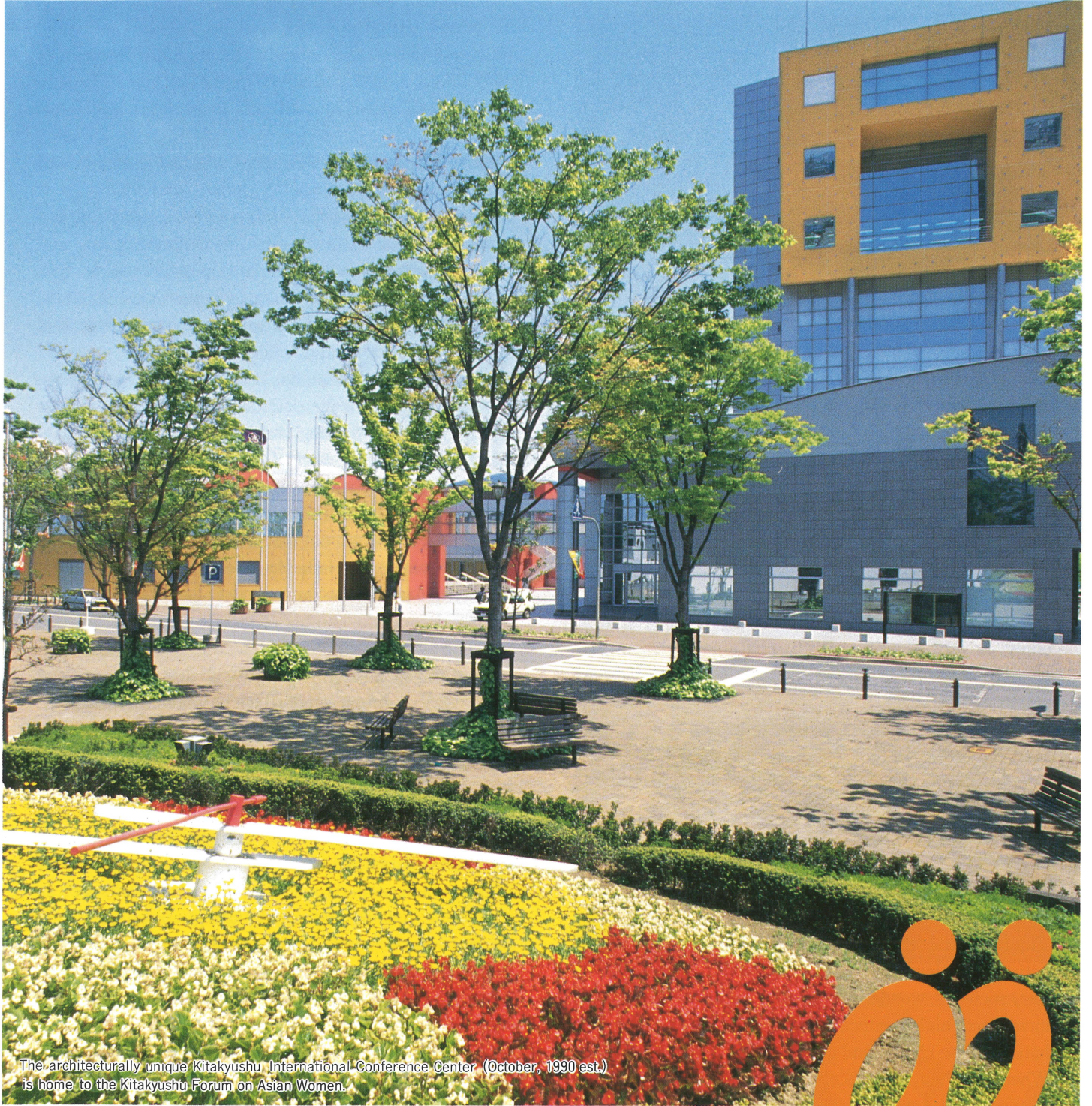


Asian Breeze



The architecturally unique Kitakyushu International Conference Center (October, 1990 est.) is home to the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women.

