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## Voice of Youth

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### \* Panelists

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Factory, Honda Motor Co., Ltd.

Ms. Megumi OMURA      Shinomiya Bamboo Craft Shop

Ms. Moto SESHITA      PR Section, President's Office,  
Watami Food Service Co., Ltd.

Mr. Ken TAKANARITA      Secretary General, East Kanto Headquarters,  
Japanese Workers' Co-Operative Union

### \* Moderator

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## Present condition of Japanese Youth

### **Moderator Genda:**

During the Symposium on Globalization and the Future of Youth in Asia, sessions on various subjects have taken place. In this session, in a little more than one hour, we will hear firsthand from the voice of youth.

At present, the youth of Japan seem to find considerable difficulties in their lives. They are distressed about living. According to various international comparisons, a greater proportion of Japan's youth has no hope for the future or cannot anticipate a future compared with their counterparts in other countries. In fact, various indications of this tendency can be seen. To be sure, the Japanese economy has gradually been recovering, but the unemployment rate for teens and those in their twenties remains high. Furthermore, the number of non-regular workers, known as "Freeters," or job-hopping part-time workers, has grown, though they are not included in the unemployed. Indeed, it is rather hard for young people to get steady jobs. Moreover, since 1998, juvenile crime and other difficult problems have been mounting in Japan. Nowadays, there are young people who are neither unemployed nor are Freeters, and who have lost hope of working. They are called "Neets," an acronym for "not in education, employment, or training." Accordingly, a growing number of young people find it difficult to work and live in this country.

What should we do about that? I think this is not a problem for Japan alone because other Asian countries will face similar challenges in the future. However, it should also be noted that

not all young people are facing such hard conditions and, even in difficulties, there are young people who are carving out their careers for themselves through trial and error. Today, we have four young workers.

## Introduction of Panelists

### **Moderator Genda:**

Ms. Hiromi Hayashi, who was introduced earlier, is working at a manufacturing workshop. Amid intensifying globalization, how will Japanese manufacturers be changing? Aren't there a number of difficulties? Despite such apprehensions, she will talk very happily later – you can expect a promising future for her. Ms. Emi Omura lives in the world of craftworkers. After finishing school, she joined the ranks of craftworkers to work under a master, hewing out her future. In our increasingly globalized world, many may have pessimistic views about the future of craftworkers. But what will she say about such views? Ms. Moto Seshita works for a service-sector company. The company operates nationwide over 400 franchise izakaya, or establishments combining a bar and a restaurant. Most young employees working at its franchises are not regular employees but part-time workers. Many consider that jobs for part-timers are easy, monotonous ones. Is that true? Also, in that industry, there are many people who wish to be assigned to various franchises and become restaurant managers to manage such establishments. What are those workers other than regular employees thinking now? What can we do to assist them? Mr. Ken Takanarita is involved in the activities of a workers' co-operative union, a nonprofit organization. The number of NPOs has grown rapidly in Japan. However, those who are involved in NPO activities are very limited in developed countries. But their activities are now attracting young people's attention as a new way of working. I personally have met many young people who wish to do something not for themselves but for society and undertake worthwhile activities. Indeed, such young people are on the rise. Supporting elderly or handicapped persons, they wish to do something for their own future and for society. Young men and women who have such a mind visit Mr. Takanarita's office. What do they think and how does Mr. Takanarita feel? I would like to ask about that later. Before that, let me show you a video, which will give a brief introduction to them. After the video presentation, we will hear their voices firsthand.

#### Video

A video was played, which showed the four persons in their workplaces. It also showed interviews with them and their supervisors regarding issues such as their attitude towards work.

## The situation of working

**Moderator Genda:**

Thank you for watching that 15-minute video. What impression did you get of them? Was it the same or different from the image you have built up of the youth of Japan? I understand that many hold the view that young Japanese people are low in spirit, that you don't know what's on their mind, and that they are lethargic. But this short video shows that such impressions are not necessarily applicable to all young Japanese. Mr. Takanarita, could you give us your frank comments about the video, which showed the four of you in your workplaces?

