

# What the Survey and its Findings Tell Us

## Ainu Women

Ainu Association of Hokkaido, Sapporo Branch

### 1. Introduction

Most of the respondents of this survey were members of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido, with two hundred and forty-one women from 14 branches and one district being surveyed out of a total of fifty-four branches. The survey comprised of 78 questions, 31 of which dealt with five areas determined by the organizers of the minority women’s survey project, namely education, employment, social welfare, health and violence, as well as 47 questions about discrimination and the preservation and transmission of Ainu culture.

Because members of the Ainu Association of Hokkaido were the main targets of the survey, 77% of respondents were aged over 40 years. In seeking the cooperation of each branch, it was not communicated that they should consider reaching a wider age range. Ample time was also required to take part in the survey, such that only women who were not working or who had the day off were available to participate. Further, young Ainu women tend not to actively participate in the activities of the association, partly because it would require them to “come out” to society about their roots. Many women wait until their children have grown up before joining Ainu-organized activities, so that their children will not become targets of discrimination. The preparation work by the organizers is also a factor in considering the demographic - surveying the entire region of Hokkaido proved to be more difficult than imagined, requiring scheduling gatherings in each region for a large number of people.

### 2. Education

#### 1. Level of Education

Given that 77% of respondents were over the age of 40 years, a majority of 60% had graduated elementary or junior high school. Thirty-six percent had finished at least high school, with 4% completing college or university. According to the 2006 Hokkaido Utari Survey on Living Conditions, 93.5% go on to attend senior high school (the average in municipalities where Ainu live).

A certain amount of improvement can be seen in overall education advancement rates of the Ainu since the gradual implementation of incentives funded by the Hokkaido government from 1965 to 1974 for Ainu children to further their studies, as well as subsidies and allowances from the Ministry of Education from 1975 for Ainu children attending senior high school.

Chart 2-1 Your level of education

Level of Education Completed		Number of respondents	%
Compulsory education	Elementary school	25	10
	Junior high school	118	50
Senior high school		61	26
Technical High school		1	0

Professional training college	15	6
College	7	3
Public university	0	0
Private university	3	1
Graduate school	1	0
Never been to school	1	0
No answer	9	4
Total	241	100

From what we are told by the women, however, even if they answered that they had graduated high school, for example, there are cases where they did not actually attend school. At a meeting to analyze the survey data, a woman over the age of 50 told us: “Back then, even if you didn’t go to school, you could get a graduation certificate because education was compulsory. The Ainu women born around 1945 living in my village helped their families, so they did anything - helping with the horse carriage, construction or fishing. Work was not hard because it was just the natural order of things. I don’t remember getting a school graduation certificate.”

Another woman shared, “I had to weave *Atsushi* (traditional Ainu clothing woven from the bark of elm trees) every single day. I really hated it, but if I had known that things would change [that Ainu culture would be reexamined], I would have studied more about Ainu culture.” She had regrets, having spent much of her time back then helping out in the house rather than going to school.

Another woman said that she worked day-labor jobs and attending school was not really something to consider.

One woman spoke about the harshness of discrimination against Ainu in school: “It wasn’t just the children. Teachers also discriminated against us. If we did better at school than the Shamo<sup>1</sup> children, they would ask us in front of the entire class whether we had really done it on our own. If we knew the answer, they would pretend we didn’t.”

Poverty was another reason given for being unable to go to school. The fact that there was not enough money to buy clothes, shoes or school supplies, or bring a lunch box, led to discrimination against the children. The survey revealed this comment: “I couldn’t move up in school, so when I started working after the divorce and had to use a computer,<sup>2</sup> I couldn’t read the roman characters on the keyboard. I was scolded by my boss for not even being able to do that. I study on my own now and attend computer classes.” Another woman wrote, “As a single mother, I feel there is a limit to the education I can provide my children.”

<sup>1</sup> The Japanese race in the Ainu Language.

<sup>2</sup> Roman characters are used when Japanese is typed from a computer keyboard.

