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My two-week study tour of the United States gave me much hope and courage. I would like to again thank the Institute of International Education and the Japan Center for International Exchange for offering me this opportunity, and our hosts in Los Angeles, Spokane, Chicago and New York for their heartwarming welcome and for allowing us to see their magnificent projects.

We landed safely in Los Angeles nine and a half hours out of Narita Airport. It was a long flight fraught with anxiety and apprehension for me. This was my first visit to the United States. The moment I set foot on foreign soil, I briefly felt the bewilderment people must experience when they travel from other parts of Asia to Japan for the first time. I was both overwhelmed and refreshed by the vast land stretching as far as the eye can see, the clear blue skies and the towering skyscrapers of Los Angeles.

Representatives from a number of private organizations in different fields participated in this visit to the United States. I represented the field of international exchange. On this trip I was able to observe facilities and programs related to my current activities. I would like to present my viewpoints on what I experienced.

My Organization, We Love Asia 21, and My Objectives on the Study Tour

We Love Asia 21 is a volunteer organization established six years ago. Currently, there are 100 members and 25 executive committee members, most of whom are housewives. Through annual performances of ethnic music and dance, we have deepened our relationships with foreign residents in Japan from 10 Asian countries (India, Indonesia, North and South Korea, Cambodia, China, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Laos). In addition, we have held discussions with other Asians living in Japan on a wide variety of topics including human rights, education, and welfare and have been active in working to solve some of the problems confronting these groups.

On this visit to the United States, I wanted to learn about issues currently facing the United States and its diverse population and to see the kinds of activities

women leaders are undertaking to cope with various problems and the impact these activities had on community development.

In addition to We Love Asia 21, I am also involved in a community effort to create a better life for retired people. Currently our group of twenty persons pool their resources to lease 1300 *tsubo* of farmland to grow organic vegetables. I hope that my visit to the organic farm in Spokane will become a foundation for opening up the future of our Mahoroba Farm.

My Impressions of the Communities We Visited

Our first stop was Los Angeles, a diverse city of 3.5 million people of African, Asian, Latino, and European descent. Here we visited Irene Redondo-Churchward's Project Info Community Services (PICS) and observed how people are taught family communication skills in order to prevent domestic violence. Most of the educational materials are made by the staff, with great attention given to small details. I was moved by the warm guidance the staff gave to their clients.

Our next visit was to Foley House, a shelter for women operated by Lynn Appel. Here we saw young women struggling to overcome problems with drugs and alcohol. I talked to some twenty women of various ages. When I asked them when the most difficult period was, they told me the most painful time was about thirty days after they stopped using drugs and alcohol. While I was not able to look deeply into the troubled souls of these people, I could sense the unbearable suffering they must have gone through before coming to this facility. I was deeply moved by the devoted staff who helped these women and shared in their suffering.

I was shocked by the dismal condition of the children born to these patients. When I saw the expressionless faces of these children, a chill ran down my spine at the thought of the terror of drugs. The staff provided the children with kind, individual instruction. The ignorance of the parents has deprived the little children of their future. How does one atone for this crime? I felt anger grow inside me and tears came to my eyes.

Spokane is a beautiful, scenic city of about 180,000 people, surrounded by 12 national parks, 15 national forests, and some 70 lakes. Our host in Spokane was Susan Virnig of Northwest Regional Facilitators. In Spokane, we visited the YWCA and its school for homeless children. We spent the afternoon with the children in a friendly atmosphere, using our broken English. We split up into small groups, showing the children how to make origami paper helmets, how to use chopsticks, and how to write their names in Japanese. The expressions of longing on the faces of the children as we said goodbye is still vividly etched in my mind.

