

からだ・私たち自身

Bodies, Ourselves

From OBOS to SOFL: Why and How We Have Adapted Them into Japanese Society

The history of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* coming to Japan begins in the early 1980's. In 1984, Chizuko Ueno, a feminist sociologist who is currently teaching at Tokyo University, was then staying in Chicago on a professional exchange. She came to know the newly published *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves* there and introduced it in a Japanese quarterly newsletter, *Women's Books*.

The publisher of this feminist newsletter was Toyoko Nakanishi. In 1975, she started a small bookstore specifically for women called *Shokado Women's Bookstore* in Kyoto. In those early days of Japanese women's liberation movement, she could not find any information helpful for women in Japan, although she keenly felt the need for it. So she decided to launch on a difficult task of collecting, introducing, and publishing women's books and circulating information for women.

When Chizuko introduced *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and appealed to readers of women's books to attempt a Japanese translation of this marvelous book, many women, including myself, responded earnestly and volunteered translation work. We faced difficulties immediately, however, in finding a publishing house brave enough to take on this hard task. Not only was the book so huge but also it dealt with women's bodies and sexual issues with daring frankness – at least,



Shokado Women's Book Store

Japan

1988

according to the Japanese standard in those days. Then, dauntless Toyoko decided to publish it by herself, saying, "If I won't do it, I am not a woman!"

At that time, Japanese women were more or less ignorant of their own bodies; they were not being educated about their own bodies and women's health. Furthermore, there was a vast lack of self-control generally because husbands as well as doctors (who were mostly men) had almost complete authority over all the decisions concerning women's health, thus giving men control over women's bodies and rendering women powerless about their own health. Along with this, women were not accustomed to talking openly about their bodies and sexuality, even with other women, because of the strong sense of shame and filth attached to women's bodies.

One horrific example of such ignorance on the part of women is the case of Fujimi Hospital which was revealed in 1981. About one thousand and three hundred unnecessary hysterectomy and/or ovariectomy operations were conducted on women at this hospital for a period of many years. These women were told that "Your uterus is rotten" or "Your ovary is cancerous and in a mess," and were urged to undergo an operation immediately. They obeyed. However, later it was found that their removed organs were healthy and that the hospital had performed those operations just for money's sake. Although this case was a real tragedy for these victimized women, it worked as a strong warning to Japanese women of a danger of being ignorant of their bodies.

Translation and Adaptation

Shokado was (and is?) a small bookstore/publisher with chronic financial shortage, and it is very difficult in Japan to find a fund or some public financial aid for publishing activity. Accordingly, the making of Japanese version of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was carried out totally on a voluntary base. Twenty-three women participated in translation work, and twenty-five women, some of whom overlapping with the translation team, took charge of editing and collecting information

necessary for Japanese adaptation. Many of these women were housewives who had had no experience and/or training of translation and editing until then. Since I had some experience of professional translation, I took charge of proof-reading to check translation with Mioko Fujieda, a feminist scholar. Dr. Miyoko Kawano, a feminist obstetrician-gynecologist, took upon herself the responsibility of checking all technical terms and pointing to many differences among medical systems, medical treatments, and medicines between the United States and Japan. She also introduced us to the photographer who took pictures of women giving birth at her hospital in Hiroshima, so that we could use those wonderful pictures in our book. Since we decided to replace all the pictures of Western women in the book with those of Japanese women, many people offered their own or their family's photos for us. One of our friends who was pregnant then even posed in the nude as a model for us. Finally, a famous artist, Chizuru Miyasako, readily accepted our request and made a charming collage work for the cover of the Japanese edition.

Apart from this translation/editing team, many people including lesbians (who were mostly in the closet in those days) lent a helping hand to our project. While the earlier shortened version of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* published in Japan in 1974 was entitled 『女のからだ』 (Women's Bodies), we chose a title more faithful to the original, that is, 『からだ・私たち自身』 (*Bodies, Ourselves*).