**Mr. Takanarita:**

I was impressed by that Ms. Hayashi and Ms. Omura are so young, 20 or so. At that age, both Ms. Seshita and I were loafing around, weren't we? I was a student and had no idea what to do or what job I would get in the future. It's great that they have guts to determine careers to live on at their age. Have you never thought of quitting?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

No, I have hardly ever thought of quitting because I enjoy my current job very much.

**Moderator Genda:**

Isn't it tough at all?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

Shift-work is tough.

**Moderator Genda:**

What is tough about shift-work?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

It's tough to wake up early in the morning.

**Moderator Genda:**

What time do you wake up?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

We start working at 6:30 on the early morning shift, so I have to wake up at 4:30 to go to work. It's really hard.

**Moderator Genda:**

Do you find any difficulties in human relations?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

I have very good relations with my colleagues thanks to their kind consideration.

**Moderator Genda:**

Ms. Omura, what do you feel hard in your working life?

**Ms. Omura:**

I don't think things are so hard for me. I sometimes get injured, but I don't want to quit at all for that reason. Perhaps, I don't want to give up halfway anyway.

**Moderator Genda:**

Ms. Seshita, what is your impression of those in the video?

**Ms. Seshita:**

Although both of them are younger than me, I feel empathy for them as they are pursuing their own courses. They are working together with their senior colleagues and have found their own positions and pleasure in working. I've received a very good impression of them.

**Moderator Genda:**

Ms. Omura, have you found anything that is different from Ms. Hayashi?

**Ms. Omura:**

I think Ms. Hayashi and I are alike in that both of us are engaged in manufacturing. Ms. Seshita and Mr. Takanarita are in supervisory positions, teaching others, while I am in a subordinate position. So, I am not clear about their situation. Nevertheless, I feel that they are good targets for me, knowing that they are working with older persons.

**Moderator Genda:**

Mr. Takanarita, how about you?

**Mr. Takanarita:**

To be sure, in the manufacturing sector, workers themselves are involved in development or creation, and Ms. Seshita also may be involved in the creation of new restaurants. In my case, I feel pleasure in creating new public services and offering social welfare places that are meeting the demands of the times. Since our organization is nonprofit, it is not certain whether I will be able to continue to live on, but yet I am very satisfied with my current position as I can actually feel what I am doing, rather than being a little cog in a giant company machine.

**Moderator Genda:**

In that context, Ms. Hayashi works for a large company representative of Japan, doesn't she?

**Mr. Takanarita:**

Right. It seems that she is engaged in very simple work in a sense. It is really astonishing that a teen-age woman is doing such unspectacular work.

**Ms. Hayashi:**

Although my job may be simple, if I do not do it properly, that will cause trouble in the following processes. So, I always keep in mind that I am doing a simple but important duty.

**Moderator Genda**

By the way, what are simple jobs? Let us discuss this matter from a viewpoint of part-time workers in Watami. Watami has a manual for part-time employees, doesn't it?

**Ms. Seshita:**

Yes. We have our manual for simple jobs. But Watami has for its motto, "Throw away the manual."

**Moderator Genda**

What does that mean?

**Ms. Seshita:**

If an employee considers it good for customers, the employee is allowed to do anything for customers in the restaurant, even if it has not been described in the manual. All employees are encouraged to do anything that gives customers pleasure and satisfaction. This is our corporate culture.

**Moderator Genda:**

Think and judge for yourself, right?

**Ms. Seshita:**

In our company, both regular and part-time employees perform their duties by trial and error for themselves.

**Moderator Genda**

When you were the restaurant manager, what did you say to employees? Did you tell them to throw away the manual and think for themselves as you said?