There are some women who re-encounter the reality of their lack of education at work after experiencing changes in their families, such as divorce. We need a survey that looks comprehensively into the linkages between Ainu women and the home, education, and employment. There were also many comments made that raised the importance of Ainu women learning more about their own culture and history, and not just education in general. It was pointed out that they do not understand or study enough about these topics: “People sometimes make fun of the Ainu, but I myself don’t understand anything about them. I did not know anything about the language or customs. I want to start learning more.” “I think that although we have Ainu ancestry, we (myself included) haven’t learned about our history and culture.”

These comments show that in their lack of knowledge about Ainu culture and history, Ainu women are realizing the importance of education about Ainu culture: “I think there should be comprehensive education about ethnic cultures. More efforts should be made in educating women.” “I hope that more efforts can be made in education and learning about other cultures, so that we can understand and become aware of the wonders of Ainu culture.” “I hope to learn more about my people and become involved in their activities in the future.”

## 2. Literacy

Chart 2-2 How well can you read newspapers?

	Number of respondents	%
I have no trouble reading	175	72
I can read some Kanji	45	19
I can only read Hiragana and Katakana	14	6
I can’t read at all	4	2
No answer	2	1
Total	241	100

Seventy-two percent of respondents had no trouble with reading and 67% had no trouble with writing. However, one-third answered “I can read some Kanji,” “I can only read Hiragana and Katakana” or “I can’t read at all,” indicating that there is difficulty in reading to some extent.<sup>3</sup> We do not know whether these numbers are higher or lower than the rest of society because there is no national survey about literacy rates.

Chart 2-3 How well can you write?

	Number of respondents	%
I have no trouble writing	158	67
I can write some Kanji	56	23

<sup>3</sup> The Japanese writing system consists of three different types of characters, being Kanji (Chinese characters), Hiragana (Japanese characters) and Katakana (characters adapted from Kanji). Kanji is far more difficult in writing and reading than the others.

I can only write Hiragana and Katakana	22	9
I can't write at all	3	1
No answer	1	0
Multiple answers	1	0
Total	241	100

It seems that some respondents answered that they had no trouble reading or writing despite being borderline cases, or that they selected certain answers despite being unsure of the meaning of the question. This assumption is based on the fact that it is very common to come across women unable to read or write in conducting paperwork in general. Also, although not many answered that they are unable to read at all, this should be commensurate with academic history. These numbers are closely related to Ainu women's circumstances in employment, finances and marriage.

### 3. Work

#### 1. Availability of Work

Chart 3-1 Are you currently working?

	Number of respondents	%
Employed	137	56
Unemployed	88	37
No answer	16	7
Total	241	100

Over half of the respondents (56%) answered that they were currently employed.

#### 2. Position

Chart 3-2 Work position

	Number of respondents	%
Self-employed (incl. farming)	24	10
Family business	13	5
Company manager/executive	2	1
Full-time/company employee	15	6
Contracted or temporary employee	10	4

Part-timer	60	26
Homemaker	8	3
Other	15	6
No answer	88	38
Multiple answers	3	1
Total	238	100

Regarding the type of employment the women are engaged in, part-time employees came to 26%, self-employed (including farming) 10%, family businesses, contracted or temporary employees<sup>4</sup> or homemakers 12% and full-time employees 6%.

The fact that almost one-third of Ainu women are employed as part-time workers reflects the instability of their employment. Almost 40% did not select an answer, perhaps because they were unwilling to or because nothing described their particular situation.

### 3. Field of Work

At 12%, the largest number of women is employed as service providers, followed by line workers and salespersons at 8% each. Over half of the respondents did not answer this question, perhaps because there was nothing that described their particular situation. Some may not have understood the question. Four percent said that they were engaged in specialist work, which can be thought to be the response of those engaged in traditional Ainu woodcraft and embroidery, which do not fall under any of the other categories.

### 4. Work hours

Because many of the respondents were part-time workers, 24% said that their average work hours per week were less than ten.

### 5. Income

Chart 3-3 What is your approximate income per year (including taxes)?

	Number of respondents	%
Under half a million yen	49	20
Half a million to 1 million yen	67	29
1 to 1.3 million yen	31	13
1.3 to 2 million yen	20	8
2 to 3 million yen	8	3
3 to 5 million yen	3	1
5 to 7 million yen	0	0
7 to 10 million yen	0	0

<sup>4</sup> Registered workers at temporary staffing agencies who work at places they are dispatched to.

