

# Asian Breeze

KITAKYUSHU FORUM ON ASIAN WOMEN OCTOBER 2007

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# Women Today

I have yearned for space since childhood. The launch failure of the Space Shuttle Challenger inspired me to become an astronaut. When I watched the Challenger astronauts smiling and waving on TV before liftoff, I strongly felt that we humans could really go into space. Several tens of seconds after liftoff, however, the Challenger was destroyed in a huge explosion. I was deeply shocked at the disaster, but, at the same time, I started to strongly desire to take up the dream of the deceased astronauts. I subsequently studied aerospace engineering at the undergraduate and graduate levels, before joining the National Space Development Agency of Japan (now the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA)). At JAXA, I was involved in developing and designing the Japanese Experiment Module "Kibo" that will be attached to the International Space Station (ISS). In 1999, I was selected as an astronaut candidate for the ISS. After completing various training programs, I was formally certified as an astronaut in 2001. Conventionally, astronauts have stayed in space for about two weeks. However, astronauts who stay aboard the ISS must remain in space for up to six months. I felt that the selection process for an ISS astronaut placed greater emphasis on the physical and mental aspects than had been the case previously.

Currently, I am training at the Johnson Space Center (JSC) in the U.S. in preparation for a space mission. Training at JSC comprises a wide variety of programs, including courses for space shuttle operation; T-38 flight; ISS assembly; and physical strength development. Moreover, since astronauts work as a team, we spend every day studying English and Russian to facilitate smooth communication. We also provide support from Earth for other astronauts who are currently performing missions in space.

When we actually go into space, we will board a U.S. space shuttle or a Russian Soyuz spacecraft. In fact, I have obtained two certifications, one as Space Shuttle Mission Specialist and the other as Soyuz Flight Engineer. Certification for a Russian aircraft would have been inconceivable during the

Cold War Era. It provided me with a great opportunity to learn new perspectives, which differ from those of Japan and the U.S. I believe that such an experience will be helpful when Japan builds a crewed rocket in the future.

The history of relations between humans and space is still young. Needless to say, there have been failures and accidents in exploring these relations. However, we have to overcome them and continue our endeavors in pursuit of greater safety and reliability. Although the scope of space in which human activities are possible is still very limited, the problems that may occur in such limited space epitomize the problems we encounter on Earth. For

example, we should consider how to curb the generation of waste and recycle the limited amount of water in space. Seeking solutions to these problems will be effective in addressing problems in our everyday life on Earth. A good example of this is "space food." Thanks to its excellent sustainability and portability, the food that astronauts carry with them into space can also be used on Earth. In either case, its shelf-life makes it ideal for long-term storage and use in the event of disaster. In fact, many astronauts say that eating is one of their greatest pleasures in space. Several Japanese companies have already undertaken research on space food. More recently, many Japanese space food products have

been certified by JAXA. I look forward to enjoying space food with a Japanese flavor, which is familiar to me, during my mission in space in the near future.

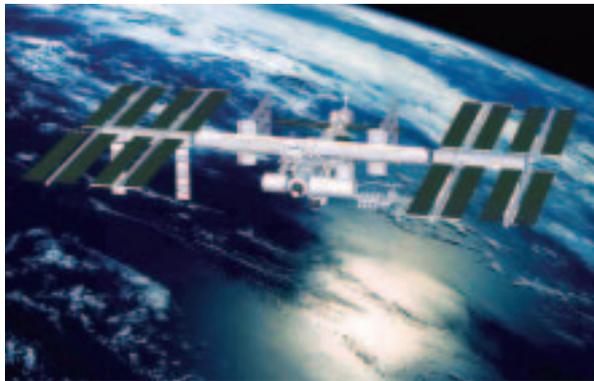
Until a short time ago, when it came to space, many people conjured up the image of an obscure, inaccessible realm. However, we can now find in everyday life many services and products that remind us of our relationship with space. These include daily weather forecasts, satellite broadcasts, and GPS-equipped mobile phones. Several decades ago, even airplanes were not a popular means of travel for most people. Nowadays, however, a great many people travel by air to various countries across national boundaries. The same will also hold true for



Courtesy of JAXA

*Naoko Yamazaki*

**Naoko Yamazaki**  
Astronaut



▲The International Space Station (ISS)  
Courtesy of JAXA

space travel. I believe that the age will come when so many more people can travel into space. Then they may ask “What is an ‘astronaut’? Was the term ‘astronaut’ once used?”