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KFAW

JUNE 1992 **No. 5**

WOMEN TODAY

Japanese women, women in other Asian countries



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Social Affairs Officer
Women in Development Section
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In 1946, one year after the end of the World War II, the new Japanese Constitution, which guarantees equality between both sexes, was enacted. Subsequently, the Government undertook the further amendment of laws and regulations which contained discriminatory articles against women. This in turn enabled the Government to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1985. Furthermore, a new law entitled "Equal Employment Opportunity Law" between men and women was enacted in 1985. Since then, Japanese women have been able to enjoy *de jure* equality. With regard to legal equality between both sexes, Japan has become one of the leading countries in the Asian Pacific region. As of November 1991, while 111 countries have ratified and/or acceded to the Convention, only 15 countries have done so in this region. Furthermore, more than half of 15 countries have ratified or acceded with some reservations and plan to amend discriminatory laws later.

However, many people might question whether *de facto* status of Japanese women is equal to that of men. Women in other Asian countries, particularly those in Thailand and Philippines where many women have actively participated into the decision-making levels of their societies, wonder why most of Japanese women who have been highly educated like to stay at home and handle house chores and child rearing only.

Whenever they have received criticism about Japanese women's lower status in the society, Japanese men, sometimes women, mention that Japanese women's status is higher since they have financial decision-making power at home. Furthermore, many young women want to choose an easy life as a full-time housekeeper rather than pursue a career faced with tremendous difficulties in traditional society. However, I am not confident that those women really understand the meaning of "equality

without economic independence" within the framework of an "unbroken marriage."

But in Japanese society, it is extremely difficult for women to work as long as men do without paying any attention to their family, in order to pursue careers. This is because the sexual division of labor—men at work, women at home—has been firmly established. Also, it is difficult to hire a maid at reasonable salary.

Violence against women has emerged as an internationally serious issue in the past decade. It covers various topics like wife beating, bride-burning, dowry death, incest, rape, violence against women in detention, sexual harassment, pornography, prostitution, etc.

Although discussion at the 1985 World Conference on Women at Nairobi did not focus much on violence against women, the issue has been one of the serious obstacles to promoting the status of women. However, in the last decade, the number of female victims of violence who started to speak out and accuse their offenders, in spite of the social stigma of those victims, has increased partly due to strong support from women's groups. In addition, there is a growing number of incidents unfortunately of family violence like wife beating in countries suffering severe economic recession.

In Bangkok many women's organizations are vigorously undertaking various activities different to those of most traditional organizations in Japan. Active organizations in Bangkok have been undertaking many projects such as supporting, helping and rehabilitating women oppressed by violence, providing ex-prostitutes with job-training and young women with income generating projects.

Recently, I have heard following complaints from the women's organizations. "Various women's organizations in Japan have repeatedly visited our organizations, wanting to know about our activities and asking the same questions. Is there no information network among women's organizations in Japan to avoid this kind of repetition? Furthermore, these Japanese organizations do not provide any feedback. Since our activities are supported by a limited number of volunteers, it is not easy to receive many visitors."

There is a big gap between most Japanese women and other Asian women.

Seminar on Improvement of the Status of Women for Government Officers

"The 1st Seminar on Improvement of the Status of Women for Government Officers" was held by the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women on March 18-27, 1992, under the auspices of the JICA Kyushu International Centre.

This seminar brought together 13 government officers from 8 different Asian Pacific countries to discuss women's issues and promote solutions by improving the day-to-day management skills of these officials.

The content of the lecture program approached the issue of Women in Development (WID) both generally with lecture topics; such as, "An Outline of Administration on Women's Affairs," and "Planning of Policies and Measures for Women's Affairs," and specifically with topics; such as, "Child Nursing," "Public Health Care," "Mother and Child Welfare Measures," and "Welfare Measures for Working Women." The lectures were reinforced with a session in which participants could observe these specific measures as they are practiced today in Japan. Furthermore, recognizing the important contribution that NGOs have made in the field of women's issues, members from such organizations also joined the discussion program.

The participants also had an opportunity to go on a study tour to Kyoto and Hiroshima. Kyoto served as a giant classroom in Japanese culture for many of the participants. In Hiroshima, they visited the Essor Hiroshima (women's general center), and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

The following are summaries of the opinions of participants from the free discussion held on the seminar's closing day.