It took more than three years from 1985 to 1988 for translation, research work and editing of the Japanese *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Many members of the project team met every week for the three years, and near the end of the period, they met more often. The location for all the meetings was on the second floor of Toyoko's small book shop in Kyoto. Toyoko's role was the overall management and coordination of the members. She was present at almost all of the meetings. As there were no fax machines nor e-mail in the period of 1985-88, Toyoko was always on the phone networking to hundreds of people and organizations. The OBOS team contacted and

met with over 80 major women's groups in Japan during this process.

While we decided to use pictures of our own and to write new prefaces for the Japanese *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, it was our policy to translate all chapters of original *Our Bodies, Ourselves* faithfully. It was not only because the contract with BWHBC required that but also because we felt that we shared many problems treated in the book as women living in a highly industrialized capitalist society. On the other hand, some parts of the book such as the chapters on lesbianism, masturbation, sexuality of aged or disabled people were quite new as a topic and a real eye-opener for most of us. I do not mean that such issues did not exist in our society, but they remained largely as issues without name until *Our Bodies, Ourselves* taught us how to see and talk about them clearly and openly.

Fortunately, we did not encounter any problem of censorship in publishing those chapters treating sexual issues. Kathy Davis mentions in her paper that, as late as 1990, the Japanese customs officials seized copies of the book showing genitalia and pubic hair as 'pornography' (Davis 2001:10). It is true. Nevertheless, we could publish pictures of a delivering woman with her pubic hair and genitalia clearly shown without receiving any admonishment! Also, we did not need to worry about the issue of induced abortions, the center of much heated controversy in many other countries including the United States. The Japanese Government legalized induced abortions as early as in 1948 as a countermeasure to the rapid population growth after the World War II.

Although the Japanese version is a faithful translation of the original *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, it is not that we found no adaptive contrivances necessary to make the book more useful and effective for Japanese audience. The major points of adaptation are as follows:

1. Changes in the Chinese Characters for Certain Terms

In Japanese language, the terms indicating parts of woman's body such as the pubic hair, the pubic bone and the vulva are ordinarily written using the Chinese characters which have a very negative connotation like "shameful (耻心)" or "dark and shady (陰)". So we substituted the Chinese character 性 which means "sex" or "sexual" for those negative-nuanced characters to give these terms more neutral or positive impression. By thus changing the Japanese words, we tried to tell our readers that the language plays an important part in framing our consciousness of the body and that there is no need for us to feel ashamed or degraded when we think or talk of our bodies.

2. Addition or Changes for More Relevant Information

Since there are many important differences as regards health insurance system, medical care and education system, and the laws between Japan and the United States, information necessary to understand the Japanese state of things was added or substituted for the original description. Names of foods and drugs unfamiliar to Japanese people were changed to those available in Japan. In addition, since the threat of HIV/AIDS was just becoming of great concern in Japanese society, the latest information on this topic was newly added.

3. Information Based on a New Research

While we omitted the bibliography and the list of various American groups in the original *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, we conducted our own path-breaking research of obstetrical-gynecological clinics, hospitals, and midwifery clinics all over Japan. One hundred and eighty clinic/hospitals and twenty-nine midwifery clinics responded to our questionnaire. The results were given in the form of tables in our book, indicating each institution's policies on the Lamaze method, postures during labor and delivery, whether the presence of a laboring woman's partner or family is permitted or not, provision

of information about the pre- and post-delivery periods including contraception, provision of counseling, as well as the method, required time and expense of induced abortion. Such research and information were very much needed by Japanese women, because they were frustrated with the haughty and unkind manner of male doctors, humiliating and inhumane treatment on a high, strapped and uncomfortable delivery table, abuse of induction and/or episiotomy, and many other unpleasant experiences in medical facilities.

4. New Prefaces

Each of three chief editors, that is Dr. Miyoko Kawano, Mioko Fujieda, and I, wrote a new preface for the Japanese version, respectively, to facilitate understanding of the book by the Japanese audience. Miyoko wrote about the state of Japanese medicine and its treatment of women, Mioko described briefly the history of women and health movement in the United States and how the original *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was born and spread around the world, and I explained about the adaptations and changes we had made for the Japanese edition.