It has not yet been decided when I will fly into space. However, when I do go, I plan to conduct experiments, taking advantage of my long stay in space. For example, I will be able to produce a large protein crystal in space thanks to zero gravity. Since such a crystal can lead to the development of new drugs, its production is one experiment that I really want to perform. I also wish to grow vegetables. Vegetable cultivation in space will be an intriguing experiment, partly because the experiment can continue over many generations. Moreover, I plan to hold classes directly from space with children on Earth. The power of images is very strong. In fact, in my elementary school days, I was greatly excited with the clear images of craters on the Moon and Saturn’s rings, viewed through an astronomical telescope. That excitement provided me with the opportunity to develop my interest in space. In recent years in Japan, more and more children have become alienated from science. In addition, a decline in children’s academic ability in science and the low percentage of female students who advance to science and technological universities or colleges have all become matters of concern. Nowadays, many people associate the word “space” with science subjects. I believe, however, that space can be considered from various aspects including



food, culture, art, and medical care. I would be very happy if I could develop children’s interest in space by directly telling them about my experiences. At the same time, I hope to help them find their own individuality.

It is true that there are many difficulties to overcome before becoming an astronaut, and afterwards as well. I have been pursuing my career as an astronaut thanks to the many people who have supported me, and who are still supporting me. Today in Japan, we frequently hear the words “work-life balance.” To establish an environment that facilitates a successful balance between work and home, irrespective of gender, it is important to create a society in which everyone is given equal options. Although my husband took paternity leave, male workers in Japan who take childcare leave are still in the minority. I presume there are men who wish to be more engaged in parenting, and women who wish to be more involved with work. I long for the realization of a world in which all can freely choose their way of life, without being restricted by stereotypical views.

In my childhood, I simply felt that I loved space. However, when I learned that the components constituting a star were the same as those comprising the human body, I was deeply impressed. Then I thought how we humans were also part of the stars. If you suffer hardships or come to a deadlock, just look up and view the vast universe, and ponder the fact that you are part of it all. Then you may feel love for yourself and for the Earth, our planet.

The Japanese Experiment Module “Kibo” of the ISS will finally be launched next year. An ISS project is not possible for a single country. It is possible only when people around the world work together, transcending national boundaries and cultural differences. In the past, my respected mentor taught me that we should change what can be changed but accept or tolerate what cannot be changed. Although it may be difficult to distinguish between what can and cannot be changed, while considering what I can do and what I can change, I will open up my potential and continue moving forward at my own pace.

#### Profile of Naoko Yamazaki

Naoko Yamazaki received Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Aerospace Engineering from the University of Tokyo. She joined the National Space Development Agency of Japan (now the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) in 1996. In 2001, she was certified as an astronaut. She was certified as a Soyuz-TMA Flight Engineer in 2004, and as a Space Shuttle Mission Specialist in 2006. Yamazaki is the second Japanese woman to qualify as an astronaut.

This text is based on an interview with astronaut Naoko Yamazaki of Tsukuba Space Center, JAXA on July 26, 2007.

## *Population and Gender (3)*

### *The Cairo Program of Action and Fertility Transition*



**Makoto Atoh**  
Professor, Faculty of Human  
Sciences, Waseda University

Increasing numbers of population scientists have begun commenting that the explosion in world population will end before the close of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Their view is based on the fact that birth rates are steadily declining on a global basis. The total fertility rate (TFR) of developing regions, home to 81% of the world's population, dropped from 5.4—the average rate between 1970 and 1975—to 2.9—the average rate between 2000 and 2005. During the same period, the average TFR of the entire world dropped from 4.5 to 2.7.

If we view the worldwide trend and the trend for all developing regions, we can certainly confirm a steady transition from the traditional high-fertility regime to the modern low-fertility regime. Yet, great gaps exist among regions. East Asia, including China, for instance, has already experienced fertility transition with below-replacement fertility. Latin America and Southeast Asia are in the final stages of fertility transition. On the other hand, South Asia, including India, and West Asia, comprising many Islamic countries, are currently undergoing transition. Sub-Saharan Africa is still in the initial phase of fertility transition. Generally, less developed regions continue to suffer from high birth rates and high population increase.

To address the world's population challenge, particularly the challenge of population explosion, the United Nations has organized three inter-governmental conferences. Of these, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in 1994 in Cairo, attracted particularly great attention, since the ICPD proposed an unprecedented approach.

The Program of Action adopted at the ICPD introduced to the world completely innovative concepts of reproductive rights (women's rights to decide their own reproduction) and reproductive health (complete wellness regarding all aspects of reproductive systems and their functions). According to the new concepts, family planning should be a tool for women to realize their reproductive rights, rather than a tool for

governments to control the national population. With this viewpoint in mind, the Program of Action suggests that individual governments should support women's exercising their rights. Moreover, based on the recognition that achieving gender equality is key to resolving population problems, the Program of Action demands that efforts be made to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment as primary goals.