**Ms. Seshita:**

I told them first to have consideration for customers. This is a spiritual aspect. Another aspect is a technical one, including the ways of making bows and greeting customers, and how to use trays. A good restaurant cannot be created without either of these aspects and their

well-balanced development is needed. Most part-time workers in Watami are in their teens, high-school students, or older. When a boy or girl works for the first time in his or her life, the youth may have little awareness of earning money or may hardly feel responsibility for what he or she is doing. Therefore, I wanted to teach them about the appropriate mental attitude towards work, in addition to work procedures. I believed that a restaurant could be improved noticeably by conveying to each employee ideas more than a mere exchange of time for money and that that would eventually benefit the young employee. I made efforts to manage the restaurant in such a way.

People of the circumference supporting youth

**Moderator Genda:**

Until recently, there had been a typical idea of work in Japan. That is, after finishing school, a youth would join a company as a regular employee and receives various types of training through jobs, known as on-the-job training. The worker would improve his or her skills and capabilities through various experiences. Thus, Japanese companies have attached great importance to person-to-person training, which led to seniority-based wage systems and long-term employment. These systems have helped develop the Japanese economy. However, the situation has changed now and various opinions have arisen. Here are some examples: those systems are outdated; amid intensifying globalization, we cannot afford to do time-consuming jobs like training personnel; workers need to make efforts to improve their capabilities by themselves; students need to master skills that can be used immediately after finishing school; new employees must contribute to the company right away. These ideas have been strongly expressed particularly after the bursting of the bubble economy. But after watching the video, I wonder to what extent a young person can do by his or her efforts alone. The first video and the video of Ms. Omura and others show that, to develop human resources, persons who take responsibility for education are needed, who are supposed to train young workers—sometimes in a strict manner and sometimes kindly. Thus, the company should attach more importance to nurturing employees; otherwise there will be no future for the Japanese economy. Ms. Omura said earlier that Mr. Shinomiya, her master, rarely scolds. Have you never been scolded or praised by him?

**Ms. Omura:**

No, I've never been scolded severely.

**Moderator Genda:**

Is there anything that was said by Mr. Shinomiya that has stuck in your memory?

**Ms. Omura:**

I have not been scolded. But when I was working, or more exactly, receiving training, Mr.

Shinomiya made some chance remarks. For instance, “you seem to have an aptitude for craftwork.” Such words made me very happy as I thought the great master has recognized me.

**Moderator Genda:**

What sort of a high-school student were you?

**Ms. Omura:**

There was nothing worth special mention. I am now involved in artistic work, but I neither took an art course nor did creative work.

**Moderator Genda:**

So, was your encounter with sensuji bamboo work fateful?

**Ms. Omura:**

That’s right. If I hadn’t come across this work, I may still be spending aimless days without knowing what to do.

**Moderator Genda:**

Ms. Hayashi, I think most of your colleagues are male workers. Would you talk about your experiences about either being scolded or praised?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

I once mistook the color setting. My duty is to set the middle-coat colors.

**Moderator Genda:**

Could you describe that more plainly so that everybody can understand? Is that painting work?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

Our painting process starts when we receive a steel car body from the welding shop. The body will go through the processes of under coat, middle coat, and finish coat, and is then inspected before going to the assembly line.

I handle the base coat in the middle coat process and my duty is to set the base coat colors. I once made mistake – I mistook to change color settings, though on a rare occasion. I was urged caution on such occasions. But we are told at our company that making a mistake is not bad and that we should just make efforts to avoid recurrence of similar mistakes.

**Moderator Genda:**

Ms. Hayashi works for Honda Motor, in which the philosophy established by its founder Soichiro Honda is still alive. I like the company. I’ve heard that, immediately after joining Honda, new employees are told that the greatest persons are those who make mistakes. They

are strongly encouraged not to fear to face challenges and make mistakes. However, at present, young Japanese people are not allowed to fail because, as I said earlier, they are supposed to contribute to the company right away and become a useful worker quickly. I suppose they feel distress if they are not allowed to fail. I talked about distress at the beginning of this session. That is perhaps related to this point. The youth of Japan are frequently told to find what they want to do and to determine their aims in their early days. But they won't be able to easily find what they want to do, in their teens or twenties in particular. Besides, they are told to behave properly. Japanese young people's inability to find what they want to do is by no means due to their dependence or laziness. I feel that it is absolutely necessary for our society to allow them to fail. This may be the process of nurturing as mentioned earlier. Mr. Takanarita, I think you meet many young people through your work in supporting elderly and handicapped persons. Would you express your feelings about today's youth?

