

〈研究ノート〉

Strategic Alliance*

A preliminary survey of feminist group cooperation in the Kansai region¹

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During the spring, 1999 campaign for reelection of Osaka's popular governor, Yokoyama "Knock"², one of the young female university students who was working for his election organization, claimed that the incumbent governor had fondled her as they were riding together in a campaign vehicle. When the young woman filed a complaint, the governor denied the accusation, and questioned the character and intentions of the young woman.

Unlike many sexual harassment cases in Japan, in which claims are denied, covered up, or ignored, this case took a different path, primarily because of the spontaneous creation of a support group for the complainant. This support group, known informally as "Onnatachi no Kai" (The Women's Group), was made up of various women's advocacy activists and members of gender equality groups. Because of the efforts of The Women's Group, the case was brought to trial, and the governor ultimately lost the case, as well as the office to which he had been reelected by a landslide.

There is a growing body of research today on various social movements in Japan which are working through the judicial system to achieve their goals. For example, Patricia Steinhoff has been examining the trial support groups for the very unpopular New Left defendants of violent political crimes. Scott North is analyzing the role of support groups for families of karoshi (death from overwork) victims, who are seeking redress through the courts. This paper is a preliminary study of the Governor Yokoyama case, including a recounting of events, a description of the groups involved in the support of the young woman, and a brief survey of the gender-relations climate in Japan. Because much additional investigation must take place before a more profound analysis can be done, my conclusions will be tentative.

Women's Issues in Japan

According to a recent article by Ehara Yumiko (2000), a long-time observer of feminism in Japan, public policy changes made to improve women's equality in the workplace have had some significant successes, but the lack of change in society as a whole has caused disillusionment among younger women. The demanding work schedules, lack of help with housework, including child care, and harassment of varying intensity on the job, make women wonder about the advantages of having both a full-time job and a family. In fact, Ehara argues that it is the unwillingness of increasing numbers of Japanese women to submit to the dual exploitation at home and at work, which has led to plummeting marriage and birth rates. In response, the government has been frightened into strengthening the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL), so that as of April 1, 1999, among other provisions, management was made responsible for preventing and resolving sexual harassment incidents in the workplace ("9,500 sexual harassment...", 2000).

Perhaps because of the new enforcement promised in the 1999 EEOL, reporting of workplace sexual harassment to government equal employment offices increased by 2,432 cases to an all-time high of 9,451 during the fiscal year in Japan ("9,500 sexual harassment...", 2000). World-wide, it has only been in the last

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2) Japanese names are written with the family name first.

twenty years that sexual harassment has begun to be recognized as a problem in the workplace (Burn, 2000, 116). Relatively few countries have laws against sexual harassment, but as Shawn Burn (2000) notes, laws alone do not ensure that legal solutions are fully available to complainants. “This is partly because sexual harassment laws are often more progressive than the societies in which they are enacted” (119). Social delay may have been a significant factor in the increasing complaints of harassment in Japan, but even in the most progressive countries, it is still a daunting task to seek legal solutions in such cases.

Recognizing the tentative state of sexual harassment litigation generally, and the particular difficulties in Japan, it is surprising to see the unfolding of the Yokoyama case. As the events are described below, note should be made that most of them take place after the execution of the revised EEOL.

The Yokoyama Case

Yokoyama “Knock,” whose original name was Yamada Isamu, is a former comedian who gained notoriety on Japanese stages and television. After serving in the upper house of the national parliament, he decided to run for the office of governor in Osaka prefecture, and was elected in 1995. In addition to his past as an entertainer, Yokoyama was a unique candidate because of his lack of affiliation with any of the established political parties. In fact, his victory was a strong indication of how disenchanted the voting public was with Japanese party politics. Although the financial health of Osaka prefectural government had declined significantly during Yokoyama’s tenure, he commanded strong support as an independent politician, and he approached his chances for reelection in 1999 with confidence (“Yokoyama sued...,” 1999).

Among Yokoyama’s admirers was a young university student who decided to demonstrate her support for the candidate by working for his reelection campaign. The 21 year old student began working part-time for the campaign on March 25, 1999, and two weeks later, on April 8 th, she found herself riding in the back seat of a campaign vehicle with the candidate himself. One of the most common forms of campaigning in Japan is for candidates to drive around the district in a vehicle with a loudspeaker, greeting people in the neighborhoods, waving, and asking them for their votes.