After the ICPD, some population scientists argued about whether or not recognition of the Cairo Program of Action is correct from the perspective of empirical science; namely, achieving gender equality as a key to lowering birth rates; and resolving problems related to population and development. Studies of countries that have experienced fertility transition imply that we cannot simply conclude that gender equality has driven fertility transition. Although we can reasonably assume that achieving gender equality eventually facilitates a decline in birth rate, it is still difficult to prove that achieving gender equality is easier than reducing birth rates.

Even so, it is true that women's social status is particularly low in the regions of high birth rates, namely, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and West Asia. To promote family planning and lower birth rates in these regions, it is of strategic importance to incorporate gender-sensitive initiatives into their development programs. Specifically, more than in any other area, these regions need to improve women's school enrollment ratio, and actively encourage women to participate in decision making.

Apart from the discussion whether or not women's empowerment has worked to lower birth rates in the regions where fertility rates have already declined, the Cairo approach is still effective in promoting reproductive health service in the remaining high-birth-rate regions and addressing their population problems.



# Opening the Door to Migrant Care Workers for the Elderly in Japan

## —What Can We Learn from the EU and East Asia?—

After concluding the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the Philippines, the Japanese government decided to receive 600 care workers and 400 nurses from the Philippines starting April 2007. Until then, the Japanese Immigration Control Law had forbidden foreigners from working in Japan, except for those engaged in specified professions, such as artists, lawyers, technological and academic professionals as well as other types of specialists. In response to intensifying market competition from advancing globalization, the Japanese government has decided to open the labor market to some developing countries in return for exporting industrial products, information and technologies from Japan. It might be possible to expand this access in the near future to other countries including Mexico and Thailand which have carried EPAs with Japan.

In Japan, the majority of care workers have been women. Especially the care work of the elderly has been taken by their wives, daughters-in-laws and daughters. Therefore, even after the introduction of the Long Term Care Insurance Law in 2000, it is said the salaries and other working conditions of the professional care givers have remained low. In addition, the quality of care is not good enough. Presently, Filipino migrant workers are limited by EPA to working in nursing homes and hospitals for the elderly who need long term care and can not work in private homes. In any event, they are taking care of the elderly's needs while respecting the latter's rights and human dignity. At the same time, many Japanese care workers are beginning to work and or live with foreign care workers. These are almost historically first experiences for the Japanese.

What kinds of issues and concerns do both Japanese and the Filipino workers need to tackle? Will the introduction of foreign care workers worsen Japanese care workers' working conditions and the quality of nursing labor even more? In what ways can Japanese workers collaborate with foreign workers as equal partners, overcoming differences in language, social customs, labor practices, cultural and religious backgrounds and values? Meanwhile, we must also study the matter from the perspectives of foreign workers. Will their rights be protected? Will they be free from discrimination? Will Japanese society ensure that they will be respected as professionals, and that they can work in an environment free from racial and cultural prejudice? Will they feel content to work in Japan?

To seek answers to the above questions, the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) conducted a joint research project on migrant care workers for two years from April 2005 - March 2006. The title of the project was "Policies and Actual Situations of Migrant Care Workers". Some European countries have already accepted migrant care workers and long accumulated research on this matter. Among those countries,

Masami Shinozaki, KFAW Chief Researcher

researchers from Denmark, Germany and Italy participated in the project. In addition, researchers from Singapore and Taiwan also participated. This report introduces part of the research results conducted in Japan, referring to reports from other countries.

### 1 Reactions of Japanese Care Workers: Survey at Welfare Institutions

In Japan, migrant care workers are expected to be employed by welfare institutions for the elderly, most notably special elderly nursing homes and health care facilities for the elderly. To identify challenges and problems related to the employment of migrant care workers, KFAW researchers surveyed the views of directors of such welfare institutions in Tokyo and Fukuoka Prefecture, as well as those of managers of care programs.

Table 1 Survey of Directors' Views regarding Foreign Staff Employment

	Number of Respondents	positively	With conditions	None as much as possible	None at all	No Answer
Tokyo	229	8 (3.5%)	124 (54.1%)	20 (8.7%)	49 (21.4%)	28 (12.2%)
Fukuoka	150	2 (1.3%)	51 (34.0%)	8 (5.3%)	76 (50.7%)	13 (8.7%)

As indicated by Table 1, 57.6% of directors in Tokyo stated that they would hire migrant care workers either willingly or under certain conditions. A total of 30.1% of directors answered that they would not hire migrant care workers, or would do their best not to hire them. As such, in Tokyo the number of directors who were positive toward hiring migrant workers far exceeded the number of directors who were not. In contrast, in Fukuoka, directors who were positive comprised only 35.3%, while those who were reluctant accounted for 56.0%.

