

Narrator: Mayumi Tsutakawa  
Interviewer: Mildred Andrews  
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Transcriber: Teresa Bergen

[BEGIN INTERVIEW]

Andrews: The following interview is being conducted with Mayumi Tsutakawa on behalf of the Washington Women's History Consortium for the 1977 Ellensburg/Houston International Women's Year Conference's Oral History Project. The interview is taking place on March fourteenth, at the home of the interviewer, Mildred Andrews.

As a beginning, Mayumi, would you tell me briefly about your growing up years? Something about your family, community, school? Basically how you developed your ideas about your role as a woman in the home and in society?

Tsutakawa: [laughs] That's a long sentence. I was born in Seattle. And both of my parents are Japanese-American, second generation, but they were both raised in Japan. So they were bilingual in Japanese. So we had a lot of Japanese culture in our home, even though my parents are both American citizens. And we, myself and my three brothers, are third generation. We grew up somewhat in the Central area, and we all went to Franklin High School. But my father was a faculty member at the University of Washington in the Art Department.

And although I would say my mother had somewhat of a traditional role in the household, and she did not achieve higher education, she was highly educated in the Japanese arts, dance and calligraphy and flower arrangement and so on. So although it seemed as though she had a traditional female role, I would say that she had a lot of influence in our family, and in guiding and serving as a real hub guiding our family.

Plus, my father being university educated, was quite, I would say, humanitarian and open minded. I would say out of the four of us, myself and one of my brothers, followed kind of the higher education standards and interests that my dad had. He passed away recently. And then, two of the sons followed more of the artistic direction of my dad. So I think that we had a really good balance growing up.

And even though I was the only girl, or maybe because I was the only girl, I felt pretty strong, and we were all pretty equal in our ability to speak out and to pursue our directions, whether it was academic or sports or arts or travel. We all did what we wanted to do. And my parents really, really encouraged us to have our directions.

Andrews: Your family is so prominent in the arts. Could you just briefly mention who your brothers are? And your dad, of course, too?

Tsutakawa: My dad was George Tsutakawa, and he was a noted artist, regionally and nationally. He was a painter and a sculptor, and he had many, many public sculpture works, many artworks in many major cities. Many fountains, large bronze fountains, in the city of Seattle, and other major cities. He had a notable career. And then of my three brothers, my oldest brother, Gerry, worked with my dad. And he has now become a

sculptor. His name is Gerard Tsutakawa. He's become a sculptor, and is pretty successful. And he also does bronze metal sculpture.

And then two of my brothers are musicians. One is Deems Tsutakawa, and he's a jazz musician. He's a full time musician; ever since after high school, he pursued his musical career full time. He's a keyboardist and a pianist. And then my youngest brother, Marcus, plays the bass. And he is the director of the Garfield High School Orchestra, which is a really nationally renowned classical music symphony orchestra. And he also plays jazz with his brother Deems sometimes, too. So they're all doing really well.

And my own occupation, were you going to get to that?

Andrews: Yes, please.

Tsutakawa: Okay. Just let me say, my own occupation is that I'm the manager of grants for organizations for the Washington State Arts Commission. That's what I do right now.

Andrews: And you've also been involved in the arts.

Tsutakawa: Yeah. I started out in journalism. And my first degree was in East Asian history, and my second degree, my master's, was in communications [from the University of Washington]. So then, in fact, that's how I got to know Rita Brogan. She convinced me to join the Communications Department. But I did become a journalist with *The Seattle Times*, and I was there six years doing features, writing about the women's movement, and also, later, as an art, visual arts writer, and then copy editor. And then later I taught at the Seattle Central Community College. And then I was with the King County Arts Commission for ten years, working on programs, and became the director. And then I worked for the Wing Luke Asian Museum for about five years. And then I came to the state, and where I am now with the State Arts Commission in Olympia.

Andrews: And you've written some lovely books, too.

