

Mitsuko Yamaguchi
Executive Director, Fusae Ichikawa
Memorial Association/Women's
Suffrage Institute
Tokyo

My Second Visit to the United States

I visited the United States for the first time in 1988. The purpose of that one-month trip, during which I traveled alone, was to observe the presidential elections and to learn about the activities of various women's groups. Now, five years later, I found myself granted the unexpected opportunity of participating in a dialogue on women's issues between Japan and the United States. I had initially recommended other community activists in Japan participate in the program but was then asked to attend to represent my organization.

Looking back over the past five years, I see that the United States has faced major problems in the midst of a dramatically changing international society, and the country has undergone significant changes. My first trip involved gathering information to provide a rough sketch of women's activities in the United States. This study tour may be considered a continuation of that first trip. My second visit to the United States increased my desire to learn more about American communities. This is because of my relatively wide involvement in the women's movement in Japan. I believe that the various societal changes taking place in Japan can be helped by increasing community activities, which in turn depends upon the state of women's activities.

In addition to myself, there were five other members of the delegation who visited the United States, all strong and energetic individuals, deeply committed to a variety of activities in their respective communities. We met for the first time on June 6, 1993, and in spite of the differences in our activities and interests, we were able to create a synergy, working together to deepen our knowledge during our two weeks in the United States.

This is the fruit of our journey, the source of which were the American and Japanese organizers, and all the friends we made along the way who worked so hard to prepare us for the ideas they planted and nurtured. I wish I could express my gratitude by listing all their names in this report. I am tempted to record all my impressions of the things we heard and were shown by the people we met, but it will suffice to simply describe our trip from the perspective of my own daily activities.

NGOs and NPOs

While the term "NPO" (nonprofit organization) has yet to become common in Japan, the term "NGO" (nongovernmental organization) has become widespread a result of Japan's rapid internationalization, and from the various United Nations social, humanitarian, cultural, and human rights campaigns.

While some 500,000 groups are recognized by the US government as tax-exempt organizations, there are a mere 700 such organizations in Japan, and thus the impact of NPOs on Japanese society is accordingly small. This is due to the historically strong bureaucracy in Japan. This does not mean that NGOs do not exist in Japan. There exists a wide range of groups which undertake activities such as hobby meetings, social welfare initiatives, educational instruction, environmental protection, assistance to foreigners, and election campaigns. These NGOs, however, do not have independent offices or full-time employees, and many are funded by membership dues and donations from individuals. In the past there was almost no exchange of information or other networking activities among NGOs. However, information exchanges have grown in the past few years due to increased attention being given to problems of development. Most women involved in NGOs rather than NPOs, but those who are working seriously in this field, are reviewing their activities. They share a dissatisfaction with the little recognition they receive for their contributions to society in spite of the time, effort, and money they expend in their activities.

Amidst these circumstances, the focus of our recent visit to the United States was on NPO activities, providing us with important ideas for ways to improve Japanese NGO activities. To explain the activities of Project Info Community Services, which provides programs for the Latino community in Los Angeles, Ms. Irene Redondo-Churchward assembled a group of activists involved in drug and alcohol abuse programs, family shelters, community newspapers, and United Way fund-raising activities. We learned about the activities of these groups through panel discussions, short skits, and the abundant research materials they provided us. On the panel was a representative of the Los Angeles Women's Foundation, which was founded seven years ago through the initiative of women's groups, and which gives priority to the protection of women from violence in the home, improving the economic status of women, and health care and insurance coverage for women. I found it interesting that this group worked independently of other existing male-dominated foundations, focusing on problems of sexual discrimination from the perspective of low-income women. I was particularly interested in this organization since I have been closely following the activities of two such women's foundations recently established in Japan with funds allocated from local municipal organizations.

Northwest Regional Facilitators (NRF), founded by Susan and her colleagues in 1974, is active in areas that are essential for community-building, including housing, transportation, environment, education, and the problems of the elderly. Executive

Director Bob Stilger told us that NRF strives to allow the community to become actively involved in the projects. I was amazed by their ability to draw upon the limitless potential and ideas of the community and then put them to use.