Evidently, the student was suffering from a cold, and a blanket was placed over her lap. What began as a gesture of concern escalated into molestation when Yokoyama slid his hand under the blanket and fondled the student’s private regions for ten to thirty minutes (depending upon who is telling the story).

The next day, the student filed a criminal complaint against Yokoyama with the Osaka District Public Prosecutor’s office. However, Yokoyama responded immediately with a counter-charge, claiming that the complaint was a false accusation, and it defamed his character. Insisting that the allegations were not true, Yokoyama greeted victory in the April 11 th election (“Yokoyama sued...,” 1999).

Although there were seven other candidates in the Osaka gubernatorial race, the ruling political party coalition did not field any candidates in that race, assuming that Yokoyama would be unbeatable. His main opponent was Japan Communist Party candidate Ajisaka Makoto, who was very critical of Yokoyama’s fiscal record, pointing out that Osaka prefectural government’s debt had grown by 1.4 trillion yen to 3.6 trillion during his term in office. Nevertheless, with a voter turnout rate of 53.34 percent, Yokoyama garnered 67.6 percent (2.35 million) of the votes for a solid victory (“Yokoyama wins...,” 1999).

Despite his strong showing in the polls, Yokoyama was not absolved of his responsibility in the harassment case. On August 3 rd, the student brought a civil suit against him for molesting her and causing mental duress, not only from that action but from his counter suit as well. She demanded ¥12 million, and had as many as 81 lawyers under consultation (“Yokoyama sued...,” 1999). However, claiming that he was too busy, Yokoyama himself did not appear in court to contest the charges, but in public statements, he denied any guilt, and made defamatory remarks about the student. Such disregard for the proceedings impelled the student to raise the amount of compensation she sought from Yokoyama to ¥15 million (Japanese governor..., 1999).

After four months of deliberation, on December 13 th, the Osaka District Court ordered Yokoyama to pay ¥11 million (US\$107,300) to the student in compensation for the molestation and defamation. This was

the highest amount awarded in a sexual harassment suit in Japan. Hayashi Keisuke, the judge in the case, stated that Yokoyama's failure to appear in court weighed heavily against him, and that the amount of the damage award was broken down in the following manner: ¥2 million-compensation for molestation, ¥5 million-compensation for false statement to prosecutors, ¥3 million-compensation for damage caused by defamatory remarks, ¥1 million-compensation for student's legal costs ("Yokoyama told...", 1999).

On the following day, December 14 th, Vice Governor Kimura Yoshiki told the Associated Press that Yokoyama continued to maintain his innocence, and wished to regain the trust of his constituents ("Japan politician...", 1999). However, on December 20 th, Yokoyama was hospitalized for an undisclosed malady, and resigned from his office as governor the next day. Perhaps he had received word that on December 21 st, he would be indicted for sexual assault as a result of the criminal complaint the student filed on April 9 th ("Yokoyama told...", 1999).

The first hearing of the criminal trial was held in March of 2000. It was at this juncture that Yokoyama, no longer governor, admitted for the first time that he had committed the acts of which he was accused. By the fifth hearing on June 6 th at Osaka District Court, Yokoyama disclosed that he had denied the charges initially because of the fear of losing his job. However, he continued to deny that the actions had been premeditated, as the Prosecutor claimed ("Yokoyama 'denied...', " 2000).

Finally, after seven hearings, the trial was concluded, and the sentence was announced at 10 : 03 a.m. on August 10, 2000. Judge Kawai Masayuki accused Yokoyama of being " 'intoxicated by his status and power as governor,' "and of developing an arrogant attitude ("Harsh words...", 2000). He was sentenced to 18 months in prison, suspended for three years. Although the judge's comments were severe, the sentence was suspended because the court believed that Yokoyama had been punished already with the loss of his job and no possibility of working again in the public arena. Furthermore, Yokoyama had apologized for his actions, and had paid the damages required by the civil suit, so the student reportedly was satisfied with the outcome, especially since her account had been accepted fully by the court ("Harsh words...", 2000). Editorials in both the Mainichi Shimbun and Asahi Shimbun after the trial's conclusion expressed support for the guilty verdict, but disappointment that the sentence had to be suspended ("Knock's sentence...", 2000 ; "Yokoyama must...", 2000).

