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First of all, I want to offer my sincere appreciation to the Institute of International Education and to the Japan Center for International Exchange for arranging this magnificent opportunity for our six-woman US delegation to participate in a "Dialogue with our Japanese counterparts in an effort to create a better global understanding of our roles in promoting change and transformation in our societies." I also want to commend, as well as thank, the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership for its vision as evidenced by the support it has given this project.

On a very personal level, my visit to Japan did much to correct many misperceptions that I had about the status of women in that country. Their awareness of the existence of these misperceptions became clear when one of the Japanese women we met asked us if we were surprised that they were not "walking three steps behind our men." We met many interesting women from a variety of backgrounds. The added benefit of getting to know the rest of the US delegates of the Japan-US Women Leaders Dialogue made the trip even more special, not only because we were so compatible, but because we were able to check out our observations with one another and learn from each other's area of expertise.

Reading all the background information I was sent, as well as anything else pertaining to Japan that I could get my hands on, provided me with a frame of reference more consistent with the reality we experienced. In spite of this, there were still many surprises, because, of course, nothing can take the place of actually being there and talking to people in their own familiar surroundings. The two weeks we spent in Japan were like looking into a constantly changing kaleidoscope, with many different exposures to people, venues, and experiences.

The women we met were intelligent and well-educated with much to say about their current status and the need for more changes in Japan that directly affect them. They were concerned about human rights, education, quality childcare and care for the elderly, and environmental issues. They were so open and eager to share their thoughts and ideas. Since many of them had gone to school in the United States, it seemed they knew a great deal more about us than we about them, though two of our group had attended a year of schooling in Japan and knew more about the country and the culture than the rest of us.

## Tokyo

During our first orientation, we learned that the concept of “nonprofit corporations or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)” is a fairly new one in Japan. It seems that “the best and the brightest” are always tapped by the government, which reduces the pool that might be interested in this area. But there now appears to be a growing awareness that government and business do not hold all the solutions for the Japan of the future. We were told by Tadashi Yamamoto, the president of the Japan Center for International Exchange, that “thinking Japanese want change, and women need to be involved as change agents.”

From him we also heard the word “internationalization” for the first of what was to be many times during our visit. We were told that it no longer means just learning to speak English. It now includes the goal of transforming Japanese society to make it more compatible with the outside world and consistent with being a global power.

It was acknowledged that in fact some of the leaders in Japan perceive other groups as inferior because they are not “economically efficient.” But at the same time, it was also stated that Japan is now examining its emphasis on economics and its goal of “catching up with the West” at the expense of the values surrounding the “quality of life.” In addition, the Gulf War brought about much self-examination, as most Japanese were surprised at the reaction of the rest of the world to their involvement—which was limited to financial support only. Their failure to provide manpower while smaller, less powerful nations were doing so brought into question whether or not Japan could remain an economic power without becoming a more visible participant in global politics as a military power. It is in this larger context that one begins to see the changing conditions in Japan and what roles women will be playing in this transitional period.

Professor Yoriko Meguro from Sophia University gave us her definition of internationalization as “people to people exchange, not just goods and trade,” and a “sharing of global key concepts of equality, human rights, justice, and fairness.” She indicated that the United Nations Year of the Woman, which began in 1975 at the Copenhagen Conference and went on to become the Decade of the Woman (with the 1980 and 1985 conferences in Mexico and Nairobi, respectively) had significant impact on the lives of Japanese women.

She lamented the fact that though the government started to offer conferences on gender equality, only women attended them which, unfortunately, limited the impact. She also said women at that time were more interested in equality than in peace and development, but now they see the interrelatedness. She felt strongly that Japanese women must share with other women from different countries in order to reconceptualize how they relate to others around the world.

Media expert Akira Kojima brought to our attention some key issues related to the “quality of life.” The Japanese birthrate at 1.5 children per family, and the world’s longest life expectancy at 81 years for women and 75 years for men, are combining

to create major problems for the future. In addition, a recent survey found that 54% of the young women interviewed wanted to remain single. If these trends continue, he predicted the extinction of the Japanese in 800 years.

We learned that there is a shortage of farmers and that farmers are mostly over 65. There is also a shortage of spouses for younger farmers. We heard from others that a solution chosen by some is to bring in and marry women from other Asian countries, such as the Philippines and Thailand. We also learned that these women are expected to work the farms, that they are not treated respectfully, and that they are often victims of domestic violence. Others that spoke later stated that Asian immigrant women get all the "dirty jobs."

It is interesting to note that while "change" is the main agenda for both government and business in Japan, Mr. Kojima feels men are less qualified to handle it than women because "men are hostages to companies," and therefore lack freedom to explore and be innovative. It was also noted by Professor Meguro that men are afraid to change because they don't know where they will fit.

As a third-generation Mexican-American, I see similarities in cultural thinking between countries. I have felt the same struggle with "traditional sex-role concepts" from some of our men. However, though we still need to improve and are a long way from where we need to be, I have also witnessed tremendous growth by men in general, and Hispanic men in particular, in the last 10 years. I see more acceptance and appreciation of womens' strengths and abilities to rise to all challenges and deal successfully with "change." I also see them recognizing womens' ability to manage several things simultaneously (as opposed to being singly focused) as something to be emulated.

Akiko Domoto, a member of the House of Councillors in the Japanese Diet since 1989, said she is often surprised by how little people around the world know about Japan. She spoke of her many interests, including biodiversity, which has to do with how culture is determined by the shape of the environment surrounding it. She spoke of meeting then-Senator Al Gore when they were both members of "Global Legislators Organization for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE) and was very glad to hear him say "it's time to hear women's points of view for problem solving."

She is also very involved in trying to change the Eugenics Protection Law, which is the embodiment of the eugenics ideal to promote the increase of a population with desirable characteristics and prevent one with inferior genetic ones. She sees it as discriminatory, because some eugenic surgery cases can be performed without the patient's consent. Moreover, compulsory sterilization was forced on women at a rate four to five times that of men and completely ignores women's rights. She wants to promote a new law that guarantees every woman's right to decide whether or not to bear children, as well as every woman's right to contraception and abortion. Her statement was very consistent with how most of the women I know in this country feel about that issue. It seems incredible that the outcome of this issue,