**Mr. Takanarita:**

As introduced in the presentation by the officer from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in the morning, my organization is offering a program called the dual system, which combines training courses and actual work on site. I am now engaged in training young people up to the age of 30. I have the impression that young people are now greatly interested in the welfare area. As shown in the video, this may be common to everyone, young people are increasingly wishing to engage in work to which smiles and thanks are returned directly. But training for such work is not easy. It is impossible to do this type of job only by gaining nursing care skills. What we place greater emphasis on is the aspect of attitude and heart. I think it very important to let trainees consider how care receivers feel when providing nursing care and other services.

Communication

**Moderator Genda:**

Are there any points that are characteristic of the young people who visit your organization? Do you feel some apathy or powerlessness?

**Mr. Takanarita:**

It is certain that many of them are not good at communicating with other generations. If they are to engage in nursing-care work, they have to talk with the generation of their grandfathers and grandmothers, older even than their parents. It is hard to help them have smooth conversations with elderly persons.

**Moderator Genda:**

Are there any tips for that?

**Mr. Takanarita:**

What I know is not to be overeager to please or care for the elderly. Instead, you should do what you enjoy yourself and what you can laugh about together. Or they will not enjoy it, feeling they are being amused by such a youngster. So, I think it is absolutely essential to develop the skills to deal with the elderly in ways that you can enjoy yourself at all times.

**Moderator Genda:**

Ms. Hayashi, you said in the video that you became able to speak to anybody. Could you do that from the start?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

I did not speak at all in the tearoom at the beginning.

**Moderator Genda:**

What were the events that made you speak?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

The head of our team took good care of me and other people also began speaking to me. Then, I began chatting with them.

**Moderator Genda:**

Didn't you have any opportunities to talk with persons of different ages in your school days?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

No, I didn't.

**Moderator Genda:**

How do you feel now? Do you enjoy yourself? They may have different values and there may be gender gaps. Don't you talk with them on different wavelengths in many cases?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

Not really. Although they may be concerned about me, I can frankly speak to people about myself. In fact, I enjoy talking with them.

**Moderator Genda:**

Ms. Omura, I think you also work with other bamboo-ware craftworkers of different ages. Could you let us know your feelings about that and other similar matters?

**Ms. Omura:**

My boss and other masters of various kinds of craftwork, such as woodworking and

lacquer-work, are of course much older than I am. But they often speak to me, and they informally talk on matters that are instructive to me.

**Moderator Genda:**

Could you give us an example?

**Ms. Omura:**

I am not involved in woodwork, so knowledge about the hardness and grain of wood are outside my field. But such knowledge of different areas that is not immediately relevant to my specialty should be absorbed as it may be useful in bamboo work as well. Anyway, we are in the same industry, that is, craftworking. I noticed that only recently. Indeed, just listening to their talks is very helpful to me.

**Moderator Genda:**

Are you confident that you will continue to engage in the current profession until you reach the age of those masters?

**Ms. Omura:**

No, I am not absolutely confident.

**Moderator Genda:**

Frankly speaking, as I mentioned earlier, craftwork is not an easy job, right?

**Ms. Omura:**

Exactly. It's homely and unspectacular work.

**Moderator Genda:**

Do you feel anxiety about the future?

**Ms. Omura:**

Yes, I do. But I'll try to avoid being crushed by anxiety and work hard to carve out a future for myself as I think my job is rewarding to me at the same time.