Over 10 million yen	0	0
No answer	63	26
Total	241	100

About 60% earn less than 1.3 million yen per year. Twenty percent earn less than half a million yen.

Chart 3-4 What is your annual household income (including your spouse/partner/co-inhabitant)?

	Number of respondents	%
Under 1 million yen	22	9
1 to 3 million yen	78	32
3 to 5 million yen	37	15
5 to 7 million yen	13	5
7 to 10 million yen	11	5
Over 10 million yen	4	2
No answer	76	32
Total	241	100

About 40% of the respondents answered that their annual income was less than three million yen, followed by 15% answering three to five million. These numbers show the financial hardship faced by the women. A third of the respondents did not answer the question, showing that it was a difficult question to answer.

According to the 2006 Hokkaido Utari Survey on Living Conditions, 52.5% of Ainu earn less than 3.49 million yen.

#### 6. Job satisfaction

Twenty-three percent were satisfied with their work and 19% were somewhat satisfied. For Ainu women who have sparse academic or other qualifications, this is all they can do, so we can guess that it is just something they have resigned themselves to. We often hear the women say that if the opportunity presented itself, they would like to study again or become qualified in something that would lead to work opportunities. The same thing can be said about changing jobs.

There is doubt as to whether it was really appropriate to ask women who are engaged in day labor and helping in farming, fishing and forestry work how many times they have changed jobs.

#### 7. Discrimination in employment

At 11%, the number of respondents who answered that they had experienced discrimination seems quite low, and we believe that it is higher in reality. In the 2006 Hokkaido Utari Survey on Living Conditions, in response to the question "Have you ever suffered discrimination, from as far back as you

can remember until the present,” 16.8% answered positively and 13.87% answered “I know someone who has.” The discrepancy may be because in our survey, we asked a specific work-related question - “Have you been discriminated against in employment” - and not “Have you been discriminated against as an Ainu?” Perhaps there is not much discrimination in the case of part-time work within the community, but there has to be more discrimination in the case of finding full-time employment, for example. There are also many women around us who run catering businesses because they cannot find any other work. Perhaps those who answered “I don’t know” or left this question blank had circumstances that could not be accurately described.

#### 4 . Discrimination against Ainu and against Women

Chart 4-1 In what situation do you feel there is discrimination in Japanese society against the Ainu?

	Number of respondents	%
A friend or acquaintance’s plain expression of prejudice	19	8
Social disadvantages	12	5
Obstacles in marriage	16	7
Difficulties in employment	1	0
Discrimination in housing	2	1
An environment making it difficult to share that one is an Ainu	62	26
No answer	76	31
Multiple answers	53	22
Total	241	100

Many answered that they had never suffered or felt discrimination. One woman wrote, “I have never been discriminated against for being Ainu or a woman, so I was surprised to get the feeling from this survey that the women are very defensive. I think women today are stronger. But it makes me angry to think that discrimination still exists today, even if it is not much.” Another woman wrote: “I have felt discrimination since starting at my current workplace. I had never really experienced discrimination in employment, personal relationships or marriage until now. (Although in elementary school, I was taunted, ‘She’s so hairy! She’s an Ainu, just like a monkey!’.... I remember being hurt as a child, but I didn’t tell my mother about it. I guess I just didn’t want to make a fuss.)”

Many respondents wrote that they had never experienced discrimination, but can we really accept this response at face value? One Ainu woman involved in the movement said this about feeling numb to the discrimination: “The Ainu of Hokkaido have been discriminated against for a long time. It’s tougher in Hokkaido - people don’t really know about the Ainu outside this island. The discrimination is continuously taken to be the natural course of things for us from a very young age. And the same goes for the perpetrators of discrimination. Somewhere, a part of everyone believes that discrimination against Ainu is just part of life. So when we did the survey, I truly felt that all the women were thinking that there really wasn’t anything that could be done about it, even if they show disdain at the discrimination at the time it happens.