- Various taboos imposed on women due to culture, custom and religion are big barriers to improving the status of women.
- In all situations, the advancement of education is still the most important duty for us in improving the status of women.
- I think cooperation with NGOs is most important in handling women's issues.
- In order to improve the lot of women in economically underdeveloped villages, we should encourage them to establish independent enterprises, as well as facilitate their access to funds and loans for those businesses.
- It is necessary to first reform the awareness of men about women's issues.



▲ Participants' seminar



▲ Visit to local nursery school



▲ Closing ceremony



▲ Reception

THE FORUM GOES TO ASIA

One of the main activities of Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women is to promote international exchange and establish an extensive Asian women's network.

In the last fiscal year, the Forum's staff visited several countries, women's organizations, institutes, and project sites in these respective countries.

The following are some of the impressions of the staff after their visits.

MALAYSIA (Oct. 20-27, 1991)

One purpose of visiting Malaysia was to see a FELDA farm. Jungles cover about 70% of Malaysian land. Under the FELDA program, a national agriculture promotion policy, the government clears the jungles to develop farming lands, allocates a piece of land to those who want to take part in the program, and provides them with any necessary agricultural training and an initial start-up loan repayable over 15 years. By then the government feels that program participants should be in fairly stable financially.

At the FELDA meeting hall, women in Islamic costume welcomed our party with local delicacies such as curry and rice, cooked fish, squid, and jellies. I had an initially clumsy but humorous experience, having to use my right-hand to pick up food. After the meal, we visited the home of a family that had lived there for 10 years. The wooden house with its elevated floor was simple, but richly decorated with handicrafts which reflected the warmth and affection among family members. I was told that every family has average of five children who each are an important part of the family's labor force. The visit to the FELDA gave me a chance to think deeply about the true meanings of wealth and happiness for us as human beings. (Yoshiko Misumi)



▲Elementary school children in northern area (Thailand)

SINGAPORE (Oct. 18-26, 1991)

In October of last year, I made my second visits to Bangkok and Chiang Mai in Thailand. In Thailand I did a preliminary survey of the family consciousness of Thai people. On the way back to Japan, I stayed two days in Singapore. Since the middle of the 1980s, the country began to see a noticeable drop in its birthrate. Consequently, I wanted to collect information on population control and family planning measures implemented by the government since then and the effects thereof. I also wanted to know the present state of "Women's Studies" and women's liberation movements in Singapore. Fortunately, through the good offices of Professor Sha at the Japanese Affairs Department of Singapore University, and Ms. Noriko Yamaguchi, a foreign correspondent of the Forum, I could obtain much useful information.

Recent milestone remarks by one of the current Cabinet ministers: "the husband should share with his wife the burden of household affairs and childcare," and "there should be full-fledged implementation of a homemaking class for school boys" are an indication of the rapid changes in the Singaporean mentality about women. In addition, the birthrate has also started to increase again.

(Masami Shinozaki)

THAILAND (Oct. 20-26, 1991)

Last year, I visited Thailand during the last days of the rainy season. October at Bangkok International Airport welcomed me with a wash of hot and muggy air.

As we drove through Bangkok, I saw many buildings and roads under construction. Thailand is presently experiencing high economic growth and thus attracting a successive flow of international investments.

While the population of Bangkok is said to be around 6 million, with the incessant migration of workers from impoverished farming villages in the northern districts, the actual population in the ever-swelling metropolis may have risen over 10 million.

In the city, I had a chance to talk with a Thai woman who was working as a maid to a resident Japanese researcher. She told me that she had left small children in the country far from Bangkok, where her parents were looking after them. She said she came to Bangkok to earn a living for her family while living separately from her small children because she cannot afford to pay the expensive fees for a nursery where she could leave them during the day. Her case was not unusual. I was shocked to learn that in the shadow of Bangkok's "Jekyll," its flamboyant economic growth, there lurked a "Hyde," women working at the risk of family disruption. (Kengo Ishida)



▲The main square in Vladivostok facing the Golden Horn Bay (Russia)

INDIA (Oct. 20-27, 1991)

