

Women's Worlds 2005
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“Celebrating Women's Leadership—the Way Forward”

Challenges of Women for Women, against Women in Japan

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First of all, I would like to congratulate the organizers, volunteers, interpreters, and all of the participants of Women's Worlds 2005 on the success of this memorable event. I would like to thank all the eight previous organizers who worked for the International Congress of Women. I especially would like to thank Prof. Chang Phil Wha for inviting me to this plenary and Dr. Soon-Young Yoon for helping the plenary participants. This was the first time for me to attend this worldwide Congress and I hope it will continue, with my best wishes to the organizers of coming Congresses in 2008 and 2011.

My talk this morning will focus on the dynamics of various sectors in Japan with regard to gender equality. I believe similar situations to ours can be observed in many parts of the world. Just like women in many countries, over the past 60 years, Japanese women and some men have been industriously working toward a better gender-equal society as consumers, farmers, merchants, teachers, nurses, clerks, medical doctors, homemakers, etc. As Fig. 1 shows, NGOs, academics, professionals join hands to influence Diet members, government officials, and indirectly Courts to this very end. The media has been playing a significant role in promoting gender equality, although we Japanese citizens and scholars have to learn more how we should relate ourselves to the media on everyday basis, so that those issues deemed important from our point of view would be covered by the media. Despite our endeavors for change, UNDP's Gender Empower Measure (GEM) still ranks Japan as low as 38th among 78 UN member countries in *Human Development Report 2004*, as shown in Table 1. One obstacle is that we women in Japan have had to face challenges against women's self-expression and achievement because of deep-rooted assumptions in our cultural and social milieu, as in the sayings such as “A woman has no place to live in the past, present, and future world,” and “A woman should obey her father before marriage, her husband after

marriage, and her son in her old age.”

In the meantime, we have been supported by domestic and international networks of women, family members, and other supporters regardless of sex/gender as reflected in the legislative changes. For one thing, the scheme of ILO has been helpful in improving the working conditions of employed women in Japan, as represented by a number of court cases which ended in favor of the working women who had been discriminated against in promotions, wages, and retirement ages as the plaintiff. In preparation for the ratification of CEDAW in 1985, Japan revised the Nationality Law in 1984 to adopt the bilineal *jus sanguinis* principle in place of the paternal *jus sanguinis* principle and in 1985 enacted the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (Law Concerning the Promotion of Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Men and Women in Employment and Other Welfare Measures for Women Workers). High school “general home economics” became requisite for both boys and girls when the revision of the course of study came much later in 1989. Thanks to the Beijing Conference and Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), the Upper and Lower Houses unanimously passed the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society in 1999. After the Japanese government adopted the Women 2000 Outcome Document, the Law for the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims, generally known as DV Law, was enacted in April 2001 and was revised in June 2004 to better accommodate women victims. These legal formulations and amendments¹ are also largely due to the existence of laws of other Asian countries including Korea which espouse gender equality.

Using this momentum, we need to further empower ourselves in cooperation with various stakeholders in both domestic and international settings. Recently, against our expectations, a backlash against gender equality is gathering force. The major goals strongly supported by radical fundamental religious groups are the following three:

1. To restore traditional family values and to build a society in which men work hard outside the home and women protect and take care of families at home. They argue that this would prevent juvenile delinquency and correct moral degeneration in the society; they do not accept diverse forms of families.
2. To gut sex education and recommend sexual abstinence for young people until marriage; and
3. To abolish women’s/gender studies.

¹ For further details, see Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, 2004, “Milestones in the Advancement of Women Since International Women’s Year”, in *Women in Japan Today 2004* (available at: http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/women2004/index.html) and Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, 2004, *FY 2004 Annual Report on the State of the Formation of a Gender Equal Society and Policies to be Implemented in FY 2005 to Promote the Formation of a Gender Equal Society* (available at: http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/women2004/index.html)

Now publications (newspapers and weekly and monthly magazines) and opinions in favor of these views abound both in the media and on the Internet. These contenders are also vigorously exerting influences over Diet members and prefectural, city, town, and village assemblies.