Effects and Influence of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*

In October 1988, 6,000 copies of Japanese *Our Bodies, Ourselves* were published. Within a decade, all the copies have been sold and the book is out of print now. But this does not mean that the book is considered out of date or forgotten today. You can find the manifold effects of publication of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in various places. First, although the number of copies sold was not quite large, partly because of the relatively high price of the book, at least one copy was purchased and housed in almost every women's center scattered in many prefectures of Japan as well as many public and university libraries, providing an easy access to the book for a large audience. One example to show that *Our Bodies, Ourselves* has faithful readers even today is given by a feminist activist with disability who told Toyoko that she was overwhelmed with joy when she first read the part written of

sexuality of people with disability many years ago and that she still uses that chapter every year as the text for their study group.

Second, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* became a source of inspiration for other books and activities. Under the far-reaching impact of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, numerous groups of women were formed to discuss and make research on various women's health issues such as the oral contraceptive pill, which was not officially approved in Japan until as late as June 1999, endometriosis, menopause, reproductive technologies, adolescence and sexuality, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. Based on such researches and bodily experiences of Japanese women, many new books have been written and published. As a result of increased interest in and visibility of women's health issues, the atmosphere of shame and secrecy surrounding women's bodies and sexuality has been dispersed to a considerable degree. In 1981, the victims of the Fujimi Hospital had a difficult time even to utter the word "uterus" in front of many people. Today, the situation is far better and to talk about women's bodies is no longer felt as a taboo among many women.

Third, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and the books and activities inspired by it have brought about some favorable changes among medical professionals. For example, some hospitals came to listen more attentively to women's complaints of uncomfortable and inhumane ways of giving birth at hospitals, and improvements have been made concerning the design of delivery beds and women's postures during labor and delivery. The number of women who, wishing to give birth in a more natural way, prefer private midwife's office to hospitals is increasing, and attendance of partners during delivery has also become common both at hospitals and midwife's offices.

Last but not least is the effects of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* on individual women of the translation/editing team. Many of them, including myself, remember the encounter with *Our Bodies, Ourselves* as an unforgettable experience which

enabled us to see our bodies more positively and encouraged us to live more freely. Personally, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* even marked a turning point in my career. I was a post-graduate studying women's history when I first met *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. The book opened my eyes to the fact that there was almost no history of woman's body in Japan, and I decided to make it my specialty. Thus it was through *Our Bodies, Ourselves* that we learned both personally and collectively that OUR BODIES DO MATTER and also OUR SELVES DO MATTER.

Translating SOFL

In 1996, a book called *Sacrificing Ourselves for Love* written by Esther R. Rome, a member of Boston Women's Book Collective, and Jane W. Hyman, a co-author of *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, was published. And the Japanese version of this book was published in June, 2001. Once again, the publisher is Toyoko's Shokado Women's Bookstore and a team consisting of 13 women, some of them overlapping with members of OBOS team, collaborated on a voluntary base in translation, research and editing. Once again, I participated as the proof-reader.

The reason why we chose this book for translation is because the issues dealt in it, such as dieting and eating disorders, cosmetic surgery, domestic violence, rape, and STDs, are all serious problems currently in Japanese society, and we thought ideas and information in this book can be very helpful for Japanese women. For instance, several large-scale researches on domestic violence were conducted during recent years, and the research in Osaka City revealed that two out of three women have experienced some kind of physical and/or mental violence from their husbands or lovers. The law inhibiting violence from partners was enacted in May 2001. In view of such conditions, we made special efforts to include necessary information on shelters and counseling services for battered women available in Japan.

Thus, we are still treading the path which started from *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, and our story of transplantation and re-

contextualization of this book is still under way.

Kathy Davis, "Translating Feminist Body/Politics: The Globalization of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*," paper presented at the meeting, "Crossing Cultural Borders with *Our Bodies, Ourselves*," in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 2001.

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