I visited the site of a UNIFEM's sericulture project in Udaipur, northern India. The project aims to assist women become independent economically by providing them with a different means of income generation. The women plant mulberry trees, feed their leaves to silkworms and harvest the cocoons. It was not as large project as I had imagined before I arrived, but a successful collaboration among UNIFEM, the provincial government, and NGOs at the site. Besides sericulture, the project also extends its activities to other various fields. One is the education of children. Another is agricultural advice; for example, how to grow other crops in between the mulberry trees such as vegetables, which improve the dieting of children. One of the NGOs representative told me that for aid projects, the keys to success are first, precise knowledge of all aspects of the recipient society, and second, understanding the project from their point of view. She also stated that there were cases where the increase in income failed to create any improvement in the local standard of living. In such cases, the best approach is to let the local people discuss and analyze the problems and let them find a solution for themselves.

(Akihiro Oda)



▲Indian women spinning silk from silkworms' cocoons. (India)

RUSSIA (Nov. 8-15, 1991)

I visited the Far East Region of the now-defunct Soviet Union to research the present problems and the future potential in promoting exchanges among countries around the Japan Sea.

My visit brought me there about one and a half months before the Soviet Union's fall. I remember now that the white, blue and red tricolor of the Russian flag was already flying above office buildings.

Under the pressure of social and economic upheaval, women's lives were also changing dramatically. Ms. Irene Tumanova, a woman leader I met in Vladivostok said, "Under communism, there were guaranteed equal employment opportunities. However, the privatization of state enterprises has triggered an increase in the number of women losing jobs. Women are suffering badly in leading their daily lives." Tumanova is a chairperson of a women's organization that is assisting these women cope with this new turn of events. She strongly desires to create a network of international cooperation among women, transcending differences in political, social and cultural systems.

My last impression of this city was from the top of a hill looking out toward the Japan Sea. The sea shone a brilliant cobalt blue, welcoming all those who gazed upon its beauty. (Satoko Kanzaki)

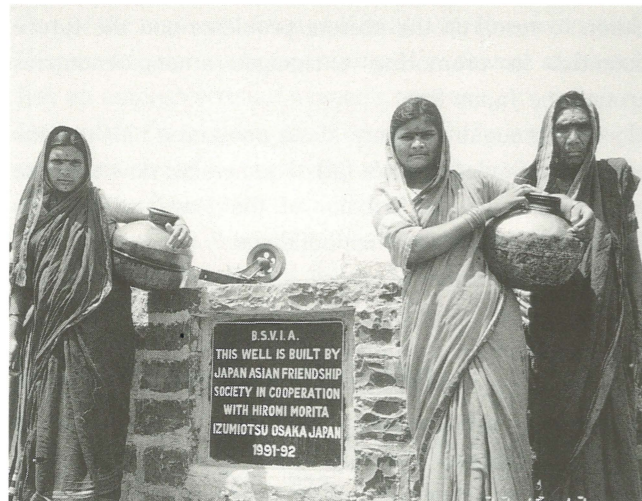
PHILIPPINES (Mar. 2-7, 1992)

In the Philippines, I, as a member of the Forum delegation, visited a training center for women, where they learn practical skills such as embroidery, toy making craft, dressmaking, food processing techniques, etc. After completing a training course there, some women may be employed and others start their own businesses. I enjoyed meeting center participants and learning about their experiences. The strongly determined director of the institution explained to us the center's mission. I was happy to learn that JICA is sponsoring this kind of grass-roots-oriented project. At a kiosk attached to the institution, handicrafts made by the women were displayed for sale; such as, bags, dolls, stuffed toys and so on. They were all so attractive that I bought a bag before I knew what I was doing.

Now I remember the following words: "the present world is not what we inherited from our parents, but what is entrusted to us by our children." The words still linger in my mind.

I think we should hand over a peaceful world to our next generation, building stronger bridges among Asian women. (Kazuko Terada)

The Japan Asian Association & Asian Friendship Society/Japan(JAFS)



▲Indian women draw water from a well recently built by JAFS.

JAFS, whose slogan is "The Creation of a More Human Global Society," aims at forming a network of NGOs active throughout Asia. Through this network JAFS hopes to give Asian NGOs the maximum number of opportunities for exchange, cooperation and solidarity with each other while bringing them together in a horizontally interconnected system.

