Introduction

Former president of Harvard University Derek Bok was both amused and impressed to learn that Margaret, a tenured Harvard faculty member and holder of a funded chair, began her academic career teaching in California community colleges. "You can't get here from there," he joked. But she did.

Margaret married at the age of eighteen; by the time she was twenty-two she had two children and an ulcer that threatened to perforate. The wife of a Presbyterian minister, she had tried to be content with children, church, and television. The ulcer made it painfully clear that this was not working. It prompted her to begin seven years of psychotherapy in which the energy that had been chewing her stomach lining went to her head and she became a voracious reader. At the age of twenty-six, she began taking classes at the nearest community college, always getting home before her children arrived from school. Sneaking studying, she tried to show that she was not doing anything but being a good wife and mother. She continued schooling, term by term, always attending the nearest school, not with the goal of completing a degree program, but because she was avid to learn more. One thing led to another, as her mother—in a different context—always said it would. At the age of forty-one she began a career with a doctorate and an assistant professor position at Harvard University's Divinity School.

Hiroko, a young girl from a small Japanese town, became the owner of her own company and a much sought-after producer of exhibitions and cultural events in Europe, North and South America, and Asia. Hiroko was born in Yamaguchi which is surrounded by mountains—the name means "gate to the mountains." Francis Xavier brought Catholicism to the region in the sixteenth century, and the cathedral, with its towers

and ringing bells, constantly reminded Hiroko of the world beyond Yamaguchi. Her aunt, who became a Catholic, sometimes took her to services. Inside the church, the artworks and stained glass reinforced her awareness of a very different world than the one to which she was accustomed. Hiroko was precocious and curious, always longing to see what was beyond the mountains.

Margaret and Hiroko met when Hiroko was producing an international exhibition of Buddhist art. The exhibition, "The Vision and Art of Shinjo Ito," consisted of sculpture, calligraphy, and photography created by the founder of the Shinnyo-en Buddhist Order. It traveled to five cities in Japan, where more than 310,000 visitors saw the exhibition. It then traveled to three American cities—New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. In each of the American venues, Margaret gave a lecture on the use of vision in religious practice. The exhibition then opened in Florence and Milan. In these venues, seventy thousand people saw the exhibit. At every opportunity we—Hiroko and Margaret—talked together, fascinated by our similarities and differences. When we realized that our conversations might be interesting to others, we began to tape them. When we wrote this book we decided to retain the lively conversations that initially attracted and fascinated us, rather than reworking them as narratives or essays.

One of our first discoveries was that both of us had grown up with conventional ideas of what our lives would be: we would get married and have children; we would need to think no further about what we might do. Both of us have found it necessary radically to rethink those assumptions.

Our differences make for interesting comparisons. We grew up in different societies; we have different educations, different professions, and different religious orientations. Our societies have inhibited and enabled us in different ways. This book explores our journeys from "there" to "here." In it we reflect on our careers and our personal lives, our hard work, our lucky opportunities and our painful losses. We can only suggest some working answers to the questions we raise, for we do not speak for all Japanese and American women, but simply as Hiroko and Margaret. Certainly, we hope to encourage other women to find and create opportunities to exercise their talents and training, but we claim only that the ideas and methods we discuss *worked for us*.

Early in our conversations about writing a book Hiroko asked, "What shelf will our book be on in the bookstore? It's not a self-help manual, and it's not about religion or philosophy; it's not autobiography." "It's memoirs," Margaret suggested, "but memoirs that stretch the boundaries of the genre." In addition to the memories and reflections of each of us, it compares our experiences of living in different societies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The topics we discussed are grouped in roughly chronological order; they need not be read in order, however, but as the reader's interest directs.

In the past, cautionary tales have effectively prevented most women from transgressing established gender roles and expectations. From *Antigone* to *Thelma and Louise*, women who broke the rules in order to seek pleasure or achievement were punished—in life as in literature—by madness or death. In Western Europe, between about 1500 and 1700, despite disagreement among historians about witch persecution figures, it is clear that "women were disproportionately targeted. In some locations, seventy-five to eighty percent of those accused of witchcraft were women, and up to ninety percent of those executed as witches were women."[1] Witches were accused of possessing a long list of vindictive powers; they were believed to cause everything from impotence, to miscarriage, to death. Even in historical societies with revered women leaders, however, the lives of most women were constricted. In Japan, for example, despite social recognition of a famous third-century shaman queen, Himiko, and even a few women emperors, chauvinistic attitudes are common.

We live in an amazing historical moment in Japanese and American societies, a moment characterized by the development of one of the most radical social movements in the history of the world. Our societies are being reshaped as women come closer than ever before to equality with men, gaining access to designing and administering the institutions of public life with its opportunities, dangers, and rewards. The present is most easily understood by contrasting it with an earlier time. In mid-twentieth century America, feminist leaders sought to identify and reject feminine gender socialization and to overturn gender roles and expectations. This was a necessary historical moment; it got public attention. Feminists were frequently accused of being "shrill and strident." As Catherine MacKinnon once said, "I'm a feminist—not the fun kind."

1. Miles, *A Complex Delight*, 18.

However, as women of diverse races and ethnicities quickly pointed out, at this stage feminism articulated the perspectives of white middle-class women. Presently, after several decades of criticism and revision, the movement no longer belongs to its originators; it has become exponentially more populous, complex, and global. Its goals are also different. Feminists no longer seek to overturn societies so that women, formerly on the bottom, are now on top. Many feminists—or those who would like to call themselves feminists if the word were not so over-determined by negative stereotypes—seek the right of women *and men* to transgress gender roles and expectations in the direction of identifying and actualizing their individual capacities, skills, and pleasures.

In both Japanese and American societies many women "want it all now," in the best sense of that phrase. That is, we want to preserve and reinterpret certain traditional values while exercising our capabilities and skills both in public and in the home. Which traditional values and roles do we want to maintain? And how do they need to be reinterpreted? For example, it is important to us to find ways of caring for others that are compatible with our professional commitments and that do not lead to burnout. Our socialization has proven inadequate on this point. Both of us were taught to ask, what is the *right* thing to do, not what can *I* do in this situation? The latter question requires thoughtful assessment of what my specific capabilities and energy permit in this particular situation. Second, although we were taught by word and example that we should make ourselves agreeable and pleasing to everyone, we found that trying to please does not necessarily produce good relationships. Examples of our adjustments of these expectations appear throughout the book. Moreover, both of us have needed to rework such large issues as our philosophy of life, our religious ideas and practices, and our attitudes toward sex, rejecting some aspects of the values with which we grew up, and maintaining and refining others.

From unlikely origins, Hiroko and Margaret created fulfilling and productive lives. A generation earlier it probably would not have been possible. And we hope that a generation later it will not be interesting because everyone will be doing it! In this book we examine *how it worked for us,* in order to stimulate and encourage other young women from similar origins to get "here" from there.