As for why migrant workers should be employed, the largest number of directors in both Tokyo and Fukuoka Prefecture (22.3% in Tokyo, 12.3% in Fukuoka) mentioned a labor shortage. Although the survey demonstrated great differences between the two regions regarding directors' attitudes toward employing migrant workers, a labor shortage is a common factor which drives directors to hire migrant workers.

On the other hand, for reasons why they were reluctant to hire foreign workers, the largest number of directors referred to language difficulties (19.2% in Tokyo; 13.3% in Fukuoka). This was followed by differences in daily customs (6.6% in Tokyo; 4.7% in Fukuoka); concerns that Japanese elderly people might not accept foreign

workers (5.2% in Tokyo;6.7% in Fukuoka); and a lack of sufficient Japanese staff members (3.9% in Tokyo; 7.3% in Fukuoka).

In order to work together with migrant care workers, language is a big problem. Care workers need to read and write care service records accurately. They need to communicate with recipients well. In order to do so, they need to understand local dialects as well as standard Japanese. Since Japanese elderly people experienced World War II either within Japan or on overseas battlefields, to fully understand the psyche of recipients of their services, care workers need to understand the personal backgrounds of recipients, including unfavorable experiences during the war. The survey revealed that directors and managers of care programs were particularly concerned about these matters.

On the other hand, Japanese directors and care program managers fairly recognized the various advantages of hiring migrant care workers. Many valued foreign workers' cheerfulness, sincerity, and enthusiasm to help the elderly. Some even said, "Can you expect such qualities from Japanese young care workers?" Whereas some referred to the low salaries of migrant workers as an advantage, others stressed the vital importance of fair and equal payment, based on skills not on nationality.

## 2 European Experience and Emerging Problems in East Asia

Next, KFAW researchers studied related initiatives taken in other countries where migrant care workers have long been employed, along with immigration/immigrant policies in these countries.

Based on studies of reports submitted from Denmark, Germany and Italy, KFAW researchers found that Denmark was the most eager to provide migrant workers with opportunities to learn the language and daily customs of the host country. In addition to training programs for care workers as well as other professions, language programs are generally provided for two or three years, the length varying according to individual municipalities. In Denmark, target audiences of such training programs are primarily refugees, their families and their second generation, who have Danish citizenship and would probably live in Denmark for life.



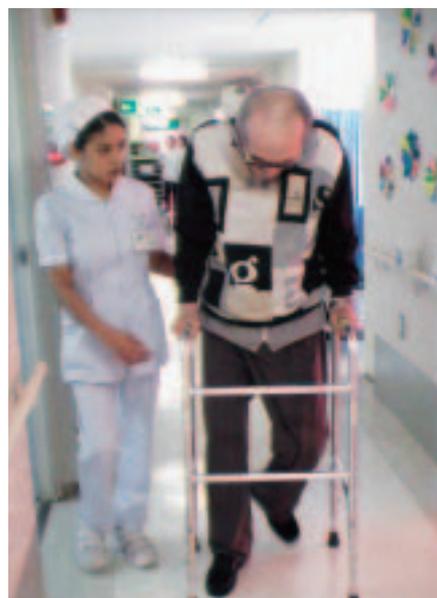
▲An Iranian care worker; a director of a welfare institution for the elderly; and a civil servant, Naestved city, Denmark

In Germany, employing foreign care workers became legal several years ago. However, due to the high costs of legal employment, it is said that many German families hire foreign care workers illegally. In Italy, it is legal for

families to hire low-wage foreign workers to work inside their own homes. A challenge for Italy in the future is how Italian people can secure a steady supply of such foreign workers when the workers' own countries achieve economic development.

In Singapore and Taiwan, public care systems have not yet been established. Along with an increase in the number of women who have high academic and occupational careers in these countries, the number of housemaids and care workers are also increasing. These latter workers are primarily migrant workers from nearby countries of lower economic levels. Various regulations, however, are imposed on these foreign workers. In Singapore, for instance, their marriage is regulated. Other problems include short-term visas (for 2-3 years); low wage levels; insufficient training programs; and labor contracts that favor employers. Many of these problems may involve infringement of human rights. In the context of ongoing globalization, our own homes will possibly become workplaces open to the global labor market. With this in mind, we must strive to realize working conditions that fairly reward workers in accordance with the efforts they make.

In Japan, many foreign women who have permanent residence or a marriage visas have begun working as care workers. Of these, Filipino women married to Japanese men, including those already divorced, comprise the largest group. Some Filipino women formed a care workers' organization to promote activities with the slogans: **Transcending National Boundaries with Hearty Care**, and **Improving Labor Conditions for All Care Workers**. These women are expected to promote collaboration with Japanese care workers. Moreover, they can support Filipino women who are coming to Japan in the near future. To learn more about working together with migrant care workers for the elderly in Japan including the prior, please read our upcoming book (initially Japanese only) on the results of this research.



