

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) held its 21st Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women, in the Kitakyushu Municipal Gender Equality Center MOVE on November 13 (Sat.) and 14 (Sun.), 2010. The theme was "Child Rearing Environments in the World: Children, Parents and Society."

■ Panel Discussion

Child Rearing Environments in the World: Children, Parents and Society

The panel discussion featured the following panelists: Singer Ms. Yu Hayami ; Professor Kyungsook Kim, Kongju National University, Korea; and Communications Director Karin Zaugg Black, Office of Economic Development, Seattle, Washington (USA). Invited as the moderator for the panel discussion was Associate Professor Norihisa Tsuneyoshi, University of Kitakyushu, Japan. Each of them gave a presentation from her/his own perspective. The discussion focused on child rearing environments around the world with an emphasis on the differences in the U.S., Korea, Denmark and Japan.



▲Venue (about 400 people participated in)

My American Child Rearing

The first presentation was given by the singer Ms. Yu Hayami. She spoke about the realities of child rearing in the U.S. and her own child rearing experiences.

In the U.S., it is increasingly common that a woman called a "doula" supports mothers during their baby's birth. A doula is not a doctor, a nurse or a midwife but a woman who provides support during pregnancy and childbirth. I gave birth to two daughters in the U.S. For both the birth of my first daughter and second, I hired a doula. The doula gave me advice and consultation on how to spend my time during pregnancy. She supported me emotionally and intellectually during my pregnancy and babies' births.

During the early days of having my first daughter, my husband did not help me take care of her so well. But after asking him one day to change her diapers, he gradually learned how to cuddle and bathe the baby, and started doing things on his own. It seems that he wanted to join in child rearing. But he is out working during the day, which means that he has much less time to spend with our children than I do. It is necessary to realize that, while both women and men are prepared to become a mother and father, they have to do so at their own pace.

When our first daughter was still a baby, I asked my

husband to take care of her for a whole day since I had a job far from home, as I do today. At first my husband seemed at a loss what to do. When I returned home, though, he looked quite different from how he did in the morning. His face was that of a father. Moreover, he thanked me for giving him an opportunity to spend time with her alone. I think that women need to give men a chance to become fathers. Bringing up a child also helps in bringing up a mother and father.

A good relationship between parents makes children comfortable. A strained relationship stresses them. Communication between partners for even 15 minutes or 20 minutes daily, can help a couple understand each other, turn a new leaf and keep going.



▲Ms. Yu Hayami

Balancing Life as an American Working Mother

Subsequently, Communications Director Karin Zaugg Black, Office of Economic Development, Seattle, Washington (USA), gave a presentation on the policies and realities of work-life balance in the U.S.

There are three types of changes that will continue to help make it easier for men and women to balance raising a family with their careers: 1) laws and policy changes; 2) personal changes that individuals and families can make; and 3) changes in the cultural and social changes.

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (Federal law) stipulates employees' rights and employers' responsibilities regarding maternity leave for the birth and care of newborn children as well as other types of leaves. Critical "family friendly" policies and services especially for working mothers include not only maternity leave but also high quality healthcare; a supportive environment for breast-feeding; understanding among co-workers; high quality childcare and a childcare support network for fathers.

However, no matter how many policies are developed, in order to ensure a good work-life balance, the important thing is to take care of yourself. In the U.S., it is often said that a happy family comes from a happy mother. Mothers need time to relax, sometimes by going out with their friends. Also, communication between partners is indispensable. Moreover, it is important to share household chores between partners; to communicate closely about schedules; and to make time to be alone as a couple without the children.



▲Ms. Karin Zaugg Black

Korean Childcare Policies and Experiences

Subsequently, Professor Kyungsook Kim, Kongju National University, Korea, explained about Korean childcare policies and its experiences.

The birthrate in Korea in 2009 was 1.15. It is estimated that if this rate continues, the population of

the country will begin to decrease in 2018. There are now urgent calls for the country to deal with its low birthrate problem.

The emphasis of the country's childcare policies is on the reduction of the financial burden of childcare on parents. The educational expense per a family is several times higher than that of other advanced countries like U.S., France and Germany. To subsidize child-rearing expenses, the Korean government expanded the number of people who can receive child support to 760,000. This number is about 50% of enrolled children in all childcare facilities in Korea as of March 2010. However, it will be raised to 60% in 2011 and 70% in 2012.

The second most important policy is the provision of necessary child-rearing support services. The government aims to provide as needed services for double-income families, single-parent families and families with challenged children.

A wide variety of support is available: financial support for parents; improvement and increase of nurseries and other facilities; and assistance for parents who cannot use nurseries as well as for single mothers, disabled children and multicultural families.

