES IN JAPAN, Kyoto University has achieved international recognition for its remarkable academic record. In addition to the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine awarded to Professor Shinya Yamanaka in 2012, the University is renowned for garnering eight other Nobel Prizes, two Fields Medals, one Gauss Prize, four Lasker Awards, four Canada Gairdner International Awards, two Japan Prizes and four Kyoto Prizes. However, it is notable that all of these prizes have been awarded to male researchers.

Japan has a long tradition of excellence in the arts and literature, and there are many women who have achieved recognition for their skills and talent. Unfortunately, however, in terms of the number of women researchers in industry and academia, Japan ranks as the lowest among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member nations. As a response to this situation, the Japanese government is addressing the need to increase the ratio of women researchers in the natural sciences as part of its Science and Technology Basic Plan. In order to achieve this target, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is implementing a number of policies to promote the training, development and recruitment of women researchers. Kyoto University has also been active in addressing the gender gap, and established the Center for Women Researchers in 2006.

The Center offers a comprehensive support system to women researchers under the funding from Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) for three years, so that their research activities need not be interrupted by childbirth or childcare. Upon completion of the term, Kyoto University implements its own services and policies to provide further support to women researchers across the natural sciences, humanities and social sciences, aiming to encourage those who will be able to contribute proactively not only to Kyoto University but also to the wider world, both nationally and internationally.



Statistical data regarding female students at undergraduate and graduate level and researchers at Kyoto University are outlined in the following paragraph — a quick glance shows that the current situation is not yet one we can be proud of. Nevertheless, among all of the distinguished researchers at Kyoto University, there are many female graduate students and young researchers who possess exceptional talent across many different fields. Every year, Kyoto University honors such excellence in research through the presentation of the Tachibana Award for the Most Outstanding Female Researcher.

As of 1 May 2013, the percentage of women researchers at assistant professor, associate professor and professor level reached 10.6% of all full-time researchers at Kyoto University — an increase of 0.7% year on year. Women constituted 15.3% of new recruits in the same period. If this recruitment ratio is maintained, undoubtedly the number of women researchers will steadily increase.

In light of these developments, this special issue of Research Activities focuses on active women researchers at Kyoto University, with the aim of informing a wide readership at universities and research institutes overseas about some of the research environments in which women researchers work at Kyoto University, as well as their various research activities.

We hope that our readers will enjoy this special issue, featuring an analysis of the current research climate for women researchers in Japan compared with that at Kyoto University, what women researchers think about older times at Kyoto University, as well as highlighting research conducted by Tachibana Award winner, frontline researchers and young professors, associate professors and assistant professors, offering a glimpse of their curiosity, enthusiasm and commitment to research. ■