Tsutakawa: Well, I was the editor of a couple of anthologies. And one of them, two of them were about artwork, Asian American artists, both historical and contemporary. And two of them were women's anthologies. One was *The Forbidden Stitch*, which was the first Asian American, national Asian American women's anthology. And the other one was *Gathering Ground*, I believe that was the name of it, which was a Northwest, one of the first Northwest women of color anthologies, which include both writing and visual artwork. It was a great pleasure to work on both of those projects. It was very exciting.

And also not having formal training in art history, I still was very interested in promoting the artwork of historical and contemporary Asian American artists. I worked on a pioneer Asian American art exhibit for Wing Luke Asian Museum. And then several different, I would say, community-based art exhibits for artists of color and Asian American artists here in the Northwest. So I've always been interested in helping to promote the work of artists, and shed some light on those that have not been recognized by the general public, or the mainstream.

Andrews: So that leads right into my next question, which is what was it like to be a woman in Seattle's Asian Pacific community and in the arts community when you were growing up?

Tsutakawa: Well, our family was very steeped in all the arts, and we had a lot of exposure to the really great Pacific Northwest artists, like Mark Tobey and Kenneth Callahan and Guy Anderson and Morris Graves and Paul Horiuchi, the great core of Northwest artists, through my dad's work. There were many, many artists. And at the same time, for some kind of fortuitous, or maybe it was intended, reason, we had a lot of really noted Japanese artists from Japan visiting our home. The Ford Foundation had provided quite a bit of fellowship and travel and grant money to bring outstanding Japanese artists such as national treasure potters, or performing artists, bringing these famous Japanese artists to Seattle.

And because they were in residence at the University of Washington, and my father taught there for many years, and my mom was really a great hostess, a great chef and hostess, we had so many events and parties with the art faculty. Jacob Lawrence was our dear, dear friend. Jacob Lawrence, the painter. And Alan Hovhaness, who was the great composer who lived in the Northwest here. Many of these great artists came to our house. So we as kids kind of hung around the edges, and actually met and talked with these people. We met Isamu Noguchi and George Nakashima. Noguchi was the great sculptor, and George Nakashima the nationally known woodworker from Pennsylvania. We met so many of these great artists and there must have been some kind of osmosis going on, because we all were inspired to continue our careers in the arts.

Oh, you were asking about growing up.

Andrews: as a woman in Seattle's Asian Pacific community prior to the 1977 IWY Convention.

Tsutakawa: I was one of the sort of core, Seattle-born people. There wasn't an Asian American women's movement or recognition, per se, before college. I went to college, I finished high school in 1968 and I went to college at Scripps College in Southern California for two years. And I think it wasn't until that time that there was really some recognition of a women's movement in me, or challenging authority because of the bombing of Cambodia, the Vietnam War. And all of these caused a great sort of waking up of political consciousness.

But prior to that time, I think that it was really the Civil Rights Movement in the mid '60s that really, that all of us, my brothers and myself, really became aware of. Because we lived right in, or on the edge, of the Central District, and went to Franklin High School. In fact, the first sit-in by the Black Panthers at Franklin High School was during my senior year of high school, and led by wonderful leaders like Larry Gossett, who's now our great, politically elected King County councilman in Seattle. So there were great people in the Civil Rights Movement.

There was not, at that time yet, a real separation or recognition of a separate women's movement. But after I went to school in California, then I went to Japan for a year. I had a really great time and studied a lot of the traditional arts. But also, there was

some alternative lifestyle coming along, budding all over the world. So I'm sure I was part of that.

But when I came back to the University of Washington in 1970 was when the Asian American movement really was becoming recognizable sort of as an echo or following the Civil Rights Movement led by African Americans. So we had a real multicultural situation at the University of Washington. It was when the Ethnic Cultural Center was first built at the University of Washington, and when the four major ethnic coalitions were strongly developed.