▲Arlene Quizon Nishimura, a native Filipina, works as a care worker at a long-term care institution in Hachioji Eisei-Hospital, Tokyo. She was also a panelist at the 17<sup>th</sup> Kitakyushu Conference on Asian Women.

# The Kitakyushu ESD Council



▲The Kitakyushu ESD Council Logo

Our home city, Kitakyushu, was once known for its smoggy skies filled with “rainbow-colored smoke,” and a sea that was so polluted that even bacillus coli could not survive there. The pollution, once regarded as a symbol of a thriving economy, was a result of the city’s industrial policy that placed the utmost priority on economic development. Today, however, Kitakyushu is proud of its blue skies and blue sea with many kinds of fish and other marine life. To restore the clean environment, a women’s grassroots group initiated an anti-pollution campaign, which developed into a city-wide movement involving residents, businesses and the city government. Based on this experience, the residents of Kitakyushu are now committed to realizing a sustainable local as well as global community in many different areas.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa, Japanese NPOs/NGOs and the Japanese government jointly proposed the idea of establishing a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005 - 2014). This proposal was adopted at the UN General Assembly, held in the same year. The objectives of ESD are to promote full awareness of each individual concerning his or her relations with other people in the world; future generations; and the natural environment. ESD also fosters each individual’s ability to participate in creating a better and more sustainable society.

To promote ESD in the Kitakyushu region, in September 2006 the Kitakyushu ESD Council was formed, comprising among others representatives of schools, universities/research institutes, other educational institutions, NPOs/NGOs, local groups, enterprises/industrial organizations, and governmental bodies. In December 2006, Kitakyushu was accredited as the fourth Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) in Japan by the United Nations University. To fulfill the role of RCE, that is, to promote ESD, the Kitakyushu ESD Council is building partnerships with various other RCEs in and outside Japan.

While adhering to the same goal of realizing a sustainable society, member organizations of the Kitakyushu ESD Council are active in various different areas ranging from environmental protection to international cooperation, international exchange and education. Raising women’s social status and promoting gender equality, the primary goals of the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW), are also essential for realizing a sustainable society. In carrying out ESD, it is essential to address our neighbors and communities. In other words, we must initiate a campaign to create a sustainable society by addressing those who are closest to us. Although schools are important for promoting ESD, the target

audience of ESD is not only school children, but all people living on the earth. At the Kitakyushu ESD Council, we place the utmost priority on fostering people who can learn, take action, and build partnerships with others. To develop ideal human resources for realizing sustainable development, ESD emphasizes the vital importance of partnerships between people as well as between groups of various different areas. With this view, we have adopted our slogan: Experiencing and Understanding; Learning and Thinking; Taking Action, Networking, Expansion of ESD; and Sharing our Vision.

Since the founding of the Kitakyushu ESD Council, its members have been studying about ESD. We have been discussing the many ways we can incorporate ESD perspectives in activities of individual member organizations. To fulfill the common goal of realizing a sustainable society, we are expanding the scope of our activities through augmented partnerships with local communities in addition to partnerships among member organizations (between environment education and welfare education groups, for instance). At the same time, some member organizations are changing their conventional programs from the viewpoint of sustainable development. To promote public awareness of the term and concept of ESD, which is still unfamiliar to most residents, we will continue organizing various related programs.



▲An activity of the Kitakyushu ESD Council

KFAW has been serving as the Secretariat for the Kitakyushu ESD Council since September 2006.

## Educational Video Promotion for International Understanding *Vietnam*

### Production of Educational Material for International Understanding



The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) produces a series of educational videos on various countries with the aim of fostering global perspectives among Japanese elementary and junior high school students who will be responsible for future society. As the 7th production in the series,

the KFAW has now completed a video on Vietnam. (only Japanese is available.)

Since the video series is designed to promote children's international understanding through its use at schools and other facilities, the production projects involve full-time elementary and junior high schools teachers. The project team of the video on Vietnam, for instance, includes four elementary school teachers, who were selected by an open application procedure. The four teachers played leading roles in writing a scenario, as well as on-the-spot coverage.

### Video Promotion



▲At the video promotion meeting

To celebrate the completion of the 7<sup>th</sup> program, *Vietnam* in the series a video promotion meeting was held on Friday, August 3, 2007 at "Move" (the Kitakyushu Municipal Gender Equality Center). Despite the unfavorable weather due to an approaching typhoon, the KFAW was able to hold the meeting as scheduled.

