On the 31st January we had the pleasure of providing a tour around Cambridge for the students of Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo who were visiting for the day. The tour was an insightful experience, allowing us to realise culture differences between University life in the UK and Japan. Many of the students were particularly surprised at the size of the Cambridge ‘Campus’ and how we have various colleges and faculties spread throughout Cambridge as opposed to one particular campus. After the tour we had a language exchange in small groups and discussed with the students topics such as ‘The position of women in Japan,’ and ‘learning languages,’ which once again opened up our eyes to the many cultural differences between our two countries.

Cambridge students taking Politics modules in FAMES this year also participated in a two-hour long seminar session with the Hitotsubashi students. Led by Dr Barak Kushner and Dr John Nilsson-Wright, the students engaged in a lively discussion over the contemporary geopolitical challenges that Japan is facing, and how its government with its ally, the United States, are attempting to tackle them. Through engaging with the preparatory readings, both the Cambridge and Hitotsubashi students were able to present their own perspective over this highly challenging yet fascinating topic. In the second half of the session, the lecturers directed the discussion towards Japan’s domestic issues, notably over how Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sought to revise the Constitution to allow greater flexibility in engaging with the regional tensions, notably that from North Korea and China. The Hitotsubashi students, with their vast knowledge of Japanese politics, gave deep insight and in no doubt, the Cambridge students also had much to gain from this unique opportunity.

Us Cambridge students were then given a presentation about how Japan should respond to the North Korean threat by the Hitotsubashi students. It was a exceptionally interesting talk, that surveyed the options facing Japan at this very difficult time. After a question session led by Dr Nilsson-Wright and Dr Kushner, we split into six mixed Hitotsubashi-Cambridge student groups and discussed the issue further. It was a wonderful opportunity to understand the difference of opinions within Japan, and outside of Japan, and it broadened everyone’s perspective on this political issue. We were
then treated to a wonderful performance of traditional Kyogen by one of the students. It very beautiful, and also considering none of the Cambridge students had ever seen this kind of performance before, educational.

Finally to complete the day we had a meal with the students at a nearby restaurant. Many of the male students were excited to experience British Beer first hand and the female students were asking many questions about whether British food is really ‘mazui’ (disgusting). The meal was a lovely way to finish an insightful and rewarding day with these students and we are very grateful we were able to take part in such an experience.

By Norman, Melissa and Lara