Another Ainu woman spoke of her experience in this way: “I have come to live feeling that it is neither good nor bad to have been born an Ainu.... I think that I was discriminated against, but when I was young, I was raised not to feel it as such. That’s what I think now, when I look back and wonder if I had been numb to it. I am grateful to have been raised well, and I didn’t feel discrimination at the time. A lot changed after I left home to get married. I didn’t feel the discrimination when I was living under my parents’ roof, but something happened when I began to experience the world beyond. I had never realized what was happening before, but then I came to see how people viewed me and that what I had experienced was discrimination. Then, the person I had married also hurled a comment at me that was discriminatory against Ainu, and that was what was really painful. It was a big shock to be spoken to in that way by the person who was supposed to understand me the most, and that became the reason we split up. Now that I think about it, that period was rock bottom for me.... I haven’t even told my parents about this. I’ve never mentioned it to anyone. I didn’t want to make them sad.”

The meaning of “discrimination” and how it is suffered depend on the person who experiences it. Some may have given up the fight, thinking that there is nothing that can be done about it, or may not want to remember those experiences. The Ainu women who took part in this survey, however, say this of the importance of realizing and standing up to racism and discrimination: “When I first attended a meeting about minority women and learnt about multiple discrimination, I had no idea what was going on. I didn’t know what multiple discrimination was, but X has taught me many things, and through thinking about everything in this process, I have come to see that it is not okay to be in an environment where discrimination is just accepted as natural. We have to stand up against this.”

There was one woman who didn’t understand the issue of discrimination against women: “I didn’t know anything. I thought that discrimination in Japan was discrimination against the Ainu. I’ve become aware of all the issues of discrimination against women and want to keep learning more in the future.”

Other Ainu women said this of the sufferings of their ancestors: “I cannot imagine the discrimination suffered by Ainu women before us. When I imagined those times of hard labor, sometimes inhumane treatment, and being treated like objects for sexual gratification, I cried so much that I could barely read the book I was holding.” “Considering the cruel treatment of Ainu women in the past and the reality that there are women who continue to suffer today, I want to think through the issues and work towards a better future as an Ainu.”

It is impossible to distinguish between the discrimination suffered by Ainu women because they are Ainu and that suffered because they are women: sometimes, the discrimination is multi-layered, and other times, compound. In the past, some people in the women’s movement have misinterpreted this to mean that women in minority groups are sensitive to discrimination against women. It is possible that many do not fully understand the multiple forms of discrimination suffered by minority women. Isn’t it difficult to separate the discrimination they suffer as women from all the discrimination that they experience as minority women? We hope that in the future, the women can create a survey that will deepen understanding of the realities of multiple discrimination.

## **5 . Social Welfare and Health**

### **1. Public pension**

About 84% of respondents were enrolled in some type of pension scheme, but what is alarming is that 16% were not. This may be due to unemployment or the inability to make the expensive payments, even for those who are working. We are concerned that there will be a large number of people in the future who are pensionless.

We also received the following comments: “What is going on with the welfare system? [It does not work. It does not give us enough support despite the fact that] both my child and I are disabled.” “It would be great to live in a place where I can feel secure when I am older. As the descendants of the Ainu of Sakhalin<sup>5</sup>, the Japanese government gave us peatlands where rice cannot grow. In the spring, the land was thawed ice and the fields were like a river or bog. It was such a pathetic state that people from the community would flee from it in the middle of the night. My parents lived there, and so my family did for a while, while the children were growing up. We had no way to feed ourselves and had to go into town to work. We could not send our children to school. We now depend on public assistance.”

## 2. Public assistance

Chart 5-1 Public assistance

	Number of respondents	%
Currently receiving	29	12
Have received in the past	21	9
Have never received	158	65
No answer	33	14
Total	241	100

We learnt from the survey that about 20% of the women were receiving public assistance or had received it in the past.

According to the 2006 Hokkaido Utari Survey on Living Conditions, 38.3 per mill (equivalent to 3.83%) lived on public assistance (out of 1000 Ainu living in municipalities). Our survey methodology was different, so it is difficult to compare results, but the number of Ainu women depending on public assistance is clearly more. When we met to analyze the survey results, we also discussed the fact that this survey was carried out using a system for research about various aspects of Ainu society, including the traditional Ainu lifestyle, as funded by the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture. As a part of the project expenditure, survey respondents were given small gratuities. We heard that because a gratuity was offered, some districts did not allow women receiving public assistance to take part in the survey.