A young man in India decided to give up his life as a member of the elite classes and instead devote himself to improving the lives of others. This inspired the creation of JAFS. JAFS then initiated through discussions with the local community its well building project in 1979. The project is designed not just as a temporary solution, but also to acquire of long-term benefits for the villagers' self-sufficiency. In developing countries, 70-80% of diseases such as diarrhea—the main cause of infant death—are attributed to unsanitary water. Therefore, these wells will have an effect on the life of the villagers far beyond just creating and maintaining a supply of safe underground water. First, this activity leads to an increase in local employment and enhances cooperative work among the villagers. In addition, with the establishment of wells inside the villages, women and children are released from the burden of fetching water from distant sources. This is the hardest duty of the day, and with its elimination, the women and children can thus spend more time on vocational and elementary education. Women and children, the traditionally oppressed, through education, will be able to change their futures by themselves and for the better.

At present JAFS international networks have expanded to 12 countries in Asia. The networks are highly active, characterized by the common ideas of "sustainable development," "grass-roots international exchange," and "the raising of a responsible next generation." For more information on JAFS, please contact: Phone (06) 444-0587

Foreign Correspondent's Report

Motorbike Women By Ms. Wang Jing <China>

One day in early February, a young woman in a bright red coat could be seen riding through Shanghai's busiest Nanjing Street on her deluxe motorbike. On her back seat was a man. More and more female motorbikers have appeared in downtown Shanghai recently, joining in what were once lines of men only on motorcycles.

According to the Shanghai Traffic Control Department, the statistics for the year 1991 show that approx. 20,000 people have motorcycle licenses, including about 400 women. 300 of these women license holders are under 40 years of age, and their occupations vary from university professors to circus actresses. People call them "motorbike women." Women's participation in riding motorbikes also illustrates their competitiveness against men. As living standards improve, people's desires also change. In China, it has been only 5-6 years since motorbikes became a part of their everyday lives. For the average white collar workers' family, a motorbike is still a luxury, just as a car is. On the other hand, if a family is well off and she has her parents' approval, many daughters have become interested in riding motorbikes. As this is still a rare thing to do, some women even feel that this is a challenge.

There are 7 "motorbike women" in the Shanghai Circus. Ms. Zhao Dong Juan, an actress, said, "If men can ride, of course we women can ride too." While actress Ms. Zheng Qin Fang said, "Although men looked at me curiously when I was riding my motorbike, I wanted to continue riding."

The lines of "motorbike women" will only keep expanding from now on. The same scene will be seen in country areas in the near future. Now, about 70 women from different occupations are studying at a motorbike driving school to get their licenses. Soon they will be out on the Shanghai streets on various types of motorbikes.



▲A motorbike woman

NGOs' Asian Women's Conference in Kitakyushu

Several groups of women related NGOs sponsored regional conferences to strengthen solidarity among Asian women in 6 Japanese cities. One such conference was held in April 11, 1992 in Kitakyushu with approx. 600 participants. The event was a local version of a joint NGOs' "Asian Women's Conference" held April 2-4, 1992 in Saitama, just outside of Tokyo after being previously held in the Philippines in 1985.

The theme of the Conference in Kitakyushu was "Talk & Unite, Asian Women." The Conference's focus was the improvement of the status of women in Asia and thus to contribute to world equality, development and peace.



▲The Kitakyushu Conference's guest speakers

The Conference started with a powerful keynote speech by Ms. Hema Goonatilake of Sri Lanka, and followed by a slide presentation. In the afternoon, there were sessions with the Conference's 4 guests, all of whom visited Japan for the plenary Conference in Saitama. They are authorities on the Kitakyushu Conference's themes of development, media, environment and labor. And then, a tea party gave lecturers and local community members an opportunity for informal international exchange. A feature of this event was Uygur songs and dances.

Guest Speakers: Ms. Hema Goonatilake (Sri Lanka)
Ms. Rita Monteiro (India)
Ms. Tati Krisnawaty (Indonesia)
Ms. Fareeha Zafar (Pakistan)

In one session, Ms. Tati Krisnawaty argued that there is a growing emphasis on reducing the birthrate as the means to control population. This imposes a burden of responsibility on women and has further restricted women's independence concerning the child birth. Ms. Krisnawaty believes that true affluence can begin only after a complete review of the situations surrounding women.