Professor Kim also spoke about the prevention of child abuse, counseling and educational programs are provided.

The only measure Korea had for preventing child abuse was to offer refuge to abused children. After the amendment of the Child Welfare Law, however, a report system has now been established to allow ordinary citizens to call a child protection facility as soon as they suspect abuse. Within 72 hours after the report, the facility researches the alleged abuse and offers protection, if needed, for the child.

Like Japan, Korea now faces social problems such as a declining birthrate and an aging population. Although the Korean government has increased its budgets related to child rearing, the amounts are still insignificant. However, the means do exist for stopping the birthrate decline. One of the quickest ways to solve this problem is to realize a gender-equal society.



▲Professor Kyungsook Kim

Child Rearing in Denmark

Subsequently, Associate Professor Norihisa Tsuneyoshi, University of Kitakyushu, Kitakyushu, Japan and moderator of the panel discussion, spoke about child rearing in Denmark.

In Denmark, the birthrate began to decline in the 1960s. Subsequently, it began to increase again in the 1980s. Due to this shift, Denmark was highly evaluated as a country that was able to stop its birthrate decline. As Japan does today, Denmark used to face a problem of too many pre-school children waiting for vacancies at nursery schools. To solve this problem, Denmark established kindergartens without buildings (called “forest kindergartens”). One survey shows that these “forest kindergartens” provide opportunities for children to play in nature. This in turn benefits the children’s emotional stability. Today, even nursery schools and kindergartens with buildings encourage their students to play outside.

In Denmark, men and women are equally guaranteed to have time and opportunities for child rearing by being allowed to take maternity leave and childcare leave. This has encouraged men to change their mindsets about sharing household chores and child rearing work. In terms of career, the rights of workers are protected. Regular working hours are usually from 8:00 a.m. to 4 p.m. By law, the total weekly working hours per person is restricted to 37 hours. A social system has been established to ensure the good health and life of individuals and families, by striking a balance between the quantity and quality of work.

Education up to the university level is available free of charge. When children reach 18 years old, they are regarded as adults. The government provides a scholarship, which a recipient does not need to repay, to enable students to live independently away from their parents.

One characteristic of the country’s measures to stop its declining birthrate is not encouraging women to have children, but promoting education that focuses on children’s individual characteristics. This ensures a balance between child rearing and career as well as encourages both men and women to share household chores and child rearing. People in Japan need to realize that these measures have led to an increase in Denmark’s birthrate.



▲Associate Professor Norihisa Tsuneyoshi

Differences in Child Rearing Environments in the World

The above four presentations were followed by an open discussion between the panelists and the moderator.

In the discussion, based on her experience, Singer Ms. Yu Hayami pointed out cultural differences in child rearing environments between the U.S. and Japan.

Both the U.S. and Japan are seeing an increase in nuclear families in urban areas. But when I was a child, I lived with my mother and grandmother. As in my case, some people in Japan still live with their grandfathers and grandmothers, or have their uncles, aunts and other relatives in their neighborhood. Japan still has the custom of providing regional support for child rearing, which I think should be highly regarded.

On the other hand, the U.S. has a good physical environment to help parents with their child rearing. Almost all women’s public restrooms have a place to change diapers. Also, compared to Japan, the U.S. has many more outdoor parks where parents can relax with their children. I think that the U.S. has an environment that is conducive to child rearing.

Making a comparison to western countries, Professor Kim referred to the characteristics and challenges of child rearing in Korea, while emphasizing Korean culture.

It is difficult to generalize Asian culture. For instance, the region has many religions, such as Buddhism and Confucianism. In Korea, it has long been believed that the life of a child has already begun when the child is in the mother’s womb. In this regard, prenatal training is respected. Pregnant women listen to relaxing music, watch beautiful pictures and read stories to their unborn babies. The differences on the child rearing policies between Korea and the western countries, often are brought by the historical backgrounds. On the other hand, I think that western countries have many more advanced skills in terms of raising children after they are born.

Today, Korea’s declining birthrate is a serious problem, leading to a substantial increase in money budgeted to solve this matter. However, most of these budgets relate to childbirth. Future challenges include providing support for child rearing. It is necessary also to further the promotion of democracy and gender mainstreaming.



▲During the panel discussion

Keywords for Creating a Better System, Society and Environment for Child Rearing

Finally, the three panelists respectively chose a keyword that they thought important for creating a better system, society and environment for child rearing.

Yu Hayami indicated that it was impossible to handle child rearing alone. Mothers need their husbands to share household chores; friends to consult with; and someone with experience in child rearing who can listen to their worries. Hayami said that it was important to establish a child rearing network where people can help and thank each other. In this regard, she selected “**network of gratitude**” as her keywords.