At the meeting, teachers who participated in the video production served as facilitators. In addition to the video show, participants enjoyed a quiz pertaining to items introduced in the video as well as a tasting of

various kinds of Vietnamese food and beverages. Although many participants were surprised at the strong fishy odor of Nuoc Mam-a Vietnamese fish sauce introduced in the video, they all seemed to enjoy Vietnamese tea with the floral fragrance of lotus-sweets containing lotus nuts, and chips of dried jackfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus Lam*)- a tropical fruit unfamiliar to many Japanese.

The party ended with a Q&A session in which the audience asked questions of the teachers and a Vietnamese student studying in Japan. This same student had cooperated with our video production. Excited to learn about actual conditions in Vietnam, which are not written about in guidebooks, the audience continued asking many questions.

Although no elementary or junior high school students attended the meeting, the organizers were pleased to welcome many teachers and others who have keen interests in Vietnam. After the meeting ended, many participants eagerly viewed exhibits from Vietnam and talked with the Vietnamese student. The video promotion of the film was effective in deepening the audience's understanding of Vietnam and her people.



▲"Linh", the navigator of the video

### Video Contents

The video introduces the average daily life of Vietnamese people, particularly children's life, in an easy-to-understand manner. To stimulate children's interest, an animation character, for the first time in the series, is used as a navigator for this video on Vietnam.

"*Xin chào, Hello Vietnam*" introduces Vietnam to promote international understanding (approx. 15 min).

"*Vietnamese Children - What's Your Greatest Treasure ?*" introduces daily activities of a Vietnamese child (approx. 15 min).

## FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS REPORTS

(access other foreign correspondents' reports : [http://www.kfaw.or.jp/english/17th\\_report.html](http://www.kfaw.or.jp/english/17th_report.html))

# Women and Community Activities

## Government, Community and Women for Positive Change

Jocelyne Vokouma (Burkina Faso)

Before the creation of the Women Promotion Ministry in Burkina Faso, women and girls had to face many problems in their daily life. In the past, men in Burkina Faso did not like their wives working far from the house. Consequently, women developed community activities to fight against poverty. They also developed many NGOs and women/girls organizations to address domestic violence and discrimination. Most women and girls understand increasingly that only community activities can really help free them from their subhuman conditions.

After the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (China), Burkina Faso women leaders, who participated, are fighting more for national political commitment to the promotion of women including the improvement of their conditions. Through different organizations, women can show the community their capacity to do useful things for the development of their country, such as participation in decision making. Along these lines, the Women Promotion Ministry created on June 10, 1997, also coordinates women organizations' activities and helps these entities to become more operational. Due to women's work capacities, the government soon accepted to strengthen these organizations by sustaining their different initiatives. This is needed especially when the government does not work well to satisfy women and girls' needs.

Government support for women's AIDS related organizations exemplifies the above kind of support. The government can not face the AIDS situation without these organizations assistance. Presently, due to polygamy, more women are infected. Many husbands die, leaving behind many children with infected wives who are physically, financially and morally limited by their health situation. Generally AIDS victims are left by all family members except the women who are ready to take care of them. Some ill women have created organizations to take care of AIDS victims-women, men and children. Some of these organizations also take care of healthy children whose parents died of AIDS. Recognizing their efforts, the government distinguishes some of them officially per year.

Because of women organizations' actions, many women have accepted training. In addition, many parents are increasingly agreeing to send their girls to school. Women's changing mentalities are also changing society. Moreover, socially and politically, women represent 52% of the national population. As they become more organized, the government has to consider their power. At the same time, women have to show their communities that they are able to do many jobs reserved to men in the past, such as textile production, electronics, mathematics, sciences, politics and the national armed forces. Beyond the current work of the Ministry of Women Promotion, and present women organizations' efforts, women also need to further improve their leadership capacities. A new strategy is to list, collect and publish about Burkinabe women's potential

in different fields of competency at national and international levels.



◀ Soap making by local Burkina Faso organization members who are mainly women

## Vietnamese Women for the Elimination of Hunger and Poverty

Le Thi (Vietnam)

Vietnam is one of the developing countries. People experience daily a lot of difficulties. Local women engage in many practical activities in the community to help one to another develop the family economy; eliminate hunger and poverty as well as carry out charity work. In addition, they assist the disadvantaged including the poor; nursing lonely mothers; homeless children; HIV/AIDS as well as agent orange infected children and orphans. They hold classes for women and disabled children to raise their educational levels and learn skills. They fight against the male-dominated way of thinking, demanding equality between men and women in the family and society. Especially they are against the abortion of the female fetus that adds to a gender imbalance. They fight violence against women and children. They support the application of the Law of Gender Equality, which was approved by the Vietnamese National Congress in 2006.