And by some sheer accident, really, I became the head of the Asian Student Coalition. I had only just come back to Seattle, but it was a time of great political forces. It was just after the very big march on the freeway against the war. Now I wasn't here for that, but after that, there were still many rallies. And I didn't really know what I was doing, but I found myself speaking as head of the Asian Student Coalition to these really large political rallies at the UW campus.

And also, some of us started taking classes on leftist philosophy, Marxism, and so on, at the UW, which were taught by some professors who were very progressive and alternative. So with all of that foment, I would say the Women's Movement was really starting. So that was the early '70s. And along with the Women's Movement in general starting, which was pushed along by real strong leftist ideology, there was the Socialist Workers' Party, and Revolutionary Union, and some of the leftist groups, but a group of Asian women, Asian American women, who were actively part of the Asian American movement, political movement here, began to form a nucleus and kind of identified itself as an Asian women's caucus or group.

But at the same time, what I was actually more active in was so many of the Asian American organizations that got their start at that time. The healthcare rights movement within the International District became what's now the very strong International District Clinic, and Asian Counseling and Referral Service we started. There was a food bank. We were very active in the rights of residents for housing in the International District.

So an Asian American women's movement was inevitable, but I have to say that for several of us at the same time, we formed a multi-ethnic women's movement, and we were called Seattle Third World Women. That was our name. We existed for many years. And Mary Stone, who is African American, who's now known as Mary Hanley was a key person.

Tsutakawa: And now she teaches at the University of North Carolina. She was the key leader. She and I met because she was involved with the Venceremos Brigade, Brigado Venceremos, which is a pro-Cuban organization in Seattle. And it was a national organization in the United States. And many different people from Seattle somehow were able to actually go to Cuba. This would be in 1971, '72, '73. They actually went to Cuba and strongly supported the Castro government, and wanted to promote the positive qualities of the Cuban nation, such as wonderful healthcare and the arts, and the ability for workers to have a strong say, and many of these characteristics.

So there was a strong Venceremos Brigade, and I was interested. So I met Mary, and I met all of the Venceremos people. Then we started living together, and then Mary and I, and then Sharon Maeda, who was very active in international focus and progressive movement in Seattle. And she was head of the Ethnic Cultural Center. And Georgette

Ioup, who is Lebanese-American, was on the faculty at the UW in romance language or something. She was a strong progressive, had many ties with the Middle Eastern political movement. A few others. We formed the core of Seattle Third World Women.

And although we were small, we had a consistent study group, and we lived on Twenty-Third and Aloha, right on Capitol Hill. We had a house. And we appeared at marches and rallies, and took part in other political movements, and supported, for example, the establishment of El Centro de la Raza, and United Construction Workers, which was fighting for multi-ethnic representation in labor, the hiring of labor, contractual labor work in Seattle.

So we were very active. So rather than there being one particular Asian women's group, we were a multi-ethnic group. And I think, I feel like it really wasn't until later, getting more towards the women's conference in Ellensburg and Houston, that more of an identifiable Asian American women's group got started. Yeah, I really want to emphasize that we were a multi-ethnic organization, and supported the different, the African American, Native American, Chicano and Chicana activities and movements.

Andrews: That's a very fascinating story, and it sounds to me like you worked closely with like-minded men.

Tsutakawa: Yeah, yeah. And most of us are still around here in Seattle. Unfortunately Bernie Whitebear passed away, but Roberto Maestas and Larry Gossett and Bob Santos were great progressive leaders at that time. And Sharon Maeda moved away, but she came back. She would really be a great one to interview if you're interested not just about these conferences, but about the early Asian American women's movement.

Andrews: Does she live in Seattle now?

Tsutakawa: Yeah, she's here.