Each target

**Moderator Genda:**

I understand. With various changes taking place in Japanese young people, Japanese youths are less positive than their counterparts in other developed countries and other Asian countries about being their own bosses, that is, the will to become leaders, or to establish companies or open shops. They are hesitant to do such risky things as they are fearful of failure. I've seen

such statistics. Conditions for company employees are severe, while the number of self-employed has been falling as less young people choose the course of “being my own boss.” Now, I would like pose a broader question. Ms. Seshita, I think you know a number of restaurant managers and other persons who have been assigned to manage restaurants. They may not be restaurant owners at present, but I hope an increasing number of persons will be able to own their restaurants or become entrepreneurs. A notable example may be president Watanabe of Watami Food Service, who has attracted much attention. What sort of conditions should be established in society to foster more young leaders in Japan?

**Ms. Seshita:**

Most Watami employees are young. The company itself is a young company as it has just marked its 20th anniversary this year. The employees working around me and my staff are young. Most of them have their specific objectives.

**Moderator Genda:**

Could you give us some examples?

**Ms. Seshita:**

Some wish to have their own restaurants before they turn 30, while some aim to have their own companies and run several establishments. Watami is also engaged in agriculture and runs a number of farms. There are some restaurant managers who wish to work on the farms in a few years. They have such dreams. If you have a specific objective, you become enthusiastic in your current job. Furthermore, the objective can be achieved only by filling a gap between the present you and the target. So, you can stick to the course even if you encounter difficulties. I think it necessary to work with a definite goal.

**Moderator Genda:**

What is your objective?

**Ms. Seshita:**

My objective is to have my own restaurant. I am now in a section unrelated to restaurant management. It is less than one year since I was assigned to this section and my current duties can be done by anyone else. So, at present, I am studying hard to become a person no one can replace in about five years.

**Moderator Genda:**

Mr. Takanarita, what is your objective?

**Mr. Takanarita:**

When I was a student, I was involved in volunteer work related to handicapped children. At

that time, I felt that there were few workplaces for handicapped persons. Generally speaking, under Japan's welfare programs in those days, handicapped persons, and elderly persons as well, were gathered deep in the mountains not to cause trouble. Officials of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare may get angry, but I had such an impression at that time. But this is not the case these days. The situation and welfare policies have changed. For example, ways to live together in harmony are being openly sought. I wish to formulate such programs by myself. In this connection, what is the matter of most concern is that if you are in the welfare sector, you are getting a narrow view. So, I think that it vital to use various tools as antennas to gather ample information.

**Moderator Genda:**

Have you figured out any particular ways to extend your antennas to gather information?

**Mr. Takanarita:**

The television provides a one-way flow of information and such information is in many cases not secure knowledge. So, to acquire necessary information, I read as many books, newspapers and other information in written form as possible. I make it a practice to do that due partly to my current position.

**Moderator Genda:**

I get the impression from their comments and the video that these four are by no means "aggressive" persons. I don't really feel their desperate eagerness to accomplish something by all means. I know many students at university and I understand that those who dash forward to achieve their wild dreams are rather uncommon among young people. Indeed, it may be hard to set targets these days, but I feel it is important for everybody to have a specific aim that cannot be attained easily but may be fulfilled if he or she makes efforts. However, it is hard to set such a target by oneself, so we should value relations with others of different ages and in different environments. These four persons have repeated that they greatly value human relations and that they have learned much from their relationships. Perhaps other Asia countries may already be facing similar problems or similar growing trends. It may be unnecessary for people to have specific aims for themselves when the economy is in growth. People wish to live in better houses and have nicer cars, maybe even high-end Honda vehicles! However, when the economy reaches maturity to a certain extent, it becomes hard to have targets for both society and individuals. At this stage, how can young individuals find their objectives? How should society get involved in their efforts? In my view, the distress that young Japanese feel now is due to excessive emphasis on ideas such as they should determine everything through their individual efforts and they should carve out their future for themselves. My view is that we should increase awareness of the importance of nurturing youth and look at how the older generation associates with young people. What Mr. Takanarita is doing is, I think, a significant attempt to form a broad network in society. By the way, we

have only a very short time today. I wonder if these young representatives could give us some brief comments. Ms. Hayashi, you told us earlier that you feel only pleasure in your work and have no dissatisfaction. Do you have anything in mind as your goal in the future?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

My goal in the future? I have just joined the company, so I have little knowledge of the company.