First, I wish to discuss the movement of women who help one to another to develop agriculture production as well as hunger and poverty reduction in many localities, especially in rural areas. In such areas, 70% of the agricultural and sideline-work laborers are women.

Some cases which exemplify the above trend are as follows : An Dong, an agricultural commune in Hai Phong city, was once characterized by hunger and poverty. Ms. Nguyen Thi My, Chairperson of the People's Committee, encouraged people there to change their farming habits to raise productivity. Since then, the commune has been recognized not only as a rich commune but also as the best commune of the city for 15 years. The percentage of nearly rich and rich households is 80%. The poor households account for 1%. Mrs. Nguyen Thi My was given a Heroic Laborer Award in July of 2004.<sup>1</sup>

Another example involves Ms. Dinh Thi Nam, a 49 year old member of a Co Tu ethnic minority, living in Hoa Phu commune, Da Nang city. She was the first woman selected to the People's Council (1999-2005). She encouraged other women to loan money to one another without interest. The whole credit fund which is VND 7 million (approx. US\$ 430) and 25 pieces of gold was given to 26 households to re-cultivate gardens and grow new trees in the forest. Those women also gathered 600 kg of rice and labored 100 days to help war invalids and the families of dead soldiers. She is very active in persuading people not only against backward weddings and funerals but also towards building up a new cultural life in the commune.<sup>2</sup>

In Phong Khe village, Bac Ninh province, a business women's club was established in November 2003 to encourage women to keep the traditional work of paper making away from bankruptcy. The club at first included 10 women who gave loans to one another to produce paper with new techniques. They became wealthier. Now the club includes 70 women, famous for their good business and solidarity. The villages call those women "Women Heroes of Traditional Job Preservation".<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, the movements of women have helped women in various rural areas of Vietnam eliminate hunger and poverty through joint financial cooperation and economic activities. These activities in turn contribute to the development of Vietnam's economy.

<sup>1</sup> *Phu nu thanh pho Hochiminh* (newspaper), May 14, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *Cong an Nhan dan* (newspaper), January 6, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> *Tuoi tre online* (online newspaper), October 17, 2006.

## Women's Committees and Education of Children in the *Mahallas*

Asuka Kawano (Uzbekistan)

"The *mahalla* is a father and a mother" is a proverb symbolic of *mahallas*, which are regional traditional communities in Uzbekistan. The proverb implies that the entire *mahalla* works to raise the children born in the *mahalla*. In each of Uzbekistan's *mahallas*, there are projects being undertaken to raise the status of women and promote the education of children. These measures are in addition to economic aid given to families with children, which was promulgated by Presidential decree in 1996.

A women's committee is set up within each *mahalla*. The activities of these women's committees are not confined to their respective *mahallas*, but also involve coordination and a variety of collaborative activities with *mahalla* schools. The women's committee includes women who are in charge of education. These women work together with the school to provide youth guidance to children in the *mahalla* who show problematic behavior, such as smoking in the *mahalla* or shoplifting at bazaars. The school teachers also write letters to the women in charge of education to keep them updated on these children in their *mahalla*. In the past, there have been cases where the children themselves corrected their own problematic behavior because they were ashamed to have *mahalla* residents learn about their bad deeds. Members of the women's committee participate in meetings held by schools and kindergartens parents' associations in the *mahalla* to discuss with parents and teachers about present educational problems and future challenges.

The role of women's committees goes beyond providing youth guidance for the children in the *mahalla*. Another major role is to hand down traditional culture and history to the children. Every year, on March 21, the school celebrates the *Navruz* Festival for the New Year in Uzbekistan. On May 9, which is their Memorial Day, war heroes are invited from the *mahalla* to participate in ceremonies at the school. After the event, the students visit elderly people's homes in the *mahalla* to hear war stories. All of these events are carried out together with the *mahalla* and the *mahalla* women's committee.

In present-day Uzbekistan, there are still heavy demands and expectations on women to do housework and child rearing. In this context, there are increasingly more cases of women being chosen as *mahalla* representatives. The *mahalla* representatives and women's committee members must tackle many problems related to collaboration with schools and aid to women in the *mahalla*, while balancing these duties with their housework and child rearing responsibilities. The activities of the *mahalla* women in Uzbekistan encompass the problems faced by the women themselves. The activities carried out by these women are not only for the children's sake but also for the bright future of these women themselves.



The *Navruz* Festival in the school courtyard▲

## THE FORUM WINDOW

### Japan's Upper House Election and Quota System

In Japan, as a result of the Upper House election of July 29, 2007, 121 new members were elected, 26 of them were originally women. This later became 27 in September of 2007 when a male councilor resigned and was replaced by a woman. This brought the total of New Upper House women members to 27 for an overall total of 43 of 242 members (17.8%). This ratio is the highest in the history of Japan's National Diet, which comprises the Upper and Lower Houses. Compared with national assemblies in other countries, however, the ratio of women lawmakers in Japan is by no means high.