The Support Groups

Throughout the time that the Yokoyama case was being tried in the courts, the student's name was never made public, and no photos of her were published or broadcast. To shield her from the public and cameras, screens were set up in the courtroom when she gave testimony ("Yokoyama gets...", 2000). Perhaps because of the lack of information about the student in general, there was also very little coverage of the personal courage which was required to bring the case to court, or of the support group which formed to provide her with legal, financial, emotional, and moral assistance. Only after the final sentencing did several newspapers report that the student had acted against the wishes of her parents and friends to pursue charges against Yokoyama. "She was criticized by those around her for having the audacity as a mere college student to make such an accusation against a popular governor. She reportedly lost 7 kilograms in weight, and many of her friends deserted her" ("Harsh words...", 2000).

Without her family and friends behind her, it would have been very difficult for the student to maintain her determination over the course of the legal proceedings. However, several feminist attorneys took interest in the case soon after the complaint was filed, and they began to communicate with contacts in a variety of women's issue groups, and soon had a network of supporters for the student. Although the group eventually began to publish a newsletter to keep members informed of developments with the case, the support group data for this paper is based primarily on interviews and materials I received from several members of the group.

In order to understand the variety and scope of the groups involved in the support of the student, I will describe the five main organizations, other than the attorneys, which collaborated to assist the young

woman. The formal name created for this confederation of groups was, “The Group of Women who Protest Governor Knock’s Evasion of His Sexual Harassment Suspicion Trial,” but it was shortened to “The Women’s Group.” Because these organizations are made up of busy persons, there was an effort to share the task of supporting the student as widely as possible. Whenever there was a trial hearing, group members who were available assembled to provide support. In addition, the expertise of members in each group is varied so as to offer a range of support services and experience.

Japan Feminist Counseling Research and Contact Association (Feminist Counseling)

Since its establishment in 1993, the Feminist Counseling group has sponsored an annual meeting, counselor education programs, and various publications. The group was organized around the recognition that gender discrimination creates psychological problems, and there is a need for counselors to assist women in solving the problems on their own. The members, both individuals and groups, have a feminist perspective, and a high level of professional specialization. In addition to counseling, members do advocacy work, and participate in public education and awareness efforts.

As participants in The Women’s Group, one of the Feminist Counseling members, took charge of directing counseling efforts for the student, and another member became a core organizer for “The Friends’ Group,” a sub-organization created to provide non-professional companionship and moral support for the student. Because many of her friends had deserted her, it was important for the student to have new contacts who could provide close, personal relationships.

The Women who do not Permit Sexual Violence

This group was organized in the wake of the 1988 Midosuji (Osaka) Subway incident. When two molesters were resisted by the woman they were trying to harass on the subway, they became angry and raped her. The woman later sent requests to area rail companies to institute measures which would prevent such a thing from happening again. As a result, several of the local train lines established public announcement systems and posters warning passengers not to participate in nuisance (meiwaku) activities.

After assisting with the train line effort, The Women who do not Permit Sexual Violence went on to conduct a large-scale survey of sexual assault in 1993-94. Today, they provide a telephone referral service for victims of sexual abuse, sponsor public seminars on the topic, and publish a quarterly bulletin. As participants in The Women’s Group, they were instrumental in organizing “The Friends’ Group” described above.

World Women’s Conference Network-Kansai

On the eve of the 1995 UN-sponsored Beijing Women’s Conference, this group was created as one of the NGOs to work with the Japanese government to plan and implement new policies for women. The collaboration between government and NGOs was known as the Japan Caucus. Because the participants at the Beijing conference were charged with monitoring progress in their own countries, the Japan Accountability Caucus was formed, and World Women’s Conference Network-Kansai was one of the groups involved. Therefore, when the 2000 Women’s Conference was held in New York, the Kansai group was responsible for compiling information on Japan’s progress, and presenting it at the international gathering.

