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### **General Observations**

#### *About the Four Settings for the Dialogues . . .*

Each place had something unique to offer us and all were important to my understanding of women and my area of interest—community planning and the environment.

Tokyo provided us with an overview of women's issues in Japan. The women we met there were among the most powerful in Japan, representing elected officials, academia, government, corporations, and foundations. They presented us with information on national economic and social trends, the role of women in politics and government, and the changing role of Japan in the world (internationalization) and how it is affecting women and the variety of issues we came to discuss.

Yokohama and Kanagawa gave us our first view of a women's center and the variety of ways in which women network in Japan, from women's workers collectives to the Kanagawa Network Movement, which elects women to political office.

In the rapidly developing Kyushu city of Fukuoka we visited AMIKAS, another women's center, and met with women from many fields including two involved in the first major sexual harassment case in Japan. I spoke with many women concerned for their neighborhoods, the environment, and development—in their city, in Japan, and globally. It is here that we heard Takahashi-san say that women are like "silk"—soft, smooth, beautiful, of high quality and strong.

Kanazawa seemed a very different stop from the others but very valuable to me. What stood out strongly in Kanazawa was the natural and cultural heritage in Japan and how it is integrated into modern life. It was here that I learned about the planning system in Japan and gained further insight on citizen participation. It was here also that we heard how women were working locally to tackle such global problems as tropical rain forest destruction and nuclear power plant safety.

#### *About Common Threads Between Japanese and US Women . . .*

Women in both Japan and the United States lead full, rich lives balancing careers and/or outside interests with home, family, parents, and community. As a single, working mother I found much in common with the Japanese women, married,

single or divorced, who face a similar lifestyle. It seemed to me that Japanese women were planning and living their lives without men or men's support, but with the support of other women, which is what keeps them bonded. In the United States single women face similar situations.

In spite of the constraints on their time and their opportunities, Japanese women are finding ways of self-improvement and community activism.

Women in both Japan and the United States share a concern for balancing conservation and development. In Japan we found women in Kanazawa concerned about a golf course development that would pollute their water supply and about a nuclear power plant over which they were involved in a four-year law suit. In Fukuoka many women expressed concern about the tremendous growth of the city and its impact on traditional neighborhoods and the environment. As one woman said, "women are nature-, earth-, and people-centered." The women we met were very sensitive to their environment and concerned about their communities and the changes that were impacting them.

#### *About Differences Among Women in Japan . . .*

Many of the women we spoke with in Tokyo who held powerful (for women in Japan) academic, political, government, and corporate positions had different perspectives than the women working at the community level on social issues affecting women. Our first evidence of this was when we visited HELP, the Asian women's shelter, where we learned from the director about the plight of Southeast Asian women in Japan. In Yokohama and elsewhere we learned more about the problems of Asian immigrant women, domestic violence, single mothers (feminization of poverty), and the divorce rate from women directly involved in these issues. While the numbers of women experiencing these conditions are still small compared to the United States, these community activists were aware of the increasing significance of these problems for Japan, whereas the "Tokyo women" seemed to be less so.

There seemed to be a gulf between professional women and housewives in Japan: Women appeared to be either part of a "housewives" group or involved in their career. By comparison, US women who are housewives and professionals might be part of the same community group (social service organization or environmental group, for example).

Mentoring—a word that was not familiar to many Japanese women we spoke with—is very limited in Japan. Young women were not connected to older women who were more experienced in their chosen professions. Older, successful women did not seem to feel the need to help younger women with career advice.

Networking, while strong at the community level, appeared to be weaker between communities and among national and international organizations. Groups that were very active locally on an issue such as the environment were not strongly linked with national or international organizations. Small local organizations were only tackling local issues, even though they were aware of broader national and interna-

tional issues. Women did not seem to move beyond their local venue either through participation in politics or in building a national agenda in their area of interest. This may be due to the weakness of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in general in Japan.

#### *About Planning and Environmental Protection in Japan . . .*

While my information about the planning system in Japan is still extremely limited, several things struck me from what I did learn. Urban planning is practiced separately from resource conservation, environmental protection, and recreation planning. The profession of urban planning appears to be primarily urban engineering, trying to find technical solutions to meet urban growth requirements. Resource conservation is governed by national and prefectural laws; planning for resource conservation occurs primarily at the prefectural level. Thus, the integration and balancing of values of growth, economic development, resource conservation and environmental protection—a fundamental practice in urban planning in the United States—cannot occur in Japan because not only are these values handled separately but also they are administered by different levels of government.

Sadly, there appear to be very few women involved in planning in Japan, in contrast to the United States where women's participation in planning is strong.<sup>1</sup> Due to women's ability to make connections and forge integration, they are ideally suited to address the deficiencies that were apparent to me in Japan's planning system.

Citizen participation in community planning is very underdeveloped in Japan. Public participation is primarily ceremonial—an opportunity for bureaucrats to present the polished plan they have come up with. It is expected that people will be in agreement with the plan presented; direct confrontation in a public setting over the content of the plan is not the accepted custom. In Kanazawa we learned that neighborhood assemblies were where government bureaucrats work with citizens to get "consensus" on city policies. Typically, citizens do not take the initiative, but rather respond to the government.

Despite this situation, we learned of several examples where women's groups had been effective in challenging developments and practices by the planning officials. The "Tea Time" group in Kanazawa was instrumental in stopping a golf course development that endangered a water supply. The Naka Ward Women's Forum in Yokohama developed a video of ideal town planning that illustrated failures in urban engineering from the perspective of women and the elderly. Their work

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<sup>1</sup>A 1991 survey of women in planning showed that 26% of the professional planners in the United States are women. In Vermont this percentage is much closer to 50%. These percentages compare favorably to other fields—architecture (18%), civil engineering (5%), landscape architecture (23%), and law (21%). Women's earnings in the planning field are still only 84% of men's, however. In addition, white males dominate "director" positions (director of agency or department, CEO, owner or partner of firm, or chair of academic department).