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Re-Examining ‘Difference’ and ‘Development’: A Note on Broadening the Field of Gender and Development in Japan

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Abstract

It is the author’s position that the framework for WID/GAD, as academic field and practice concerned primarily with developing countries should be broadened so as to incorporate Japan’s own gender and development issues in its scope. Unlike other developed countries, activists and scholars in Japan rarely connected, as was also the case with the fields of women’s/gender studies and WID/GAD. However, this was not due to any lack of interest among Japanese women regarding the lives of women in developing countries. Rather the points of fissure were the notions of ‘difference’ and ‘development’ held by Japanese women. These analytical concepts were narrowly defined, which resulted in limited interaction between discourse on women’s issues

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in Japan and WID/GAD related to 'other' women. By re-examining these notions and looking more deeply into perceived differences in the local context of 'development', not only can we strategise on 'differences' in such a way that we draw strength from the very fact of being different, but also prevent 'differences' from being used as grounds for discrimination. As a whole, we could gain substantially by broadening the field of Gender and Development and, as such, it is imperative that this field be broadened with urgency as development itself changes in this ever-interconnected world.

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Re-Examining ‘Difference’ and ‘Development’: A Note on Broadening the Field of Gender and Development in Japan[1]

Mayumi Murayama

INTRODUCTION

Ruth Pearson, a noted scholar on gender and development field states that it is no longer possible to separate out gender and development in terms of development cooperation from a gendered analysis of macro changes at the national and global level both political and economic. (Pearson 2007). I fully support this proposition. However, to achieve this we must reflect on how much more meaningful Gender and Development analysis could become by extending the framework to allow for both Japan and developing countries into its scope.

The purpose of this paper is to explore one of the many possible links between the study of Gender and Development in Japan and that in developing countries. My approach is to try to find points of fissure between women’s/gender studies in Japan and the field of WID/GAD (Women in Development/Gender and Development) - primarily applied in Japan as an academic field and a practice concerned with foreign assistance and cooperation - while also exploring some ways to bridge existing gaps. I would, however, like to limit the definition of developing countries as referred to here as being primarily Asian countries, because in the minds of activist Japanese women these countries and those of the developed West were consciously addressed.

ASIAN WOMEN’S ISSUES IN JAPANESE FEMINISM

Approaches Juxtaposing Women’s Issues in Japan to Those in Developing Countries

Economists were the first to academically juxtapose Japan and developing countries in light of development. Their rationale for doing so was based in the assumption that, since Japan was a relative latecomer among developed nations in terms of industrialisation and modernisation, Japan’s experiences in development would present a model of some relevance for developing countries (see Okita 1980, Ohkawa 1986, Ohkawa and Kohama 1993, Ohtsuka 1990).

Similar assumptions with respect to women’s issues were taken up by Nakamura et al. (1985) as

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they looked into how technological changes affected the nature of female labour in Japan. The book chiefly covers the period from the beginning of Japan's modernisation up through 1985, some years following the country's rapid economic growth period. Topics for each chapter were selected to benefit developing countries: three pre-war era topics were silk-reeling labour, women workers in the coal industry, and female workers of the urban lower class; and the two post-war era topics addressed female labour in agriculture, fisheries, and other family-based industries and female employed labour at the time of high economic growth. Each chapter highlights insightful facts that are, in many ways, similar to what has been observed in developing countries. Nevertheless, the authors themselves stop short of elaborating on the exact relevance of their findings for developing countries. Masanori Nakamura, for one, demonstrates caution in drawing clear conclusions by stating that developing nations in Asia face different circumstances, i.e. a) changes in extra-national or temporal conditions - such as with rapid technological progress - now take place within very short spans of time as compared to Japan's past experience, and b) domestic economic and social structures vary as is seen in statistical differences discovered in female labour force participation rates, both overall and grouped by age, and the share of female employment by industry. With that as a caveat, Nakamura does then draw some conclusions as to which aspects of the Japanese experience may present a point of reference for Asian countries.

