

Policies for Developing Gender Studies in Japan
Recommendation: Pioneering the Future of Science and Society
Based on Gender Perspectives

SUMMARY

1 Background

The Science Council of Japan has been steadily working towards the high-level development of science based on gender perspectives by issuing two external reports: ‘Gender Problems and the Reconstruction of Science’ by the Committee for Multilateral Investigation on Gender Problems in the 18th term, and ‘Towards the Realization of a Gender-equal Society: The Role and Importance of Gender Studies’ in the 19th term.

2 Current Situation and Problems

While a ‘reconstruction of science based on gender perspectives’ has been achieved to a certain extent in some areas of humanities and social sciences, it has not been adequately accomplished or even touched upon in many other areas. Issues underlying this include a misunderstanding of the concept of gender, which prevents the significance of this proposal from permeating into government administration, education and research institutes, mass media, private enterprises and the general public.

3 Content of Proposal, etc.

(1) What are gender studies?

Gender studies are an interdisciplinary area of research in which we analyze and try to clarify phenomena that surround human beings from ‘gender-sensitive perspectives (gender perspectives)’.

From the premodern era to the first half of the 20th century, the dominant rationale was that various fields of science originated in Western Europe. Under this rationale, it was implied as ‘natural’ that knowledge was produced by (healthy white Caucasian) men, while the standard subjects of study were also assumed to be (healthy white Caucasian) men.

Against this rationale, new fields of study have arisen and developed since the second half of the 20th century. These include post-colonial studies, black studies, women's studies, Asian studies emanating from Asia, and studies on disability undertaken by the disabled. Here, both investigator and investigated have become much more diverse in terms of their race, ethnicity, class, age or disability.

'Gender perspectives' implies a quest for genuine consideration of the diversity of human beings by re-appraising gender, which cuts across race, ethnicity, class, age, disability and other differences. Studies that re-evaluate existing research subjects or methods in scholarship from a 'gender perspective' have contributed to the coexistence of varied lives by focusing on the diversity of human beings as a whole.

(2) Contribution of gender studies to science

Studies based on gender perspectives have until now developed mainly in the fields of humanities and social sciences. In recent years, however, they have been yielding important outcomes in other fields (such as natural sciences) and in multidisciplinary areas. Studies based on gender perspectives, such as gender-sensitive medicine and gender in engineering or agronomy, have brought a new vision to these fields, contributing greatly to the idea of 'science for the sake of humanity'.

Gender is an internationally established concept – for example, it was a major concern in the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations in 2000. It is undeniable that gender studies have borne much fruit and made a significant contribution at international level.

(3) Contribution of gender studies to human society

The possibilities of human knowledge are inexhaustible. Studies based on gender perspectives will bring benefits to human society beyond the frame of estimation currently available to us. It is indispensable for the development of Japan's science and culture to promote studies for the sake of true social equality and justice, based on a clarification of gender perspectives.

However, there is a general climate of discourse that is evidently based on a misunderstanding of the concept of gender. If the use of this concept were to become restricted in this climate, it is feared that scientific research in Japan could lag behind that of other nations, and that the feedback to human society from the findings of such research could be limited.

(4) Keeping step with the international community

Equality between men and women is a major value held high in the Japanese Constitution. It has been agreed at national level that the policy of co-participation by men and women as the means to realize this value is ‘a top-priority task in determining the framework of 21st-century Japan’ (preamble to the 1999 Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society). Prior to this, in the international community, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the United Nations, and ratified by Japan in 1985.

In its 20th term, the Science Council of Japan has accumulated efforts aimed at enhancing the co-participation of men and women in scholarship as part of its bold restructuring. Nevertheless, the Gender Empowerment Measures (GEM) of the United Nations ranked Japan 43rd among 80 nations in 2005, suggesting that opportunities for women to manifest their abilities was still at a low level by international standards. Given this situation, the development of scientific research based on gender perspectives should further encourage the co-participation of men and women in all facets of society and contribute greatly towards the realization of a gender-equal society.

(5) Recommendations

(a) To the community of scientists

- To employ gender perspectives in each area of study by recognizing that they are necessary and useful for all scientific research.
- To fully utilize the results of gender studies and education in policies, including the policy of co-participation by men and women in science.

(b) To administrative, research and educational institutions

- To support and nurture scientific research and education based on gender perspectives.
- To enhance use of the concept of gender by fully recognizing its importance.

(c) To mass media, private enterprises and the general public

- To apply gender-sensitive perspectives in both transmitting and receiving information.
- To apply gender-sensitive perspectives in economic activity and social life.

The Committee hereby makes the above-mentioned recommendations, and hopes that they will help to improve the nation’s health and welfare, thereby promoting peace and happiness in the world, by contributing to the realization of a gender-equal society.