Susan and Bob told us that Spokane, with a population of 180,000, is a city of manageable size in which NPOs can be effective. As a resident of metropolitan Tokyo, I am convinced this is true. Also, the fact that there were fewer social problems in Spokane than in large cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles has also helped NRF achieve their goals more readily. Nevertheless, even NPOs in Spokane face difficulties. As we were later told by Ms. Susan Berresford, Vice President of the Ford Foundation, American society is composed of the government, corporate and the independent sectors, and it is not easy to achieve an optimum balance of the three. We were told how some of NRF's talented staff working on housing problems had been laid off due to the municipal government's taking over of the programs NRF had been administering, and how the government and corporations are much stronger than NPOs when it comes to money, authority, and other aspects of power. In the independent sector, successful activities require a fairly strong civic consciousness and solidarity, and I sensed that NRF had the strong grassroots support as well as the vitality necessary to overcome its difficulties and realize its dream of building a better community.

We saw the same sort of vitality in Ms. Bernarda Wong of the Chinese American Service League (CASL). CASL is based in Chicago's Chinatown, and works to provide job training and placement, medical consultation, nursery schools, and care for the elderly to the Chinese-American community. Bernie is very adept at organizing events to raise money for these activities. NPOs play a major role in easing tensions caused by differences in language and customs that exist in the ethnic and racial communities in the United States. In Los Angeles when we visited the Japanese Pioneer Center in Little Tokyo and Project Info, which provides services to the Latino community, we realized that settling in and becoming accustomed to life in a new country is no easy task. Even though there are Korean communities in Japan, I did not realize until I came to the United States the difficulties that arise when many different ethnic groups live together.

Mrs. Emi Yamaki, director of the Japanese Pioneer Center, is also engaged in NPO activities. The fact that second and third generation Japanese-Americans have been able to assimilate into American society to the degree they have is in part due to the efforts her predecessors, for which she has shown her gratitude by becoming involved in welfare activities aimed at elderly Japanese-Americans. There is a Japanese-style garden at the Center and a housing complex for senior citizens known as "Tokyo Tower." The Center provides meals, nutritional advice, and daycare for the elderly. Here, healthy seniors help those who are in poor health.

A voting station was set up on the first floor of a housing complex for the Los Angeles mayoral elections on June 8. Senior citizen volunteers supervised the

voting. Sample ballots were available in Japanese, English, Chinese, Korean and Spanish, offering a reminder of the diversity in the United States.

I must also mention our visit to the Art Institute of Chicago, which was arranged by Ms. Ronne Hartfield. We were overwhelmed with the rich variety of paintings, pottery and other valuable art objects created by artists of various ethnic groups. The Institute includes not only galleries for the display of these works, but also auditoriums and children's rooms. The Institute was open to the public free of charge on the day we visited. Throngs of people were gathered before the famous paintings in each gallery, and without the strict surveillance one often sees in such places. I was reminded of a scene I had witnessed in an art museum in Boston where elementary school children drew dragons while lying stretched out on the floor in front of a Japanese painted screen. This would have been criticized as bad manners in Japan, but I have come to believe it is important for children to become familiar with real art and to bring them in contact with valuable objects while they are still young, so as to raise their appreciation for cultural things. Standing in front of the Japanese collection at the Art Institute, it crossed my mind that the affluence of Japan may be nothing more than a facade.

Moving Toward Equality Between the Sexes

Equality between men and women in Japan is guaranteed by law, but the question of how to eliminate the disparity which exists in reality has become a major issue of the women's movement. In concrete terms, this means going from simple political participation to actual involvement in planning and to the establishment of governmental mechanisms which foster solutions to women's issues.

Ms. June Farnum Dunbar told us about the functions and activities of the Los Angeles County Commission on the Status of Women, which she chairs. Similar committees have been established within the Japanese national government and in virtually all municipal governments and are active in submitting opinions and summaries. Ms. Arabel Rosales, Special Assistant to the Governor of Illinois on Hispanic and Women's Affairs, works in conjunction with 46 state government departments in Illinois, and advises the Governor on legislation. She believes that the ratio of men and women who take part in policymaking is important, and she has been instrumental in the establishment of legislation toward this end. I learned that provisions have been made whereby the Governor of Illinois has the power to cancel all state contracts with companies where sexual harassment has occurred.