Speculations regarding the future of female labour, as made by Nakamura and his co-authors in this 1985 resource, have proved to be only partially true since actual changes in female employment over the past two decades have been far more dynamic than anyone expected. Yet, the book encapsulated one of the few attempts at examining female labour and employment in Japan with specific relevance for developing countries in mind. The rare nature of the research is even more remarkable when one considers that it was published well before Japan's institutionalisation of WID/GAD in the early 1990s. Moreover, it pre-dated even other research on female labour in Japan.[2] From a contemporary WID/GAD point of view, however, there are shortcomings in the project. First of all, it contained no analysis of developing countries other than in the concluding chapter written by Nakamura as mentioned above - probably due to the fact that the authors were experts on the Japanese economy and economic history rather than on developing countries. Secondly, the research applied little feminist perspective - at least explicitly, although the book does unmask the structure wherein female labour was mobilised, abandoned and re-employed over time by focusing on female labour and solidly reflecting on historical materials.

Lack of Linkages between Women's/Gender Studies in Japan and WID/GAD

What about the stance that Japanese feminist academia takes towards the issues faced by women in

[2] The Society for the Study of Social Policy in Japan named female labour as its central topic in 1992 after a 33 year gap (Shakai-seisaku Gakkai Nenpo 1993).

developing countries? While tremendous amounts of literature in women's and gender studies have been produced to date and work in WID/GAD has also gradually gained ground, few attempts have been made in either field at linking Japanese women with women in developing countries in a comparative framework.

In the early 1990s, the importance of applying gender perspective to development began to be recognised and as the concept took form as WID/GAD in the Japanese aid regime (Muramatsu 2005). However, not only did this shift take place two decades later than similar movements in the West, but it also came a full decade after the inception of women's studies in Japan, which took place in the late 1970s. The time gap between the birth of women's studies and WID/GAD in Japan starkly contrasts changes in the US and some European countries where the momentum of the women's movement extended almost instantaneously into the field of WID through women in the United Nations and national aid agencies (Tinker 1990, Young 1993). There, according to the classification set by Tinker (1990), three actors - i.e. advocates, practitioners and scholars - contributed to the institutionalisation of WID although they differed in their motives and perspectives. To the contrary, according to Ito and Fujikake, WID/GAD was primarily promoted in Japan by development agency practitioners and a handful of scholars, meaning that no strong movement supportive of WID/GAD existed outside of aid agencies (Ito and Fujikake 2003). With this in mind, the question remains, why was there so little outside support from or linkages between feminist scholars and activists regarding the making of WID/GAD in Japan, despite other prior advancements in Japanese society?

In fact, when women's studies were being established in the late 1970s, the absence of interaction among the aforementioned actors was already observed at the time. Yumiko Ehara, in her review of Japanese feminism during the 1970s and 1980s, states that the time was characterised by changes in these main actors with little interaction between activists and scholars (Ehara 1990). According to Ehara, women's studies in Japan were not born out of the Japanese women's movement. Rather, it emerged by way of the movement in the United States. Ehara says the split can be interpreted as rooted in the distance that scholars kept between themselves and the Japanese women's movement, which had failed to canvass wide social support, thus inspiring the use of developments in foreign countries as justification for the institutionalisation of women's studies in Japan. Did any similar situations prevail when WID/GAD was established within Japan's aid regime?

Two Views concerning Women in Developing Countries

Let us first examine the extent to which Japanese women were engaged in issues pertaining to women in developing nations prior to the advent of WID/GAD. Also, let us consider how women from developing countries and related gender issues were perceived and discussed by Japanese

women.

In the Japanese women's movement of the post-war era, female activists tended to align themselves with one of two opposing views towards women of developing nations: in one the women were perceived as oppressed and, in the other, they were a source of inspiration for a more active women's movement (Kano 2004, Mackie 2003).

Japanese women first acknowledged the problems of Asian women over the course of the 1970s women's liberation movement - when Japanese female activists often saw Asian women as little more than victims of war and capitalist exploitation. In 1970 the *Shinryaku = Sabetsu to Tatakau Ajia Fujin Kaigi* (Conference of Asian Women Fighting Against Discrimination = Invasion) was established to raise opposition to Japanese support for the United States role in the Vietnam War. The group also expressed serious concern over the fact that increased flows of Japanese capital into Asian countries had exacerbated oppression and exploitation against Asian peoples, something reminiscent of Japanese militarism over Asia.