Karin Zaugg Black who believes she has exercised the best option of “family and career,” listed “**option**” as her keyword.

Emphasizing that the U.S. birthrate has increased after the creation of environments where women can return to work soon after giving birth, Kyungsook Kim selected



▲Ms. Yu Hayami, answering a question from the moderator

“**women’s value**” as her keywords.

The discussion concluded with remarks by moderator Norihisa Tsuneyoshi. Tsuneyoshi emphasized that Kitakyushu City should create a better environment for child rearing based on the discussion about various child rearing environments in the world.

American Tips for Successful High School Life!

Given the opportunity to participate as a panelist in the Kitakyushu Conference of Asian Women, Karin Zaugg Black, a KFAW foreign correspondent in Seattle, Washington (USA), also visited high schools in Kitakyushu City and took part in exchange programs with high school students. These programs were attended also by her father and her son, Sam.

Karin Zaugg Black works for the city of Seattle as communications director in the Office of Economic Development.

Having participated in exchange programs herself, she described her American high school life and club activities as well as her study abroad experience in Japan, and the joy of learning a foreign language. She sometimes used English and at other times Japanese. Looking back at her days of studying in Japan, she emphasized that, in order to master a foreign language, it is important to communicate with many people without fear of failure. Also, based on her rescue operation experience as an interpreter of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake which occurred when she was working as a Coordinator for International Relation at Kobe city hall, she noted that it is necessary to study a foreign language on a regular basis. Such training may turn out to be very useful at an unexpected moment.

Students asked many questions, such as “What is the difference in high school life between Japan and the U.S.,” “What motivated you to study in Japan?” and “What is Seattle like?”

It is hoped that these programs provide opportunities for the students to think independently about planning their lives, in terms of how to get involved in their local communities, how to choose their occupations, how to work, and how to strike a balance between family and career.



▲At Kokura Commercial High School, Kokura, Kitakyushu, Japan



▲At Kyushu International University High School, Yahata, Kitakyushu, Japan

The 21st Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women Day 2, Reports on KFAW Research Activities

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) conducts surveys and research on a wide variety of gender- and women-related problems around the world, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

Four KFAW research groups presented their research results and exchanged opinions with participants, moderated by KFAW Chief Researcher Masami Shinozaki. The detailed results of the research will be published in *Asia Josei Kenkyu*, Vol. 20 (scheduled for publication in March, 2011).



Approaches to Women's Empowerment: Cases in South Asia

Masako Ota, KFAW Senior Researcher

Empowerment of women has been a key concept since the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing and various projects have been conducted for achieving it. The research examines the approaches that are adopted by the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, and SEWA and the Mahila Samakya Programme in India in terms of the physical, psychological, economic, social and political aspects, and considers an effective approach to empower women.



Female Criminals and Suspects Portrayed by the Japanese Media

Yumi Shikata, KFAW Visiting Researcher (2010)/ Associate Professor, Miyazaki Municipal University

To clarify how women have been described in recent crime reports in Japan, this study examined crime reports involving women mainly from the newspaper coverage of the past five years. In the case of female victims, the number of reports on personal information has decreased. However, there are more than a few expressions suggesting that victims of sexual crimes may have been the cause. With respect to female suspects, personal information is heavily reported. Also, there are many negative references to gender norms including matters unrelated to the crime.



Women's Employment Behavior and Social Networks in Kitakyushu and Fukuoka

Katsuhiko Ishikawa, KFAW Research Staff

Questionnaire surveys were conducted in Kitakyushu and Fukuoka cities, Japan, among women with pre-school children regarding their work and networks for child rearing. The surveys' preliminary data analysis indicates that to ensure a balance between career and child rearing, it is important to establish a support network within one's household and relatives. At the same time, the necessity of extending such a network beyond the household and relatives was indicated.



Social Inclusion of Migrant Women and their Children from Thailand and the Philippines

Yuriko Saito, KFAW Visiting Researcher (2010)/ Associate Professor, Faculty of International Studies, Meiji Gakuin University
Pataya Ruenkaew, KFAW Visiting Co-researcher/ Researcher



Interviews were conducted among mothers from Thailand and the Philippines who live in Fukuoka Prefecture. It was revealed that there are child rearing problems, such as insufficient child care support, bullying at school, and difficulty in entering high school due to insufficient academic skills. In terms of career development for mothers, the necessity of Japanese language learning, nurseries and career development support was indicated. This study also reported on multicultural coexistence in the city of Essen, Germany.