Despite 16% of respondents being pensionless and 12% receiving public assistance, there were not many comments made regarding social welfare. We thus cannot tell what Ainu women are experiencing in this regard. It is possible that they lack knowledge about the system, and a more detailed survey is needed in the future.

<sup>5</sup> Sakhalin: An island located north of Hokkaido. It is now a part of Russia, but was a Japanese territory until World War II.

Almost half of the respondents were enrolled in the National Pension Plan,<sup>6</sup> followed by 23% in the Employee's Pension Plan. Around 15% were not enrolled in either.

### 3. Health

Chart 5-3 Do you suffer from any chronic diseases?

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	75	31
No	147	61
Don't know	0	0
No answers	19	8
Total	241	100

Thirty-one percent answered positively, of which 14% said that they were not visiting the hospital for appropriate medical care. Regarding why, 20% raised financial reasons and, though few, some said that it was because they were not enrolled in a health insurance scheme.

Chart 5-4 Do you go to the hospital when you need medical attention?

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	188	78
No	33	14
No answers	20	8
Total	241	100

When asked whether they had a health insurance card, 10% answered in the negative.

We can see from this that education affects Ainu women's employment, thereby affecting their income, and that this affects their education and health condition.

## 6. Violence

### 1. Experience of domestic violence

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<sup>6</sup> The National Pension Plan and the Employee's Pension Plan are two types of public pensions. Basically, the Employee's Pension Plan is for those who work for private companies, while the National Pension Plan is for those who do not.

Seventeen percent of respondents said that they had been hit, kicked or beaten several times, and 20% admitted to once or twice. A total of 37% of the Ainu women who responded said that they had suffered some sort of spousal violence. We are unable to tell from our survey methodology whether this number is statistically high or low. We did, however, confirm that there definitely are women who are suffering from such violence.

Chart 6-1 Have you experienced violence from your spouse or significant other?

	I have been hit, kicked or beaten		I have had things thrown at me		I have had things valuable to me destroyed or thrown away		I have been called "fool," useless" and told I should die	
	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	%
Many times	40	17	20	8	8	3	24	10
Once or twice	48	20	27	11	18	7	26	11
Never	133	55	105	44	137	58	119	49
No answer	20	8	89	37	78	32	72	30
Total	241	100	241	100	241	100	241	100
	Almost 40% answered "many times" or "once or twice"		About 20% answered "many times" or "once or twice"		10% answered "many times" or "once or twice"		About 20% have experienced verbal abuse from their spouse	

	I have been denied living expense allowance		My relations with family or friends are restricted or prohibited and my phone calls and mail are checked		I have been forced to have sex against my will	
	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	%
Many times	19	8	25	17	48	20
Once or twice	10	4	19	20	33	14
Never	154	64	150	55	113	46
No answer	58	24	47	8	47	20
Total	241	100	241	100	241	100
	Over 10% said that they had been denied living expense allowance		Almost 40% had experienced such restrictions, bans and checks		Over 30% answered "many times" or "once or twice"	

2. Seeking help

Among those that confided in or consulted others regarding the violence they had suffered, 14% said they had approached doctors, rather than family or friends, perhaps because of the after effects of the physical or verbal abuse. In some cases, the spouse had verbally abused the woman by insulting all Ainu women, and that led to being hurt and feelings of self-contempt, as well as the loss of pride as a human being. This made us think about how much better it would be to have a shelter for women who suffer this violence, where they can feel safe and have people to consult for advice.

Sixty-four percent left this question blank, despite there being the choice “I did not consult anyone/anywhere.” We cannot be sure what this number represents, but it is important to consider the reasons for the respondents not answering this question.

Chart 6-2 Have you consulted anyone regarding the violence you have suffered from your spouse?

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	48	23
No	70	33
No answers	93	44
Total	211	100

Over 20% said that they had approached someone for advice and over 30% said that they did not consult anyone at all.

Chart 6-3 For those who answered “Yes” above, who did you consult?