Against the backdrop of their activism, Japanese women from the liberation movement succeeded in bringing about change within Japan. There was a perceptive shift in the role played by Japanese women - from one of passive war victim to one of imperialistic actor, equally responsible for the oppression of Asian people. This self-reflection led to the formation of two strands of activism: one that reconstructed the history of the role Japanese women played during the war and another that raised strong protest against reviving Japanese economic and social oppression over Asian women via capital, goods and sex tourism. In 1977, *Onnatachi no Ima o Tou Kai* (Women Questioning the Present), a group which represented the first strand of activism, started publishing a newsletter titled '*Jugoshi Noto'* (Notes for a History of the Homefront). In the same year, another group of women launched an organisation called *Ajia no Onnatachi no Kai* (Asian Women's Association)[3] and raised issues related to Japanese oppression over Asian women. The issue of comfort women, and sexual slavery enforced by the Japanese Army during World War II was also acknowledged in the 1970s (Kano 2004). This history is seen as one of the most symbolic examples of Japan's sexual, economic and political exploitation based in the gender, class and ethnicity of Asian women. When comfort women received renewed attention in the 1990s, the issue was re-conceptualised within a new and wider perspective of violence against women.

The second view portraying women in developing nations as an inspiration took shape as Japanese activists began to participate in international women's conferences in the mid 1970s. Japanese women representing both government and NGO interests at a women's conference in Mexico in 1975 first took notice of the activism of women from developing countries. Taki Fujita - the leader of an official Japanese mission to the conference - commented that she felt a palpable

[3] *Ajia no Onnatachi no Kai* was renamed *Ajia Josei Shiryo Senta*(Asia-Japan Women's Resource Center) in 1995, the year when the fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing.

sense of political power welling up in developing countries, which was more than she had expected. Grass-roots activists also found that the conferences provided them with fresh opportunities for direct encounters with women from developing nations. Chiyo Saito, known as a central activist in *Agora* - a civil organisation against war, discrimination and violence - was shocked to learn how ill-prepared Japanese women were at the conference, which stood in stark contrast to the preparedness of participants from other countries (Kano 2004). Teruko Yoshitake, too, wrote about feeling awakened by the vigour of Third World women and realising how ignorant she was of North-South issues; she discovered that unknowingly she was among those who discriminated against them (Yoshitake 1999a). Japanese women were increasingly inspired by women of developing nations with each conference attended, particularly after the fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 (Funabashi 1994, Matsui 1996). In line with this change, the general mass media in Japan also began to disseminate positive messages about Asia starting in the early 1990s, owing in part to the economic growth of China and some Southeast Asian countries.

It is important to note that, between the two prevailing views, it was the first view that took precedence when the government came to realise the necessity of incorporating WID/GAD into their Official Development Assistance (ODA) framework. Japan surpassed the United States to become the world's largest provider of ODA from 1989, and the institutionalisation of WID/GAD in its aid regime in the early 1990s was primarily promoted by external pressure. Some women's organisations, such as *Ajia no Onnatachi no Kai* submitted their own proposals for the government's official WID guidelines (Matsui 1997). I am not aware of how their proposal was received by the government, or whether the group's proposal was followed-up. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to guess that the Japanese government did not welcome *Ajia no Onnatachi no Kai*'s advocacies – the organisation was against Japanese ODA for the way in which its was structured to benefit Japan at the cost of the welfare of people, particularly women, in neighbouring Asian countries. Whether or not, those who were at the fore of WID/GAD's institutionalisation consciously or strategically kept themselves at some distance from the anti-ODA stance espoused by women's organisations, as happened when women's studies was established, has yet to be sufficiently explored.

Japanese Women and the Notion of 'Difference'

The two aforementioned contrasting views both relate to the notion of 'difference' that Japanese women commonly hold regarding 'other' women. Japanese people in general, and intellectuals in particular, have projected their society and themselves as being different from Western countries. At the same time, certain latent but prevalent notions exist commonly among the Japanese populace -- notions of the hierarchy of nations among Asian countries, as pointed out by Mackie (2003). This view has been nurtured gradually from the time when Japanese modernisation, or Westernisation, began in the Meiji era and was subsequently consolidated in the pre- and post-war

periods along with Japanese imperialism and rapid economic development. As such, Japanese women today are not totally free from it. Thus, the psychological distance felt by Japanese women to women of other Asian countries is no less narrow than that which they experience with women of the US and European countries. This is further corroborated by the fact that the concept of ‘Asia’ is used in two ways - one implying a geographical region that includes Japan and another that reflects a mental map that excludes Japan.