In opposition, we, who are trying to promote realization of gender equal society in Japan, are claiming that:

1. Co-existence of varieties of family-types, life styles, and outlooks on life will be the sources of sustainable development of the society. Working couples with or without children, single individuals, families with working husbands and full-time housewives with or without children, families with house husbands and working wives with or without children, and aged people retired or not should be guaranteed to lead a better life.
2. Appropriate and quality sex education should be urgently promoted at school, at home, and in communities, primarily because the numbers and ratios of unwanted pregnancies and STIs among the youth under the age of 20 have been rapidly increasing during the past ten years.
3. Women's/gender studies is absolutely necessary for understanding human being as biological, social, and cultural entities, and they will contribute to the sustainability of humankind.

From both short-term and long-term perspectives, we further aim to strengthen inter-generational ties and ties among the same-minded individuals regardless of sex/gender within Japan as well as those with global networks outside Japan so as to overcome severe challenges from conservative groups which women's movements in Japan have been confronting particularly since 2002.

One good example is the session "The Rise of Young Feminists' Power in Asia,"² organized by Asian Center for Women's Studies, Ewha Womans University, for this Congress, Women's Worlds 2005, where "young" participants from China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan gave their presentations in five panels and "older" participants were among the audience. Such efforts as theirs to create global feminist knowledge and networks across generations are essential for our future in Japan and in the world. I would like to stress that the roles of women's/gender studies is very important not only as an academic pursuit (theoretically and empirically), but also as links between academia and women's movements for the better and diverse global society.

² Asian Center for Women's Studies, Ewha Womans University, 2005, *The Rise of Young Feminists' Power in Asia*, Proceedings of Women's Worlds 2005: 9th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women

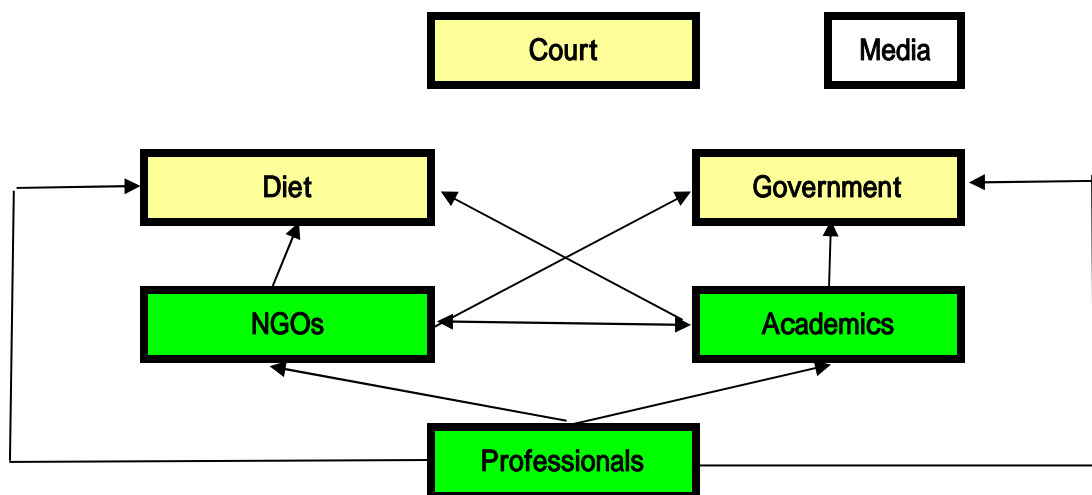


Fig. 1 Dynamics among Various Sectors

Table 1
UNDP's Gender Empowerment Measure in *Human Development Report* (2001-2004)

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004
Japan's rank	31st	32nd	44th	38th
No. of UN member countries being ranked	64	66	70	78

Sources: UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 2001-2004