	Number of respondents	%
Police	0	0
Regional and District Legal Affairs Bureaus, Civil Liberties Commissioner	2	1.2
Consultation offices/consultant for women	0	0
General facilities for women (e.g. women’s centers, gender equality centers)	0	0
Offices of the administrative divisions of Japan	0	0
City hall/municipal office	1	1
Court	0	0
Private organizations (e.g. Bar Association, private shelter)	0	0
Doctor	21	14
Family/Relative	13	9
Friend/Acquaintance	2	1
Other	0	0
I didn’t consult anyone	3	2
No answer	97	64
Multiple answers	13	9

Total	150	100
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### 3. Knowledge of the law

Asked whether they were aware that there are laws preventing spousal violence and protecting the victim, 64% answered positively, but we did not inquire as to whether they understood the content of such laws.

## 7. Ainu culture and ethnic identity

### 1. Ainu culture

Chart 7-1 Do you think it is necessary to preserve and transmit Ainu culture?

	Number of respondents	%
Yes	206	85
No	2	1
Don't know	22	9
No answers	11	5
Total	241	100

Many Ainu women commented on the aspect of culture, regarding pride in and protection of their culture, as well as sharing it with others: “Because we are Ainu, we should own our culture, to maintain our pride as Ainu women.” “The Ainu culture is magnificent, and one that is second to none. We have an amazing culture. I want to help make Ainu more proud of themselves.” “We have to work together to learn the history of our ancestors properly and be proud of our wonderful people.”

Further, the women stressed the importance of preserving their culture: “The Ainu in me is stirred particularly when I see Ainu dances or hear our music, when I feel the rhythm and follow the song. We have to preserve our history and culture.” “I think it would be great for women who have warm but faint recollections of their grandparents to gather even just once every few years to sing and share stories.” “We should teach young Ainu about their history and culture!” “I can feel Ainu culture and history in my bones and listen to stories from those around me and study from books, but there is still a lot I have to learn.”

While there is hope of preserving and transmitting the Ainu culture on one hand, it is also pointed out that this is difficult in practice: “There is a limit to how much time you can devote to studying and passing down the Ainu culture to preserve it. In reality, it is impossible to do in everyday life.” The women also mentioned their hope that non-Ainu people learn about Ainu culture. “I hope that the Ainu become a leader among indigenous peoples around the world. This is Sapporo, one of Japan’s most modern cities, and we in this city should be promoting the Ainu of Ainu Mosir<sup>7</sup> more widely!”

<sup>7</sup> “Ainu Mosir” means “quiet earth where humans dwell” in the Ainu language and usually indicates Hokkaido prefecture, which Ainu people have traditionally inhabited. Sapporo is the largest city in Hokkaido.

The understanding of culture and history, which is deeply linked to the establishment of Ainu women’s identity, thus plays a valuable role in their affirmation of self as Ainu. 2. Identity as Ainu

Chart 7-2 Of all the things that oppress Ainu women, what most affects you?

	Number of respondents	%
Discrimination against Ainu in Japan	80	33
Discrimination against women in Japan	25	10
Discrimination against women in Ainu society	19	8
Other	15	6
No answer	93	39
Multiple answers	9	4
Total	241	100

There were several comments made regarding Ainu women’s identity, about it being ambiguous: though proud of the Ainu people, the women were also ashamed by it and wanted to reject it.

Women negative about being Ainu said: “It is tough to be an Ainu, even today.” “I probably think I am Ainu in some way, but that’s about it.... If asked, I reply that I am Ainu. I have so much to deal with everyday that I can’t give the issue much thought.” “When I was a child, I was hurt when my friends called me an Ainu. Even now, I can’t explain to my children properly that they have Ainu blood. I told my eldest in a casual way, but my younger child still doesn’t know. I think it’s because I feel ashamed somehow.”

The reality is that assimilation policies have worked so well, including on a cultural level, so that many Ainu women are unable to become conscious of their identity as Ainu. One woman whose workplace deals with Ainu culture admits her unease over identity: “I could never have imagined that I would be doing this kind of work. To be honest, I really didn’t want to be tainted by being Ainu. I wanted to avoid it.” In this way, the women take pride in their identity as Ainu women, but are negative about it at the same time. We need to examine from different perspectives why Ainu women think negatively about being Ainu, because this problem is not theirs alone to deal with, but a problem for Japanese society as a whole.

\*This article will be published in the IMADR publication Peoples for Human Rights Volume 12 “Minority Women Rise Up: A collaborative survey on Ainu, Buraku, and Korean women in Japan.”

\*\*Translated by Malaya Iletto