Ajia no Onnatachi no Kai and other NGOs actively siding with Asian countries during the late 1970s and the 1980s strategically worked to shed light on commonalities and links between Japan and other Asian countries. They illustrated how Japanese consumption, including that of food and manufactured goods, is supported by the exploitation of Asian workers. This was part of an attempt to close the distance that the Japanese populace felt towards Asian countries. In my opinion, their approach substantially imbued the Japanese population at large with an awareness of the hitherto invisible relationship between other Asian countries and their own.[4] Nevertheless, perceived ‘differences’ based in hierarchies seem to have steadfastly persisted to date despite the broadened understanding of relationships. It seems to me that this perceptive distance has got in the way for Japanese women of building more of a collective subjectivity, along with women of developing countries, against development as a hotly contested issue relating to their own livelihoods and not merely as a problem limited to developing countries.

Japanese Women and the Notion of ‘Development’

In addition to the distance Japanese women felt with women of developing countries, one other important factor relating to the notion of ‘development’ had isolated WID/GAD from gender issues in Japan.

In the Japanese language, development can be translated in two ways; ‘*kaihatsu*’ and ‘*hatten*’. In the Japanese connotations, the former is transitive and means the active development of something, while the latter is intransitive and implies self-development. Currently in Japanese WID/GAD, ‘development’ is translated as ‘*kaihatsu*’ without exception although, in words such as ‘developing countries’, both ‘*kaihatsu*’ and ‘*hatten*’ are used in many cases interchangeably as the translation of the word ‘developing . According to Hiroshi Kan Sato, the word ‘*kaihatsu*’ has been used for more than 1000 years and originally implied turning uncultivated land into agricultural fields. Usage was then broadened most notably after World War II as large-scale infrastructure, such as dams and roads, became increasingly subject to development (Sato 2005).

As is well known, the connection between women and development was first articulated in

[4] By the late 1980s, the relationship between Japan and developing nations became more visible as the number of immigrant workers increased and occupational distribution showed markedly gendered- and country-specific characteristics (Ito 1992). See also note 8.

Boserup's seminal work, Women's Role in Economic Development, published in 1970. It was upon the occasion of the World Conference of International Women's Year, held in Mexico City in 1975, that Japanese women came to realise development was an issue of critical concern for women. Among the three themes proclaimed as key at the conference (i.e., Equality, Development, and Peace), 'development' was a more recent issue with more broadly recognised significance owing to the increase in newly independent countries member to the U.N. On the other hand, 'equality' and 'peace' were each raised as agenda by developed industrial nations and the Eastern bloc respectively (Tinker 1990).

Prior to the conference, only a few Japanese women acknowledged the importance of 'development' as a women's agenda item.[5] At the time of the Mexico Conference, 'development' was translated as '*hatten*' by the Japanese government (Ito 1993). Although Japanese women participating in the conference came to understand then the significance of 'development' as an important agenda item for women, the concept itself still seemed to vaguely remain more of an issue related to 'other' women. Yoshitake states that she thought the concept of '*hatten*' needed to be thoroughly debated, particularly regarding whom it would benefit and how - whereas there was no point in questioning 'peace' and 'equality' as a set because war not only unhinges solidarity among women but also creates stern systems of order - among countries, men and women, and the old and the young (Yoshitake 1999a). The issue of 'equality' had been of critical concern for Japanese women - even in times before the conference. International recognition of its significance bolstered their promotion of this agenda throughout Japanese society in employment and education, mass media and family, as well as throughout legal and political fields. We can observe an instance of multifarious women's activism in the records of *Kodosuru Onnatachi no Kai* (International Women's Year Action Group) (Kodo suru kai kirokushu henshu iinkai 1999). *Kodosuru Onnatachi no Kai*, a network of women's organisations established in preparation for the Mexico Conference, also took the problems of women in developing countries seriously. They articulated a move to build solidarity with Asian women. Nevertheless, as with other organisations, they, too, were limited by the issues of comfort women and Asian sex tours (Yoshitake 1999b).