We also visited the YWCA's Safe Shelter. This facility is similar to the Buddhist temples of feudal Japan that took in runaway housewives. The shelter is open 24 hours a day. Legal measures have been taken to protect residents by preventing abusive partners from approaching within a certain distance. At Safe Shelter I saw

two mothers seeking refuge late at night with their children and nothing more than the clothes on their backs. The women cradled their children and slept in a bed in the corner of a dimly-lit room. I could feel the fatigue and dismay of these women after a desperate escape from their violent husbands. As a mother I can empathize with their plight. I also met a young woman who sought refuge from her lover who had threatened her with a gun.

These kinds of problems also occur in Japan every day. There are tragic cases of women who marry to obtain visas. There are women who are deceived into coming to Japan with offers of work, only to have their hopes dashed when they are forced to live in deplorable conditions and eventually are led into prostitution. I have seen many very tragic cases of brides brought to Japan from Asian countries to marry farmers in rural areas.

A Brief Moment of Joy

There was a brief moment of respite in our otherwise hard schedule. A barbecue party was held at the home of Julie Goltz, Ms. Yokoyama's host family. Since leaving Japan on June 6, I had been feeling very lonely, sitting alone in the window seat of the plane and staying in single hotel rooms. Moreover, it had been a while since I had had Japanese rice. Thus, this party with our host families was a happy occasion. I was relieved when Ms. Yokoyama told me that we would have sushi and *yakiniku*. Ms. Yokoyama is from the Seikatsu Club Cooperative, and using the resourcefulness typical of her organization, she had managed to find a supermarket that sold California rice. It was an emotional moment, like finding an oasis in the desert. I will never forget the taste of the sushi we made that day.

The Long-Awaited Farm Visit

At this party I was introduced to my host family, Jane and Dave Swett, owners of the Yesterday's Farm. One of the main objectives of my trip was to learn about organic farming and the state of farming communities in the United States. I was looking forward to this visit, hoping that it would give me an opportunity to review and reconsider our activities at the Mahoroba Farm.

My host family's home was about an hour's ride from where the party was held. We drove across a seemingly endless prairie to get there. Ms. Iijima of JCIE was also in the car. The only saving grace amidst the anxiety of traveling in a strange foreign land was that I was with a person who understood both Japanese and English. I felt calm even as we sped through the darkness. It was June but it felt as cold as winter. The clock had already passed 10:30 pm.

We got up at 5:30 am. Mr. Swett had been awake since 4:30 am, and was already doing the farm chores. The morning work began with picking vegetables to be shipped to market. There were many vegetables, including beets, spinach, asparagus, and others which I had never seen before. Mr. Swett expertly washed and stacked the fresh vegetables before taking them to the market.

From nine in the morning to five in the evening, I sold vegetables at the market. I was fatigued from the cold and from doing something I was unaccustomed to. However, I was able to see the trusting relationship between the producer and consumer. The vegetables were sold out before 5:00 pm.

To till one hectare of soil alone is no easy task. Yet, Mr. Swett would never do shoddy work. I was truly impressed by the work ethic at Yesterday's Farm. Through my direct observation of this farm and the methods used in a country with customs and a history completely different from my own country, I gained something useful in developing new directions for the Mahoroba Farm.

Chicago and New York

Chicago, with a population of 2.8 million people, is the third largest city in the United States. "The Windy City" is noted for its modern architecture, and there are riverboat tours that allow visitors to see the famous architectural landmarks. The world's tallest building, the Sears Tower (110 floors, 443 meters), is just one such famous landmark.

In Chicago we visited the Chinese American Service League (CASL). Our host was Bernarda Wong. Vocational training, language education for children, and senior citizen daycare were some of the programs operated by CASL. With so many Chinese immigrants there, it was like seeing a China within America. English language education is one of the most important activities, as more than half of the people living in Chinatown do not have adequate English abilities. The facility was energetically tackling a wide range of problems associated with employment, livelihood, and retired citizens. In particular, Bernarda Wong's efforts were outstanding. Through her many years of experience, she has numerous professional contacts, and through the trust she enjoys from within the community, support continues to grow. The activities in this community were in contrast to the rather sedate lifestyle of the Japanese in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. One can see the sharp difference in the characteristics of the Japanese and Chinese.