Andrews: Were there other organizations that you belonged to or were active in, in the '60s and early '70s that—

Tsutakawa: Right. Might have shaped me. I guess the one part of my upbringing was that I was a Girl Scout for ten years. So I think that that helps to develop some, you know, some sense of capability. And the other thing is that I was on a crew team in high school. I like to say that I don't play sports, but I was on a women's, a junior women's crew team that was made up of high school girls. And it was the first year that the national, the Women's National Crew Association developed, allowed a lightweight category, so that younger girls could compete in their own category. And then the heavyweight, so-called heavyweight, like above 130 pounds was heavyweight, would be more of the college type girls. So we, the Green Lake Crew team, won several first place gold medals in the national competition. I'm not sure how it developed, but Green Lake Crew was a strong organization. So I was in a women's sport, so to speak. But I wasn't in any women's activities in high school.

The college I went to was a women's college, Scripps College in Southern California. So for two years, I was part of an all women's really strong academic

environment. But I wasn't part of any women's organizations, per se, until we developed Seattle Third World Women. And then later, an Asian women's caucus in Seattle evolved.

Andrews: So how did you view women's roles in the home and in society at the time of the conferences? In the mid-'70s.

Tsutakawa: Yeah. Let's see. Well, when I was growing up, I think my dad actually had hoped that I would be more feminine in the traditional Japanese model. But I was so active in high school in all the clubs. And I was with the school newspaper, and student government, and all that. He always wanted me to learn more of the Japanese traditional, like the cooking, and so on. I did study Japanese music, the koto. The instrument called the koto. It's like a zither or a harp. And I did go to Japanese school, so I learned the language.

But by the time I went to Japan, I didn't feel like I was part of that traditional Japanese women's role. I was kind of the sore thumb that stuck out. Among my cousins and aunts and uncles, they really thought that I was pretty odd to be traveling around by myself, wearing jeans with a backpack and hiking boots. They just thought this was really, really— I don't know, that I was unsuccessful, or I was just strange.

So I got used to having that kind of push and pull, because I was really interested in Japanese culture. I really loved Japan and living there and Japanese culture, but at the same time, I felt disappointed, or disgruntled, with the role that I had to play. There's a lot of formality, a structured formality in the language in Japan. So I came home, I actually wanted to come home by the time my year was up.

But in terms of my role, it wasn't until we really got involved with this organization that I really felt the importance of a feminist perspective, and with the development of the push for the ERA, the Equal Rights Amendment, I could see that that was really important. And the other Native American and Chicana and African American women, sharing time with them and learning more about the conditions of women in different communities. And also, the leftist women in Seattle. I think I learned a lot during the early '70s.

After I finished my Master's in Communications, I went to *The Seattle Times*. And I think that I was ready and interested to write about the women's conference.

Andrews: What made you decide to go to the Ellensburg Conference?

Tsutakawa: Well, I went to grad school, I graduated with my undergraduate degree in '72, then I went to grad school in '75 and '76. I think I must have graduated in June of '76. And also, I got married during that time. And then I went to the *Times*. It was soon after I graduated from UW. It must have been the summer or fall of '76. And this conference was in—

Andrews: July, '77.

Tsutakawa: Oh, July, '77. Okay, so it was fairly soon after that. So I started working at *The Seattle Times* in what was then called the View section. V-i-e-w. And it had played

the role of the traditional women's section for many, many years. With the, not so much the recipes, but the society type of news.

Andrews: Do you remember June Almquist?

Tsutakawa: And June Almquist was the editor. She was a very strong personality in the old journalism mode. But she was curious. Even though I feel that she was quite a conservative, she was curious about the Women's Movement. And she saw it as something that was coming up, and important, and worthy as coverage. And I think that she saw covering the Women's Movement, rather than having the news department, the news desk of the *Times* covering this political movement, she wanted to have the Women's Movement news in our department.

So I came along. I felt I was really lucky. There was some strange, there was some fortuitous reason why the other more senior reporters in the department were not able to cover this, the Ellensburg conference, and then the national Houston conference. And me being quite a new kid on the block, and my communications degree, master's degree, was not specifically in journalism, it was actually a history, a media communications history thesis.