Here I do not mean to undermine the significance of such issues or the sincere of the above organisations. From the vantage point of WID/GAD, however, development was rarely linked with the economic, political and social changes that Japanese women were experiencing at that time and for a substantial time thereafter. One ought to recall that the 1970s in Japan were an era in which the development policies pursued over the previous decade of high growth began to be questioned owing to their negative consequences, such as migration drains from rural and non-urban areas,

[5] Yoko Kitazawa, an activist who participated in a world women's conference organised by Women's International Democratic Federation and held in Copenhagen in 1960, may be one of the few who became aware of neglect early on by women of the North for the concerns relating to development and colonialism voiced by women in developing countries (Kitazawa 1979).

urban overpopulation, and the spread of pollution. Furthermore, during that period, women did play socially active roles and collectively raised a strong voice against the advance of development[6] (Chino 1996). Activism commonly practiced among Japanese women with regard to development issues, however, was not related to development being questioned in international women's forums.

In sum, prior to the inception of WID/GAD in Japan, the concerns that Japanese women had for women's issues in developing countries were fundamentally grounded in perceived 'differences', implying mostly a hierarchical relationship between Japanese men and women as the oppressors and women of other Asian countries as the oppressed. Moreover, the notion of development, as presented in the agenda of international women's initiatives, was understood quite narrowly, separate from that which concerned the development of Japan. While it seemed that there was little interaction between the women's movement and the official institutionalisation of WID/GAD, such attitudes had also crept into both the academic expression and practical implementation of institutionalised WID/GAD as it related to foreign development assistance. At the same time, these attitudes have also visibly persisted within Japan's women's movement where issues pertaining to women from developing countries are addressed, although some changes have taken place since the mid-1990s after the Beijing Conference.

EXTENDING THE WID/GAD FRAMEWORK IN JAPANESE CONTEXT

Re-examining the Notions of 'Difference' and 'Development'

Based on the above accounts, I would like to suggest that the scope of WID/GAD analysis be broadened by a re-examination of the notions of 'difference' and 'development'.

The notion of 'difference' had already been addressed by some Japanese feminist scholars, primarily those hailing from one of two strands of feminist thought: post-colonial - or Third World feminism, and post-modern feminism. By introducing these feminisms, they deliberately questioned the standpoints evident in Japanese feminism. Mari Oka, who writes extensively on the representation of Arab women in Western feminism, also turns her eye towards how proponents of the cause have addressed and interpreted the issue of comfort women without reflecting on their own relative positionalities - which carry into their talk about 'other' women (Oka 2000). Oka's critique is directed towards Japanese feminists who advocate sisterhood and solidarity with women of the

[6] Kiso Kimura, a female farmer in Aomori prefecture elaborated in a 1972 meeting titled 'Pollution and Education' on why and how women organised in movements against larges-scale development plans including the construction of a nuclear power plant, nuclear fuel cycle facilities and an oil storage base (Kimura 1972). Her very articulate and down-to-earth narrative effectively presents pivotal issues within WID/GAD today.

Third World without ever becoming conscious of their positions as contributing to their exploitation through structures of North-South relations. Thus, she argues that, for Japanese women, the target of liberation should be not women of the Third World but one's self.

While Oka's approach to analysing the relationship between Japanese women and women of developing nations is similar in some respects to that for women's groups discussed in the previous sections, Yoshiko Kanai purports that 'difference' should be one key concept by which we should re-construct Japanese feminism and the feminist movement so that it extends beyond the single long-pursued principle of 'equality' (Kanai 1989). Kanai critiques the discriminatory nature of principals of equality, which leave out, for example, physically-challenged and minority women. As long as equality means assimilation, 'difference' is used as an implicit source of discrimination. Instead, Kanai calls for de-constructing and re-constructing our consciousness about differences and diversities, whereupon spaces in which differences are respected and understood could be created and people could live in harmony.

So problems stemming from 'difference' in Japanese feminism are twofold. Firstly, 'difference' as held by Japanese regarding women from developing countries is perhaps muted but persistent, thereby perpetuating the implicit structure of a perceived hierarchy. On the other hand, difference among Japanese women is often neglected in the face of agenda for equality vis-à-vis men. In both cases, there has been a tendency to avoid dealing squarely with the notion of 'difference'. These tendencies have resulted in a situation where Japanese women neither strategise over the notion of 'difference' for their own collective benefit nor stop it from being used as grounds for discrimination.

