

“University of Tsukuba Night” at Venture Café Cambridge and its evaluation by the Boston area.

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1. Introduction

“University of Tsukuba Night: The Role of Academia in Innovation” was held at Cambridge Innovation Center (CIC: 1 Broadway, Cambridge) on August 29th, 2019, with the support of the Consulate General of Japan in Boston. For the first time in a Japanese university, the University of Tsukuba sponsored "Venture Cafe Cambridge" held every Thursday at CIC, one of the world's leading innovation hubs.

“What will Japanese university do in Cambridge?” Based on this interest, many people from local companies, startups, VCs, and Japanese institutions in the US participated. In this paper, we report the contents of “University of Tsukuba Night” and its verification results.



Figure 1. Cambridge Innovation Center

2. Event Purpose

Located in the center of Japan's largest research city, startups from the University of Tsukuba have raised over USD 100 million since 2017. In the future, we would like to promote collaboration with the Boston area by establishing an activity base at CIC. This base will be the meeting place for investors who seek startups with innovative and cutting-edge technology, companies who look for opportunities of a strategic alliance with

Japan, other ecosystem players, and students.

3. Event Contents

(1) Opening Remarks

Following the remarks by the Consul General of the Japanese Consulate General in Boston, Nagata (President, University of Tsukuba) stated below:

1. The environment for industry-academia collaboration and startups surrounding universities is very different between Japan and the US.

2. The University of Tsukuba will not only stay in Japan but also send faculties and students to world-leading innovation centers, such as Boston and Silicon Valley, to promote worldwide startup activities.

(2) Panel Discussion

The theme was “Academia as a Catalyst for Innovation.” The panel members were chosen with a priority on diversity. Moderator was Nancy Saucier (BAE System Inc.) nominated by Venture Café. Jacob Levin (MIT), Hiroshi Ishii (MIT), Benton Caroline (vice president, University of Tsukuba), and Yoichi Ochiai (associate professor, University of Tsukuba) participated as panelists.



Figure 2. Panel Discussion



CIC Founder, Mr. Timothy Rowe



MIT, Mr. Christopher Novel

Figure 3. Questions from Participants

Following the startup support measures of the University of Tsukuba and MIT, there was a lively discussion about the difference in a startup environment, including investment and management personnel between Japan and the US. The many of audience in the crowded room was standing until the end. Benton stated the reinforcement of industry-academia collaboration and startups by the transdisciplinarity and Headquarters for International Industry-University Collaboration at the University of Tsukuba. Ochiai described the characteristics of the University of Tsukuba, such as faculties that can be CEOs and its flexible systems (ex. special collaborative research projects) give boost startups.

Timothy Rowe (CIC founder) asked a question, “What should you do to develop CTOs who can play an active role at global companies from Japan?” Benton introduced the “International Unicorn Program,” which sends faculties and students to the co-working space at CIC to conduct on-site training on product market fit activity from September 2019. Lastly, Ishii said “The theme of today was The Role of Academia in Innovation. Although today’s discussion concentrated on funds and money, there are many “tops” like a summit at universities, and there are many climbing routes. It is important to work with dreams.” And there was a big applause from

the audience. Coupled with Nancy’s prestigious progress, Levine vs. Benton from the perspective of the campus policy and Ishii vs. Ochiai from the perspective of the researchers (entrepreneurs), those paring between MIT and the University of Tsukuba aroused active debate, and good results were produced

(3) Flash Talk & Networking

Flash Talk took place in a surprisingly small glass room, but this is the venture café way. Four University of Tsukuba faculty-based startups gave presentations. There were 20 to 30 people in the small room and they had a close discussion. Many of people saw the inside through the glass as well.



a. Flash Talk



b. Networking

Figure 4. Flash Talk & Networking

4. Verification

(1) SNS response: As a result of 233,000 SNS Impressions until the event date of August 29th at Venture Café Cambridge, Engagement Rate, which shows the response (ex. “like” and retweet) rate, was 0.5%. Although this is not a high number at all, it can be said that there were over 1,000 SNS responses even though the University of Tsukuba is a Japanese university with a low profile.

(2) Event day: Totally 343 participants gathered at the event. 29% of them were woman and 27% were first time participants.

One of the characteristics of this event was one-third of participants were Asian descent. Japanese international students at Harvard University who participated said that

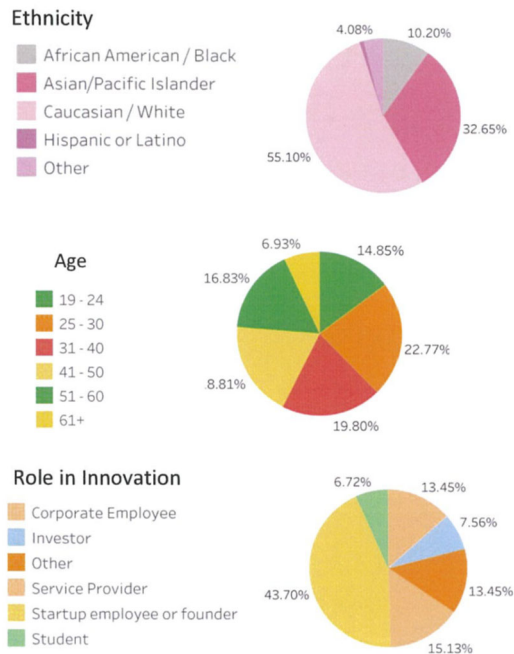


Figure 5. Participant analysis

international students all over Boston may join this event. Holding the venture café by the University of Tsukuba was receiving attention from the Japanese community in Boston that much. As for ages, each generation participated in a well-balanced. The founders or employees of startups accounted for nearly half of the participants, and this result was unique to CIC.

5. Summary

The University of Tsukuba sponsored the "Venture Cafe Cambridge" for the first time in a Japanese university and implemented "University of Tsukuba Night". We will continue those activities and improve the evidence in Boston area.