In the Republic of Korea, for example, they have adopted a quota system for both national and local assemblies in order to increase the number of women lawmakers. In the Republic of Korea system, specific percentages have been set for women candidates to be listed on the party list in elections to maintain gender balance among lawmakers.

Regarding the election of national assembly members, in 2000, the Republic of Korea decided that women should comprise at least 30% of candidates to be listed for the proportional representation election. In 2004, the Political Party Law was revised to increase the percentage of women candidates to 50%. As a result of this revision, the percentage of women members elected in the general election in 2004 reached 13%. In 2006, the country also introduced a quota system for nationwide local elections, demanding that women should comprise at least 50% of the candidates to be listed on the party list for the proportional representation election.

In the Republic of Korea, such a quota system has stimulated active debate regarding the system's pros and cons. Some argue that the system constitutes reverse discrimination against men. Others suggest that such manipulation violates the Constitution of the Republic of Korea. Still others maintain that the quota system augments the power of influential politicians. These people are concerned that in each political party influential politicians are likely to have even greater power over decision making as to who will be on the candidate lists. This concern is worth noting, since it is crucial for any politician whether or not he or she will be included in the proportional representation election. If the quota system results in the emergence of the so-called boss-rule, this can possibly interfere with the realization of true democratic elections and policymaking.

Although it is pressing to promote women's participation in policy making, and realize gender equality in the political world, it is equally essential to ensure that gender equality be realized without diminishing overall fairness, equality and freedom. Accordingly, we should analyze both merits and demerits of the quota system before deciding whether or not to introduce such a system in Japan.

**Harumichi Yuasa**

Associate Professor, Kyushu International University  
KFAW Visiting Researcher

# INFORMATION

## Q&A Corner

### Question

Compulsory education in Japan is 9 years - 6 years in elementary school and 3 years in junior high school. The new school year starts in April. How about in your country?

Naomi Sasaki, Kitakyushu, Japan

### Answer



Satoko Chaterjee,  
India



Swapna Majumdar,  
India

Under the Constitution of India, free and compulsory education for children from 6-14 years of age is a fundamental right. However, unfortunately many children living in rural areas, especially girls, stop attending school.

There are public and private schools. Which school a child attends depends on his/her family's income not the household's school district like in Japan. Children from poor to very poor households attend public schools because the school fees are free. But the educational environment of these public schools is lacking. Consequently, the children from the middle and upper classes attend private schools which charge tuition and textbook fees. Students in grades 1<sup>st</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> usually study at private schools. The beginning of a new school year differs by state. Many schools start their new school year in April.

## COVER PROFILE



### Ms. Mizue Harada

Managing Director of Kitakyushu Kyudo Federation

The basis of Kyudo, Japanese archery, is to acquire basic operations called "hassetsu" and pull the bow toward a target that does not move. Kyudo is not as simple as it looks. Kyudo requires emotional, intellectual as well as physical commitment. Appropriate etiquette is also required. Subsequently, the more the archer practices, the more his or her

technique will improve. The archers will be able to carry out eight kinds of basic aims without wasting energy and hit the target. Ms. Harada maintains that one attraction of Kyudo is that the archer only faces the target. She teaches Kyudo to many different generations including high school students to elderly persons. 20 years ago as a housewife, she began to learn Kyudo because she was attracted to the Kyudo range's expanse of green grass. She enjoys meetings with various people who come to practice Kyudo after school or work. Thanks to the establishment of the International Kyudo Federation, which 17 countries joined, Kyudo has spread internationally. Harada's goal is to expand the attractiveness of Kyudo in Asia where there are still very few Kyudo competitors.

## Asian Lifestyles

~Photos from KFAW Readers~

### Cambodian Children carry out Fund Raising Activities



The Roluos ruins are located southeast of the Angkor ruins, a world heritage site in Cambodia. The royal capital of the Angkor Empire was established in Roluos in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. When I visited Roluos, I joined the children in fund raising activities. I raised the money for them and pointed my camera toward them. Then, they stood in line with smile. I heard that this fund raising money was used for the operation of a training center for the poor, homeless and orphaned children.

Momoe Kikuzaki, Kitakyushu, Japan

### Location of Kitakyushu



## Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women

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### KFAW

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) was established in October of 1990 with a special government fund for revitalization projects. Subsequently, in 1993, the KFAW was recognized as a foundation by the Ministry of Labor. The purpose of the KFAW, through various projects, is to promote the improvement of women's status as well as their mutual understanding and cooperation in Asia.



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