My master's thesis was about the history of the Japanese American newspapers, and one in particular in Seattle, and its very famous editor, James Sakamoto. It was kind of a thesis that looked at the old Japanese language newspapers and the new Japanese American newspaper, and how they behaved in the build up to the wartime in 1942. So my thesis is still around. It's distributed somewhat nationally.

So I actually was not formally trained in journalism. So that's why I'm saying I was really lucky to be able to fall into this situation. Number one, to get the job at *The Seattle Times*. And number two, the other journalists couldn't do it. They were, I don't know, on maternity leave, or didn't want to travel or something. So I got the assignment to begin covering the Women's Movement conference.

I was able to go to the preparatory meetings in Seattle, and then the meetings themselves in Ellensburg.

Andrews: Did you go as an observer?

Tsutakawa: Yeah, there were a couple of media people. Jean Enerson was another one. I don't know who else was there; she was with King TV. I'm not sure who was there for the *PI*. But definitely I was there for the *Times*, and we served as observers, and we wrote and reported on the whole deal, from the planning period onwards.

Andrews: Were you involved in other ways besides as a reporter?

Tsutakawa: No, I couldn't do that. I had some fairly, you know, strict ethical considerations.

Andrews: Well I think you've already talked some about the Asian Pacific women's movement, but how did, could you talk about how ethnic minority women came together for this conference?

Tsutakawa: Okay, I was just about to say, it was pretty, it was really very thrilling to see the ethnic diversity in the planning and in the delegations themselves. There were some older African American women. Dorothy Hollingsworth, who's an educator in Seattle, African American sort of education pioneer, she was a strong presence in that group. Rita Brogan, who then was called Rita Fujiki.

Andrews: Rita Fujiki Elway.

Tsutakawa: Yeah, then she became Elway. She was a strong Asian American presence. I'm trying to think of the Native American and Chicana women. But definitely—

Andrews: Kathleen Delahunt.

Tsutakawa: Yeah.

Andrews: Lilly Aguilar.

Tsutakawa: Yeah, I remember Lilly. A number of us came from the UW ethnic student groups, and kind of went on. So I have to say that the planning and the meetings themselves were very multi-ethnic. There was a lot of recognition of each other's special characteristics and challenges. There was a lot of feeling of equality and solidarity in the groups themselves.

Now I'm trying to remember when did this Asian women's group start; I remember we met in Tacoma. So there were women from Tacoma, as well as Seattle. And I feel like Dolores Sibonga was one of the Asian women, strong Asian women, present. And possibly Ruth Ann Kurose, who's now with state government, and has been really politically active for many years. And some other faculty from the UW. But again, I'm not sure when this was, but I know also Diane Narasaki, who's now the head of Asian Counseling Referral Service, was one of the early strong young women that was part of this group. Also Sally Kazama. I'm trying to remember the earlier group. See, a different group of Asian women came together around the International Women's Conference in Beijing. So that was much later. But in this early period—

Oh, a really important person took part, Yuri Takahashi, who sadly passed away. She was an Asian art scholar. And sadly, she passed away probably five years, or ten years after, like in the mid '80s or something. But she was a strong presence in the early Asian women's groups.

Andrews: I haven't seen the names of any Chinese American women.

Tsutakawa: Oh, I was going to say, a Filipino leader would be Ticiang Diangson. . Chinese. I'm sure there were some. Lorraine Sakata was another person. She was an ethnomusicology faculty at UW. So there were some meetings to develop some, I think the preparatory meetings in the ethnic caucuses were meant to bring out issues that would then be brought to the state or the national meetings. Logically, that is what would happen.

Andrews: In your articles, I know you commented on some of the issues that were discussed at Ellensburg. But before I get to that, tell me about how you got to Ellensburg, about the logistics of getting there and staying there I'm looking for some of the atmosphere.