Upon listening to the recommendations made by the Los Angeles County Commission on the Status of Women, one could sense the competence of the members of that committee. But, as is the case in Japan, the fact that their recommendations carry little legal authority is a source of dissatisfaction shared by the members of such committees. The job of supervising government agencies, such as performed by Ms. Rosales in Illinois, is important. It requires the formulation of various measures, including the enactment of legislation, which in turn must include a compre-

hensive perspective on women's problems. In Japan, discussions are now being held between the government and women's groups on strengthening the national mechanisms for dealing with women's issues. I believe the important thing is to continue to create organizations through legislation which have both sound financial backing and strong authority. Illinois is doing good work in this direction, but I question why the Equal Rights Amendment was not passed in the United States.

Women and Participation in Politics

While there are only two female mayors in Japan, there are a fairly large number in the United States. Ms. Sheri Barnard is the current mayor of Spokane. We visited her at her office along with Washington state representatives, city council members, and state government officials. All were from Spokane and had come to discuss with us their respective activities. That same night, we sat in on a town meeting led by Washington Governor Lowry and were impressed by the fact that there were more women than men waiting in line to voice their opinions and ask questions of the Governor.

Incidentally, I read in a newspaper that the number of Congresswomen increased after the US Congressional elections last autumn. Jennifer Polleck, a representative of the Spokane office of Senator Patty Murray who was elected last year, was also present in the Mayor's office when we visited. We called on her again later at her office in the Farm Credit Building.

Ms. Polleck's mother, who played a vital role in Senator Murray's campaign, was at the office when we visited, and also took the time to speak with us. When I visited Washington, D.C. in 1988, there were only two women among the hundred members of the Senate. This number has now grown to six. Ms. Polleck explained that the United States is looking for change and has placed its hopes in new people. The Cold War has ended, and the political focus has shifted to the problems facing women and children and the issues of health care. These factors helped make 1992 the "Year of the Woman." Murray's rival candidate was a born politician with the support of many lobbyists. Ms. Murray had been a member of the Board of Education, but had no special qualifications for political office. This led to her rival labeling her as an "amateur." She made the issue of the federal deficit easier for the general public to understand by comparing it to household finances. She told us that the AFL-CIO contributed to her campaign. The trend for so-called "amateurs" to take on and defeat professional politicians may be a worldwide phenomenon. In any case, campaigns require huge amounts of funds.

As a result of the experiences of women in a variety of fields, politics has come to be a natural sphere of activity for women. It seems the experiences that members of Congress and public officials gained through their activities with NPOs have become an important part of this process.

In Japan, the proportion of female members in the Diet is relatively high, while the percentage of women in local assemblies nationwide is a mere 3.2 percent.

Because I was interested in learning about local assemblies in the United States, I was given the opportunity to stay at the home Spokane City Council member Lois Stratton. The cozy interior was filled with photographs that showed the closeness of her family. On Saturday morning Lois' daughter and husband and Ms. Hideko Katsumata joined us for breakfast. In May Ms. Stratton had announced her candidacy in the Spokane mayoral elections to be held in the fall. Lois had been a Democratic member of the Washington state Senate for eight years, a member of the Washington House of Representatives for five years, and became a member of the Spokane City Council this past February. Before embarking on her political career she had been an ordinary citizen, a housewife, and an office worker.

In her political career, she has been active in such areas as family problems, drug abuse, child abuse, recycling, and the problems of the elderly. She regularly attends meetings of an exchange group composed of women politicians with Mayor Barnard. The two will be competing in the mayoral elections this autumn. Ms. Stratton says she hopes to use her experience in the legislature to supplement what the current administration is lacking, to address problems involving the police and city employees, and to become a bridge between the government and the people of the city.

Her daughter Karen is her campaign manager. Karen knows her mother's strengths better than anyone else. They expect to have about 200 volunteers and to hold campaign expenses to about \$100,000. They said the citizens must put a stop to politicians spending money on expensive campaigns. In talking to Lois, I learned that candidates in regional elections are not required to support the entire platform of their respective political parties. Through the media Stratton plans to appeal to the public to choose whether they want candidates who are indistinguishable from each other or one with strong leadership abilities. I was impressed by her press release stating that, if elected, she will name women to the positions of City Council Chair, City Treasurer, and Council Treasurer.