**Moderator Genda:**

Don't you know why you are at the company?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

Well. I wish to become a person everybody can rely on, a person who can do anything.

**Moderator Genda:**

For that purpose, what should you do?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

First, I have to tackle my immediate tasks. I want to be able to perform my current duty perfectly and then acquire the skills for other processes.

**Moderator Genda:**

What are you lacking in order to attain that?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

I need to learn different things.

**Moderator Genda**

Different things?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

It's about different processes.

**Moderator Genda:**

To learn the next process, in addition to your current work, right? By learning about different processes, what do you think will change?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

I think learning will broaden my views.

**Moderator Genda:**

You have a very specific idea. Thank you very much. Ms. Omura, what is your target for the future?

**Ms. Omura:**

It takes time to become a qualified craftworker. The necessary skills cannot be acquired so easily. So, I have to keep learning to master them. Anyway, it is very important that one continues. Furthermore, as shown in the video, we need to think about selling products in shops, as until recently it had been thought enough for craftworkers just to make the products.

**Moderator Genda:**

Are you good at that sort of work?

**Ms. Omura:**

No, I am not. I am really terrible at appearing in front of people.

**Moderator Genda:**

So, you have a hard day today, don't you! To tackle such a new challenge, how should you transform yourself? What do you have to change?

**Ms. Omura:**

What I am thinking of now is ways of communication with others. I feel a lack of ability to sell myself and products.

**Moderator Genda:**

To acquire that ability, what should you do?

**Ms. Omura:**

I have to do it in practice; for example by going to an exhibition to sell our products. Knowledge alone will not suffice. I need to accumulate practical experience. By making products and selling them on the spot, I will get the knack.

**Moderator Genda:**

So, you need to repeat more failures?

**Ms. Omura:**

I think so.

**Moderator Genda:**

Thank you very much. Ms. Seshita, what is your target? You touched on that earlier, but could

you give us any specific idea?

**Ms. Seshita:**

Ms. Hayashi and Ms. Omura's words have reminded me that it is very important to immerse yourself in a single matter. From my experience, company life is not all roses, and I sometimes want to quit. When I was a restaurant manager, I got into a real mess due to confusion between company policy, what my supervisor said, and what I wanted to do. At that time, although I did not know what to do, if I devoted myself to making a better restaurant, the way to a solution opened naturally. I strongly felt that. So, their talks recalled that memory and I think it is very important for young people to immerse themselves in something.

**Moderator Genda:**

How about you? Do you immerse yourself in something at present?

**Ms. Seshita:**

I am now thoroughly immersed in my current duties!

**Moderator Genda:**

How about you, Mr. Takanarita?

**Mr. Takanarita:**

I am the only person who has reached thirty among these members and I have two children. While protecting and organizing my personal life, I want to continue my work. I hope to pursue such a way of working. People tend to think that it may be hard to live on the work at a cooperative or another NPO. In fact, it's not easy to live on and my spouse and I are both working. Our way of working is generally considered tough. It is said that it will cost about 20 million yen in Japan to give a child education up to a university. When I heard this, the question arises, "How does one earn 20 million yen?" In fact, after having such talks with my colleagues, someone said, "Why don't you use my child's hand-me-downs?" Since then, I seldom bought clothes for my children until they reached two years old. Thus, we can lead an economical life. So, I hope young people will not be easily influenced by this kind of information but take a step forward to find their own ways of working and building their own lives.

Conclusion

**Moderator Genda:**

Thank you very much. After hearing the opinions from these young people, I feel afresh that the youth of Japan are by no means so bad. As I said at the beginning, it is often said that Japanese youths are low in spirits, that they do not study hard, and that they are apathetic. However, that is only a general impression. It is certain that that sort of people exist. But even

if they have no specific goals at present, they may not necessarily be satisfied with that state. Unable to find what to do, many young people are having a hard time finding the way to determine what they want to do. Every member of this session answered my sudden questions what they should do or what they lack in a specific manner and in their own words. We had no scenario today. I did not tell them beforehand what I would ask. I think youth problems should be left to youths to a greater extent. Various problems for young people should be dealt with by those in the same generation as they can think about such problems from a comparable standpoint. Up to now, it seems that the problems of youth have been dealt with in many cases by adults from their adult point of view. Of course it is true that appropriate advice from adults is sometimes needed. But, at the same time, we should allow young people to make more failures and have various experiences. By doing so, the circumstances will change. I have strongly felt this today.