Our last stop in the United States was New York, a diverse city with a population of over seven million. Each year some 17 million people visit America's largest city, which boasts 150 museums, 400 galleries, and 38 Broadway theaters. It is also the center for global business, the arts, and fashion. Our host here was Peggy Blumenthal, Vice President of Educational Services at IIE. After having visited Los Angeles, Spokane, and Chicago, what surprised me most about New York was the continuous sound of sirens from morning to night. I felt threatened by the crime-filled city.

I expressed a desire to visit Harlem during our free afternoon in New York. Unfortunately, we had to cancel this trip as we were unable to contact the district manager of the organization I wanted to visit. Instead, we were given an unexpected treat through efforts of Shaun Martin, Manager of Asia/Pacific programs at IIE, who arranged for us to attend a practice session of the Boys Choir of Harlem. It was

an emotional experience to meet Dr. Walter J. Turnbull, the founder and executive director of the choir.

A little about Dr. Turnbull's background and profile of the Harlem Boys Choir: Dr. Turnbull earned his M.A. in music and Ph.D. in musical arts from the Manhattan School of Music. He also graduated from the Columbia University School of Business Institute for Nonprofit Management and has received numerous honorary doctorates. He is active as a tenor soloist for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra. The Harlem Boys Choir, begun in 1968, offers a positive and creative alternative for children residing in inner-city New York. It is an artistic as well as a humanitarian organization.

I found Dr. Turnbull, with his charming smile, to be very gentle. He is very strict in his daily lessons. On the day of our visit, he sternly reprimanded a student for being tardy. Although the choir sings only parts of songs during regular practice sessions, on this day, through the courtesy of Dr. Turnbull, the choir sang an entire selection for us. Because the lyrics were in English I did not understand what they were singing, but I felt the enthusiasm of the boys through their voices. The song was a hymnal of peace; a harmony of the hearts of the boys who proudly live their lives earnestly through song.

What I Learned From My Visit

My two-week study tour of the United States was indeed a fruitful one. In this multi-racial society, each person is constantly aware of the problems that exist and defends his own way of life. It was on this point that I saw the wisdom, the unity, and the resilient networking among women leaders. The status of the nonprofit organization (NPO) was not secured in a day. To me, this was a monument built on the efforts and activities of organizations that looked at community issues and underwent tremendous hardships to ensure that everyone is able to live a decent life.

I believe personal donations to NGOs like the United Way are made in gratitude and encouragement, as a way of saying that these organizations are necessary for people's livelihoods. We have still not reached this stage in Japan. Buried in affluence and content with living happily for the moment, it is no wonder that there is no developing awareness of the problems that exist. Foundations in Japan tend to work independently with very little linkage between them. Therefore, it is difficult for the private, independent sector to expand its activities without this financial base. These are the cold facts of Japan, the economic superpower.

During my trip to the United States I was often asked about the direction of independent sector activities and how to gain access to foundations. Through the valuable experience gained in the United States, each of us who participated in this trip shall work hard to solve the problems before us.

In Conclusion

This study tour was my first trip to the United States. At first I was nervous at the word "study," but the women leaders we met proved to be kind and gentle. The Americans did not understand my Japanese and, naturally, I did not understand English. It never occurred to me before that the language barriers and the differences between countries could be so great. But in a span of only 15 days, I felt a connection between our hearts. I believe that this was made possible by the thoughtfulness common to all people throughout the world.

International exchange means interaction between nations. It means that we should work together, while recognizing national differences, and believing that we can all live the one life we are given as humans beings. This is what I had learned from the hearts and the actions of the women leaders in the United States.

Next year is "The Year of the International Family." So that all of us can be members of this global community, We Love Asia 21 intends to link our 10-nation ethnic music and dance program in Japan to the rest of the world, so that we may realize a broader dream of peace and friendship.