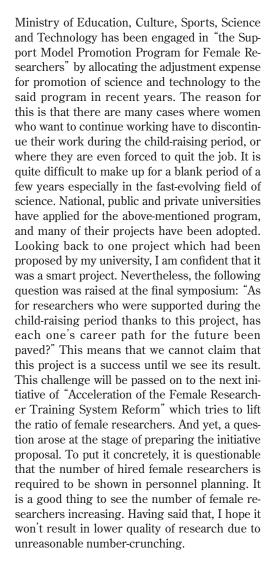


Toward an era when women will contribute to science and technology



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It can be said that presence of female researchers was recognized in Japan for the first time in 1913 when the Tohoku Imperial University opened its door to three female students: Chika Kuroda (Department of Chemistry), Ume Tange (Department of Chemistry), and Raku Makita (Department of Mathematics). In a sharp contrast to Europe where Madame Curie had received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1903, Japan has been far behind in terms of female education. Right from the start, Japan has periods when the conventional wisdom had claimed "women do not need to be educated" or even said "science does harm (to women)." Such periods lasted until the late 1800s.



Female researchers have been supported in universities, but how is the corresponding situation for female researchers and engineers in businesses? In the current conditions of "declining birth rates and moving-away from science and engineering," fewer and fewer youths take up science and technology. For the past several years, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has been promoting a campaign to encourage female students at elementary and junior high schools to "become interested in science." With this background, aspiration for science seems to be getting stronger in my university as well, which has affiliated schools. It would be difficult to maintain the status as a nation built on the platform of scientific and technological creativity toward a new industrial revolution, unless not only men but also women make contributions in the next generation. That is because more and more engineers who supported Japan in the 20th century now go into retirement. I believe that a new social structure shall be formed if we can take a new turn by adding female sensibility to science and technology which have supported the Japanese economy. Back in the World War II era, the predecessor of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology urged the establishment of science-course professional schools for girls in order both to meet rapidly increased demand for scientists and engineers and to make up for a shortage of male labor force when the war intensified. In response to the official request, new science courses were opened one after another in then existing professional schools for girls until 1944. And now, attention is seemingly paid to women again as it was in the war time. In spite of such an ironic viewpoint, I do hope that the movement won't end up with temporary hiring of women but will have a solid foundation for this time around so that a gender-equal era can be created. To this end, I sincerely ask for corporate support to female scientists and engineers.

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