The members of the Kansai organization number approximately 160 groups, institutions, and individuals from many walks of life. As participants in The Women’s Group, the World Women’s Conference Network-Kansai served as headquarters and coordinator for the entire support effort.

Women’s Studies Society of Japan

In 1977, this organization was established in the Kansai region as the first academic society to study

women's issues in Japan. Since 1980 it has published an annual journal. There are approximately 200 members, including many of the premier researchers in this field. Many of these members participated in The Women's Group, and were instrumental in providing a philosophical and theoretical foundation in sexual violence issues for all the group participants. One of the members has also been active in disseminating information about The Women's Group to similar organizations in other Asian countries.

Several of the key members in the Women's Study Society are also members of the World Women's Conference Network-Kansai. Such overlapping memberships in these organizations worked to facilitate networking and rapid implementation of their support for the student in the Yokoyama case.

ECPAT Japan-Kansai

The acronym for "End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism," ECPAT began at a 1990 conference in Thailand in which the situation of child prostitution was explained, and a campaign to prevent it was begun. In 1996, another conference was held in Stockholm to help fight commerce in child exploitation. ECPAT Japan-Kansai was established in 1992, and focused on tourism aimed at child prostitution. However, after 1997, the efforts were expanded to include all child sexexploitation businesses such as child pornography. As a member of The Women's Group, ECPAT Japan-Kansai contributed individuals to assist with various sub-groups supporting the student.

Conclusion

Because this paper incorporates only the most basic information about the Yokoyama case and the organizations which came to the support of the woman who filed the charges against him, it is impossible to arrive at any profound conclusions. However, based on this rudimentary sketch, we can attempt to make some general deductions.

1. Given the lack of support from family and friends, it would have been difficult for the student to have persevered alone in both the civil and criminal cases against Yokoyama, considering the length of time to conclusion (sixteen months), and the resources needed to prevail. The fact that legal assistance was made available to her, and then a whole range of support, including financial, psychological, and moral, was provided by capable individuals and groups, gave the student encouragement, and was probably impressive to observers as well.

2. The collaboration of multiple women's organizations to accomplish a single goal is an important strategy for accomplishing new tasks in the future. The experience of networking and deploying members to participate in a cooperative effort should be very instructive for new challenges which will require alliances to form once more. It is also important to learn how mutual support can prevent the onset of despair and hopelessness when a cause requires much time and sustained effort.

3. Both the government authorities (court personnel, bureaucrats, and politicians), and media cooperated, perhaps unwittingly, to bring about a successful conclusion to the case. Strict efforts to maintain the anonymity of the student, and treatment of the case as serious, were two ways in which public support was maintained for the process.

4. The Yokoyama case can serve to raise consciousness in the society about the consequences of sexual harassment, and can instruct all involved about the importance of providing a strong support for complainants both within the formal system, and through informal groups.

Many more aspects of this case must be examined and analyzed in a systematic way. Learning from

the analytical processes utilized in other studies of support groups, additional information about the dynamics within The Women's Groups and more details about the legal process will be combined to derive more valuable insights into these specialized social movements. Future research will expand to include other support activities conducted by the individual women's groups described here. The motivations, goals, and personal histories of women involved in these groups are another area for further investigation. What compels these women to join the groups and take the risk of becoming involved in advocacy? Are they indications of a new trend in Japanese feminism? How will such advocacy efforts affect the shape of grass roots movements and democracy? These are just some of the questions I would like to address in my future research.

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Interviews were conducted with Okamoto Kyoko and Tagami Tokiko. Ms. Okamoto provided me with printed materials as well as her own written description of The Women's Group members.

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ABSTRACT

Unlike many sexual harassment cases in Japan, in which claims are denied or ignored, the case brought against popular Osaka mayor, Yokoyama, took a different path, primarily because of the spontaneous creation of a support group for the complainant. This support group was made up of various women's advocacy activists and members of gender equality groups. Because of the efforts of The Women's Group, the case was brought to trial, and the governor lost the case, as well as the office to which he had been reelected by a landslide. This research note provides a brief summary of the case and a description of the groups involved in support activities as well as an indication the direction for future investigation.

Key words : feminist groups, support groups, sexual harassment, Yokoyama "Knock"