After breakfast at the Strattons, we toured the Spokane Market which had been built upon a suggestion from Bob Stfiger at NRF. Lois then took us on a 50-minute drive to her summer house on Lake Loon. There, with Ms. Katsumata interpreting, we had a frank discussion on the organization of the City Council. She told us that council members receive \$12,000 per year, and in order to prevent corruption members must disclose their finances to a special committee.

Lois laughed as she cooked some fried chicken and beans, explaining that she had skipped breakfast. A lightly chilled bottle of California wine was a heartwarming touch. With the mayoral election only five months away, I was extremely grateful that she had set aside some of her precious time to entertain me, a foreigner. But she told me that she always goes away on weekends to water the plants and to refresh herself. I thought of the way Japanese council members rush about all the time as though taking time off were a sin, leaving themselves with little time to study issues in depth or to refine their ideas. I realized that this was something

which both the council members and the public should strive to change. I am eagerly awaiting the results of the Spokane mayoral election.

Jane Addams' Hull House

I have been interested in the activities of Councilor Fusae Ichikawa for more than 20 years, so when we visited Chicago I wanted to visit Hull House, where Ms. Ichikawa had spent time in her youth. Hull House was established as a residence for immigrants in 1889 by Jane Addams, who devoted her entire life to promoting peace and welfare. There were once facilities like this throughout Chicago, but now the only remaining example has been relocated as a memorial on the grounds of the Chicago campus of the University of Illinois. Hull House was the first facility established in the United States to provide welfare for immigrants. The link between Hull House and the idea for the Women's Suffrage Institute where I work may be found in Ms. Ichikawa's autobiography.

In 1921, when Ms. Ichikawa was 28 years old, she went to the United States, traveling for three days on the Great Northern Railroad from Seattle before finally arriving in Chicago. Having little money, she placed an advertisement in *The Chicago Tribune*: "Situation Wanted/Young Japanese School Girl." She often visited Hull House to use the cafeteria and to attend lectures. She attended lectures by Jeannette Rankin, the first female member of the House of Representatives, and this may have had an influence on the Japanese women's suffrage movement after 1924 when Ichikawa returned to Japan. I was pleased to see with my own eyes this place once frequented by Fusae Ichikawa, who devoted her whole life to the suffrage movement. When I left the Hull House Memorial, I presented to the director, Mary Anne Johnson, a souvenir book entitled *A Pictorial Record of Fusae Ichikawa and the Women's Suffrage Movement*.

Epilogue

As we drove through Los Angeles and Chicago, we saw groups of homeless people everywhere. At Foley House in Los Angeles and at the YWCA's Safe Shelter, we met women who had suffered the from effects of drugs and violence. Homelessness, drugs, and violence are viewed by the Japanese as evidence of an ailing America. If one were to speak of the light and darkness of the United States, the land of freedom, then these aspects would naturally constitute the darkness.

The NPO and NGO activities which for many years have extended a helping hand to those less fortunate have provided not only comfort and the means to achieve greater independence but also a valuable experience for all. Frankly speaking, many of the NGO activities in Japan are mostly "cosmetic." NGO activities in the United States, where kind and compassionate people are dealing with matters of life and death are probably closer to what NGOs should be. This is a matter of national character, according to Ms. Berresford. With internationalization, an aging population, and the progression towards an information-oriented society cited as

the three main challenges currently facing Japan, I feel that we who are planning NGO activities must make sure that we are doing something which makes a viable social contribution, and that we must strive to introduce the management that is apt to be lacking in women's associations. An improvement in the general public's perceptions of NGOs would force the government to extend the guidelines for tax exemption. Furthermore, I believe the United States and Japan should aim for the equal participation by women and men in planning and implementing the activities of NGOs.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to IIE Vice President Peggy Blumenthal, Mr. Shaun Martin, and each and every one of those involved in the program who welcomed us so warmly during our two-week study tour.