Chandra T. Mohanty, one of the leading theorists in Third World feminism, asserts that diversity and difference are central values to be acknowledged and respected, not erased, in the building of alliances (Mohanty 2003). For the sake of making 'difference' a source of power rather than one of discrimination, we should not avoid examining the notion of difference as we and others, men or women, see it. Gender is one element by which we differentiate one person from another. However, it is not the only element addressed by post-modern and Third World feminisms. Other factors such as race, ethnicity, age, and class make a difference. John Scott defined gender as a 'constitutive element of social relationship based on perceived differences between the sexes', and it is also a 'primary way of signifying relationship of power' (Scott 1988). Scott's formulation above can be extended to define other elements of difference.

Next, we also need to elucidate on how those elements function in constructing our perceived differences. According to Scott, gender defined as above involves four interrelated factors: culturally available symbols, norms, social institutions and organisations, and subjective identity. I will not elaborate on Scott's framework in any more depth here but I believe it is pertinent to examine other elements of 'difference' from a similar framework of analysis. One thing that is clear is that these factors do not function in a vacuum. In order to understand perceived differences

and the elements that construct such differences, we need to investigate each matter in certain local contexts, whether those be at a global, national, community, or household level. This is where we can bring in a broadened notion of 'development' as a space and place demarcated by certain projects, whether economic, political, cultural or nationalistic in nature.

According to Yasuko Muramatsu, the 1990 publication of the Human Development Report by United Nations Development Programme clarified the fact that development implies not only the development of developing countries but also that including gender equality of developed countries. Hence, GAD theory has come to gradually be perceived as covering dimensions of gender-related research, practice and policy in broader socio-economic development, irrespective of the degree of development (Muramatsu 2005). Since then, some studies have approached particular gender issues concerning both Japan and developing countries with a common framework for analysis (See for example, Osawa 1996, Ajia josei-shi kokusai shinposiumu jikko iinkai 1997, Murayama 2005a, Yokota 2006). This emerging line of research needs to be pursued with the involvement of more scholars, activists and practitioners engaged collectively in gender issues affecting both Japan and other countries.

Benefits of a Broadened WID/GAD

There are several other reasons that I believe this undertaking has significant relevance for the sake of both research and activism in Japan.

First, the theories, methodologies, findings and fieldwork experiences being accumulated in the field of WID/GAD can be applied to the study of Japanese society. It would fill the gap created by, as noted by Kimiko Kimoto, the overwhelming concentration of Japanese gender studies in theoretical studies while empirical studies are still lacking (Kimoto 2000). Perspectives gained from experiences in other fields would help us to question the issues, interpretations and ways of solving problems, often taken for granted, and thus lead to further exploration (Murayama 2005a). This would not be limited to research alone but may also extend through dimensions of activism. One example is seen in a reflection of Michiko Hiroki who, along with Miyoko Shiozawa, has promoted since the early 1980s the strengthening of relationships between female workers in Japan and its Asian neighbours.[7] Hiroki explains that, through exchanges with workers from other Asian

[7] Miyoko Shiozawa and Michiko Hiroki started their career as activists in a trade union which primarily organised Japanese textile workers. As Japanese industries began to shift their production bases to other Asian countries in the 1970s, Shiozawa and Hiroki became concerned that the harsh working conditions which Japanese women endured would be transferred to women in other countries. In 1981, a women's group called the Committee of Asian Workers (CAW) was formed in Hong Kong with the support of a Christian organisation in order to raise awareness about the problems of women workers in Asia (After 1992, CAW became independent of the Christian organisation and currently functions as a networking organisation linking female workers' groups from 13 Asian countries through its office in Bangkok). Shiozawa was involved in the

countries, Japanese labour activists not only learned more about the problems faced by their counterparts but they also came to re-evaluate problems within the Japanese union system and the state of their own everyday livelihoods (Hiroki 1999). Pearson (2007) and John (2007) suggest many pertinent fields in which we may work together and learn from each other in order to broaden the whole of our understanding. Views and experiences that pertain to 'others' are particularly important since they have not only made an impact on the now-contested terrains of gender and development, but they may also act as an added resource for indirectly applying pressure for change – to be used just as women's groups in the past used emergent international norms of gender equity and trans-national feminist mobilisation for bringing greater focus on social justice and rights (Gelb 2003).