Questions and answers with the hall

**Moderator Genda:**

Are there any questions?

**Audience Question 1:**

I have been studying youth employment problems recently. I have been so impressed by all of the young people here that I want them to come and talk at my university. They are completely different from the typical impression of today's youths, who often lack eagerness or have no aim in work, as Moderator Genda mentioned earlier. I want to hear views from the young women in particular. In our working life, no significant change takes place for men after they marry and have children. But for women, even if they wish to do a certain job, I know many young women who had to give up their careers due to marriage or child rearing. So, I would like to hear their views regarding relations between their working life and future and their private life, whether they wish and will be able to continue their careers after marriage and having children.

**Moderator Genda:**

Do you have any opinion on this matter, Ms. Seshita?

**Ms. Seshita:**

I have not thought about this before. But I have begun considering marriage and having a baby as a very immediate problem recently. I am not married yet, but I feel a concern about it. If I have a baby, it is absolutely necessary to be absent from work. Someone comes after me during my absence and, when I return to work, I may lose my position. On the other hand, if I do not marry or have children, I am uncertain whether I will be able to be independent and live all alone. Indeed, I have reached an age where I am thinking about my future. However, I am now

considering that if I find one particular work and if I become a professional in that area, I do not mind whether or not I am in the company. I am currently working for Watami, but I may quit the company when I marry or have a child and, when I've got over the busiest part of bringing my child up, I may find another job, taking advantage of my professional skills. I've just started thinking in such a way. If I am asked whether I will continue working in Watami, I may face some difficulties. But if I do not stick to the company, or if I am not particular about the company and if I can do what I want to do, I am confident that I will be able to continue working in the future.

**Moderator Genda:**

Ms. Hayashi and Ms. Omura, is it too early for both of you to think about marriage?

**Ms. Omura:**

I haven't thought about marriage yet.

**Moderator Genda:**

You are working in a workshop. So, you don't have to worry about what is called service overtime, or overtime work without pay?

**Ms. Omura:**

That's right.

**Moderator Genda:**

Isn't it easier for you as a craftworker to cope with both your work and marriage and having a baby?

**Ms. Omura:**

Exactly. My job, bamboo craftwork, is like domestic piecework. So, even if you leave the job due to marriage and having a baby, when the child gets to an age that needs less care, you can resume work. Thus, I think I will have no great difficulty in this regard.

**Moderator Genda:**

To cope with both your work and family life, the sympathetic understanding of those around you and the community is needed and it should not be related to the nature of the work. However, in Japan, there is a deep-rooted three-year-old myth, or a socially accepted idea that a child must be raised by his or her mother until he or she reaches three years of age. In reality, the idea has no scientific basis. To bring up children in a healthy way, we need to create an environment in which children are raised by everybody – the family, the community, and society; otherwise we will not be able to work out good solutions to the problems of women's work and family life and the falling birthrate.

**Audience Question 2:**

Could you tell me if your parents were involved in the process of your career choices?

**Ms. Hayashi:**

My parents respected my choice and had no opposition.

**Ms. Omura:**

My parents did not tell me what occupation I should take up. They helped me when I was striving to attain the goals I set myself.

**Ms. Seshita:**

I was told by my parents to do what I wanted. My father was a hard worker and his attitude toward work might have fostered a spirit of independence in me.

**Mr. Takanarita:**

My father was a newspaper journalist and he was engaged in a study of the future course of the regional economy. Although I am not in the media sector, I am working on similar subjects in the field of welfare. He never objected to my career.

**Moderator Genda:**

Thank you all very much indeed. It's time to close this session.