Tsutakawa: I'm sure it was either a busload or carloads of people, and I'm sure we stayed in dorms and met in some sort of cafeteria like settings. But I'm not being very good about remembering that part of it. I do know that the strange thing, here's the anomaly, the strange thing is that along with all these rousing, spirited, progressive women, there was a strong contingent of conservative, mostly Mormon women. This was very strange and curious. But they decided, whoever their leaders were, from a national standpoint, or maybe it was some local leader, decided this, that they would have a presence and speak out for the traditional role of women in Washington and America. They were strongly anti-abortion, and strongly anti-ERA. They formed a bloc. And I'm not sure about Ellensburg, but I noticed there was a note here in the national, at the national meeting they had a separate rally in Houston.

But it was kind of interesting, because you're in the same group, and you want to be convivial and friendly. And they were friendly. But they weren't mean, they just strongly held to their beliefs. And others were strongly holding fast to their beliefs. So it was kind of an interesting situation in a microcosm, sort of a microcosm of society, but with a pretty friendly, civilized group of women discussing it. And I think that Pam Roach, who's now state representative, was one of the people.

Andrews: She was there.

Tsutakawa: Yeah.

Andrews: And I will be interviewing her, too.

Tsutakawa: She was pretty young at the time.

Andrews: What were some of the major issues that were discussed at the conference?

Tsutakawa: Well, the ERA itself was something really important for people. It was a new thing, and it was something really important for people, the general public and progressive people, to understand. Which was an equal rights amendment to the Constitution that would provide, that would bar unequal treatment of women. But I'm not sure on the sub issues, like healthcare, childcare, equal pay for equal work, if there were separate planks or resolutions. I mean, I know on the national level there definitely were. So I would assume at the state level we had separate planks of issues.

I'm thinking that there was a general vote of, it was a general vote at Ellensburg on pro or against the ERA, and also the conference members voted on a slate of candidate members to go to Houston. And it looks like it was a very multi-ethnic slate. Because I know in the final group that went to Houston, it was a very multi-ethnic group of women.

Andrews: The conservatives had their own slate of delegates. And the liberals had theirs. And there was only one conservative delegate that went to Houston out of that conservative slate. And then all of the alternates were conservatives.

Tsutakawa: I do want to point out that I remember quite strongly that Jill Ruckelshaus was a leader of the Seattle group. She had had a national political life in DC with her husband, Bill Ruckelshaus. And she was just really sort of a shining star, and a strong and an articulate leader of the Seattle group.

Andrews: I haven't been able to locate her.

Tsutakawa: Oh, she might not be in Seattle?

Andrews: Did you have a chance to interview Jill Ruckelshaus?

Tsutakawa: I don't know. You'd have to look through here to see.

Andrews: That's okay.

Tsutakawa: I do want to say that it was important also to note that *The Seattle Times* sent a very good new young woman photographer to both of the [conferences], and you know, she's still at *The Seattle Times*, Kathy Andrisevic. You could interview her. She's editor of the *Pacific Magazine* now. And she was sort of what I would say a hotshot young woman photographer. One of the first strong women photographers at *The Seattle Times*.

Andrews: That would be very interesting.

Tsutakawa: And she definitely took all of these pictures. She went to Houston, for sure.

Andrews: It looks like a crowd of hippies in some of the photographs.

Tsutakawa: Yeah. She would definitely be a good person to talk to, because she's still at the *Times*.

Andrews: There's a good balance between that and some of the women that are very dressed up and businesslike. I thought that was wonderful that she captured that.

Tsutakawa: Okay. All right. We better go on.

Andrews: Okay. Were there issues that were of major concern to you at the conference?

Tsutakawa: No, I was neutral. [laughs]

Andrews: You had to be, as a reporter.

Tsutakawa: No. Really. I was, you know, I really, this was my important opportunity to show my professionalism. And being a really new reporter, plus being a minority female reporter, I felt that I really had to be professional. And it was a lot of hard work, attending the sessions, and writing and sending. I've forgotten how we transmitted the information, but I was sending every day. I don't know how we transmitted because it was before the electronic transmission methods.

Andrews: I thought your articles were very fair, very balanced.