Second, in consideration of the economic and social position that they currently find themselves in, Japanese women as a whole ought to embark on a collective reflection incorporating a wider view of the connectivity between their lives and the lives of women in developing countries. Needless to say, globalisation has made it impossible to separate out Japanese economy and society from those of other countries. Its interrelatedness with Asian neighbours has deepened particularly since the mid 1980s. The Plaza Accord in 1985 led to a rapid appreciation of the yen in relation to the US dollar and was followed by massive overseas direct investment by Japanese manufacturers. This affected the employment of women not only in countries receiving Japanese investment but also in Japan (Murayama 1995b). In the 1980s, workers entering Japan from developing countries also surged in the labour market.[8] From the vantage point of women's equality, the mid-1980s was when Japan's labour law was restructured by the enactment of the Equal Opportunity and Worker Dispatch Laws, in addition to deregulation of the Labour Standards Law. Further, the issues of

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establishment of CAW and, in line with this work, an organisation called Asian Women Workers Center (AWWC) was formed in Japan in 1983 as a way to disseminate information regarding conditions affecting Asian workers since overseas Japanese firms have substantial control over working conditions and labour management practices.

[8] Although, Japan was both a sending and receiving country of migrants up until World War II, in the post-war economic development era Japan, unlike many other developed countries, did not utilise foreign workers to fill growing labour shortages (Iyotani 1992). It was not until the 1980s that foreign workers became visible in Japanese society. One notable feature was that the initial wave of workers in the 1970s and early 1980s mostly consisted of women from the Philippines and Thailand engaged in 'entertainment' services including work at snack bars and sex work (See Ito 1992, for the details of the gendered nature of foreign workers in Japan. Starting in the late 1980s, while the number of male workers increased, the sectors in which female foreign workers were employed expanded to cover new sectors such as manufacturing, construction and cleaning work. To date, Japan continues to take a conservative approach in accepting foreign workers. Nevertheless, the number of such workers is rising. According to the Report on the Employment Situations of Foreigners as published by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, approximately 340,000 directly and indirectly employed foreign workers lived in Japan as of 1st of June, 2005; this number has more than doubled over the last 10 years. The multi-dimensional nature of foreign and, particularly, of female workers' issues, with people engaged in various sectors and with varied status, has not been sufficiently investigated and needs to be subject to much more rigorous research.

poverty and disparity, which have only recently come into limelight over this past decade, can be traced back to the mid-1980s when Japan's Gini coefficient, a measure of inequality in income distribution, began to rise (Kumazawa 2007). It should be noted that income disparities among women has widened at a much faster rate than that among men (Hashimoto 2007).

Rigorous research must be undertaken in order to explore the relationships shared between the above facts before any conclusions can be drawn. Nevertheless, one thing that is clear is that elucidation of problems would be impossible were we to confine our analyses to Japan. Similar issues affecting both men and women are being explored in many countries and communities around the world. Moreover, there is much to learn from developing countries owing to their long history with struggles concerning gender and development.[9]

Lastly, some say that young women in Japan organising around issues of developing countries or WID/GAD constitute a Third Wave of feminism (Gelb 2003). Yet, to the contrary, others say that there is a distinct lack of younger generation activists.[10] Thus, for the sake of expanding the human base of feminist work as well, it is imperative that we now share the lived experiences of both younger and senior feminists within a broadened framework for Gender and Development.

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[9] Masanao Kano refers to the absence of perspectives on poverty within contemporary Japanese feminism. He states that the notion of poverty appears only in relation to Southeast Asia, when discussing the sexual object of rich Japanese men. In his view, while feminism has added perspective on gender as a basis for re-evaluating society as a whole, it has weakened the very same potential for understanding society as a whole by fixing its stance to this particular angle. He cites the issue of female-headed households in Japan, not only as an example of the feminisation of poverty but also as a case of the female power of self-help (Kano 2004).

[10] The women's labour movement, for instance, has been borne mostly by experienced women alone, although the situation has recently changed with the rapid increases in non-standard employment among youth.

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