THE FORUM WINDOW

Internationalization of Heart-Link

"Our lives intersect
Yours and mine
This rich diversity
We go beyond words
We draw together In Sisterhood
Heart-Link Heart-Link
A time for minds to deepen"

The above verse is from the poem called "Heart-Link: When our hearts are tied together" by Ms. Keiko Ochiai. It was her message to a joint NGOs' second Asian Women's Conference.

At this Conference held at National Women's Education Centre in Saitama, the 18 guest speakers from several Asian countries took part on behalf of their own groups and networks.

Besides this main conference, guest speakers also participated in regional conferences in 6 other cities in Yokohama, Sendai, Sakai, Hiroshima, Kitakyushu, and Osaka like a whirl wind. If only for a short time, the whole of Japan felt the will and spirit of those creating an "Asia for women."

In Saitama, I took part in "Women's Studies in Asia" workshop. During the workshop, I wondered why and how "Asian" women's studies are necessary since Asian women vary so much in their climate, way of living, religious life, political organizations, etc. Is it necessary, or even possible for us to think of women's studies in "Asia" in a singular way?

A speech by Ms. Hema Goonatilake of Sri Lanka gave me some answers. She pointed out that the most important point of feminism is being aware that women have been suppressed and that situation now must be changed. When Ms. Goonatilake stayed in the U.S. in the 1960s, she found that the American radical feminist groups focused mainly on the struggle against male-dominated society. Yet, in Sri Lanka and other Asian countries, men and women have equally been struggling against poverty. It has always been of the interest to the ruling classes to suppress the poor. The structure of poverty and suppression under the present international economic order is strengthened by the unequal relationship between advanced nations and the Third World. In addition, she feels that women should continue to struggle against male dominance.

In Japan, we tend to think that we achieved our so-called prosperity through our individual efforts, industriousness, ability to defer to the group, and dedication to the pursuit of innovation in science and technology. In a sense this is true, but not completely. We have to ask ourselves how this was achieved in cooperation with other people in the world. Just as the reforms during the Meiji Restoration and after World War II were crucial points to turning Japan toward the greater world beyond its shores, it is the time for women to take the initiative in the "Third Opening of Japan" through the internationalism of Heart-Link.

Masami Shinozaki

Chief Researcher, Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women

INFORMATION

●THE 3rd ASIAN SEMINAR

The Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women will hold a series of open seminars, June through August 1992, in order to heighten everyone's awareness of Asian women's situations and their contribution to development. We will examine the problem of "Women in Development," the very serious problems of family, education, the environment, and the economy, and then ask ourselves what is required for improving these situations in the future.

We look forward very much to everyone's attendance. For more information, please call us on : 093-551-1220

●REPORT ON THE JAPAN-KOREA JOINT RESEARCH PROJECT

One of the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women's main projects in 1991 was a joint research project with the Korean Women's Development Institute. We compared the change in family consciousness in big cities between Korea and Japan, and recently issued a report on our findings. This report centers on the topic of how development influences women and families, including such issues as women's roles, values, the consciousness of men, and the differences and similarities between the two countries. It is published in both Japanese and English. Further information, please call us on : 093-551-1220

●"Asian Breeze" SUBSCRIBERS' DRIVE

The "Asian Breeze" is published every 4 months. It is distributed free at the Public Relations Section of the City Hall of Kitakyushu and Citizens' Consultation Room in every ward. If you would like us to send you a copy, please contact us. Our telephone No.: 093-551-1220

EDITORS' POSTSCRIPTS

As editors of this newsletter, we are extremely happy that through Asian Breeze we can share and continue to spread information about women's issues all over the world. We welcome your letters and are pleased with the recent increase of correspondence from China, Nepal, Australia, Cook Islands, etc. <S>

Early Summer Day -

The sight of soft green foliage growing vibrantly makes our hearts dance with summer joy. The Asian Women's Conference in Kitakyushu along with local citizens has become a refreshing force - a fresh summer breeze - blowing in change and renovation for women. <K>



Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women

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