Tsutakawa: Oh, good. I'm glad to hear it. [laughs]

Andrews: I've read some others that definitely presented mainly a feminist stance. And some that were conservative, too. Yours were probably some of the most objective I read.

Tsutakawa: Oh, good. Yeah, I think I felt I had to do that.

Andrews: Tell me about going to Houston.

Tsutakawa: That was quite a revelation to me, because I had never been in the South before. I'd traveled, I'd been to New York, the two coasts. Oregon, California, and DC, and Oregon. So I had never been in the South before. And culturally, it was very different. For one thing, Houston is a very big city, and we were probably mostly stuck downtown. But the people working, you know, that you ran into, both white and black, had really strong Southern accents. I wasn't used to that. I knew black people with Southern accents. You really got the sense that you were in the South. And I think that some of the local, like the waitresses in the restaurants, I think they were pretty bewildered that this huge number of women, of feminist women, were in their city, were in their town. They were just sort of scared.

But it was so impressive to be able to hear people like Coretta Scott King, and is it June Jordan? Who was that keynote address?

Andrews: Barbara Jordan?

Tsutakawa: Barbara Jordan, yeah. And Bella Abzug. It was just so impressive to be able to, for the first time, hear very outstanding women's voices as true, true national leaders. It's amazing that, you know, the positive feeling that you could get from that. But also the fact that, here's another thing that I had never experienced before. I guess it was modeled on a national political convention with each of the states sitting in their area with signs, and voting as a group. But it was pretty fun to be able to experience that and get a sense of each state and their characteristics.

And one of the things that I remember was that the New York delegation, which was considered just very sophisticated and cool, you know, they all wore some specific color of T-shirt or something. I'm sure I didn't, but our group did. The New York delegation was so big. And when they voted, they held up an apple. [laughs] So this whole huge group of women wearing some cool dark color like maybe navy blue, holding up the apple for the Big Apple, you know?

I mean, there were just some really neat symbolic visual sorts of things that happened. And maybe some other people had been to a national political conference, but I hadn't been. It was neat. There were all these different buttons and T-shirts. Like here's one in this picture, "Moms for ERA." And hats, and insignias, and just so many different visual signals. Signs of all types. And the conservatives with their signs. So it was a very fun convention atmosphere.

Andrews: Where did you sit?

Tsutakawa: I'm sure that I was up in some separate press area, not with the delegation itself.

Andrews: Did you have regular contact with the Washington delegation?

Tsutakawa: Yeah. We would go in and out.

Andrews: So you could go down on the floor.

Tsutakawa: I guess so. You know, this is thirty-five years ago. [laughs] I'm sure that I had the ability to walk around, because I was an official press delegate.

Andrews: What about the minority caucuses of Houston?

Tsutakawa: I'm sure there were some.

Tsutakawa: But you know, this is an interesting thing. I don't remember an Asian women's caucus in Houston. Did you see that in here?

Andrews: I had the impression that they came together more as a minority caucus.

Tsutakawa: Right. Right. Rather than a particular ethnic group background. Oh, yeah. Judith Lonnquist. She was quite a leader in that whole group.

Andrews: I've just talked with her.

Tsutakawa: Yeah. Okay. I'm sure there was a minority women's caucus, but I don't remember it. I don't want to make up anything.

Andrews: Is there anything else that you would like to comment on about Houston? The outcome?

Tsutakawa: I'm frankly really surprised that an ERA was never passed in this country. It seemed like there was such a strong and cohesive movement. I didn't know if national feminist leaders like the National Organization for Women decided to not pursue that particular fight at one point, or if there was not the necessary support in Congress. But it

seemed that there was such a wonderful and positive and strong feeling at that time that I was really surprised that it did not become part of our nation's laws. And it kind of makes me wonder if we were really just a tiny minority of the nation as a whole.

And in some of the elections in recent years, you know, you feel like oh, yeah, I agree with everything that's happening on the two coasts, but the middle part of America is just huge. And I think that there was a certain amount of idealizing that we felt, or, I mean, that we were carrying about, that now, looking back on it, we felt that it was really a good thing. The conference was really a good thing. It was an ideal situation of women's power and voices in unity with diversity. And yet, it didn't result in that one particular thing.

Now on the other hand, I think I have to say that on the local level, there have been many different improvements and a lot of women's strength in political action. Well, I'm about to talk about later Asian women's stuff.

Okay, I think in later years that somehow, at least among the Asians, what I mean is Asian Americans in Seattle, that a few people, key people, were active in the Democratic, and, to some extent, in the earlier, progressive version of the Republican Party. In other words, pro-Dan Evans type of Republican. There were enough Asian Americans involved at that time, and there was enough groundwork laid by people like Wing Luke having been elected to office in the Seattle City Council. There developed enough women in the Asian American community that now what has evolved is a good, strong representation of Asian Americans, including Asian American women, in political office. Okay, so this would be your mainstream society governmental positions. I feel that there's a strong Asian American presence and voice in government, local and state government here.

There was an Asian Women's Caucus that developed through the years after this period of the Houston conference. And people like Rita Brogan and Ticiang Diangson, and Maria Batayola, who's now still very active, and Dolores Sibonga, carried forward this sort of Asian Women's Caucus. And I don't know if it was called AWC, or it might have been Asian Women's Political Caucus, AWPC, but there was a group. And by the time the International Women's Conference in Beijing came along, when was that? Was it in the '80s or the '90s? Must have been in the '90s. [It was in 1995. (ed.)]

By the time that came along, there was a nice strong group of women, Asian women, including younger ones like Sharon Tomiko Santos, who, you know, then ran for office in state government. So there was a group that continued along. But I have to say, from my outside observational viewpoint, that the Asian women's group in Seattle became more of a mainstream political group, rather than a grassroots kind of movement. And maybe that is because the Asian American community as a whole became more professional, higher income level. You know, it was sort of the professionalization of the Asian women's movement from something that had been more of a grassroots, progressive movement, into more of a professional women's kind of situation.

Now one of the things that changed along the way in Asian American political life, was that a lot of immigrants started to come in from Southeast Asia. And then later, from South Asia. So the definition of the Asian American political movement has grown and widened. It's become nicely multi-ethnic. But there was a time when I felt that the newer Southeast Asian immigrants were not part of an Asian women's movement, and there was not so much animosity, but lack of recognition of the issues of the newcomer

immigrant women. And maybe that's all improved by now. But traditionally, the Asian political movement in the United States was Japanese, Chinese, Filipino. And later, the Vietnamese, Korean, South Asian, Taiwanese, Hong Kong, all of these other groups sort of came along later.

So it was almost, for those of us who were American born, kind of a lack of recognition of the newcomer immigrant. I mean, I guess that's a long way of saying that it took a while for us to really recognize and embrace the newcomer immigrants within the Asian political spectrum. But now there's a lot more of that embracing and involvement by the more recent immigrants.

Andrews: Let's go back just a little bit, to the time of the conferences. In your opinion, what were some of the positive and negative outcomes? Or have we already covered that?

Tsutakawa: Okay, so the negative outcome was that the ERA was not passed. But the positive outcome, I feel, is that within both the Asian community, and within the general public in Seattle, that there was a recognition that the women's movement was important, and that it was organized to the extent that there could be a national structure, like a national conference. And I think another good outcome was that some of the issues, such as childcare and equal pay for equal work got an airing, more of an airing.

Now a side good product, good thing, was that the individual women who took part in this were able to be recognized as leaders. And I feel that each of them in their way were recognized in their specific communities. And I'd like to say that they continued to take a leadership role in women's issues in at least identifying women's issues within their specific communities. I mean, that's me speculating, but I think that that was a positive outgrowth. I don't know about negative. I can't think of any negative things.

However, it still seemed to be funny at *The Seattle Times*, that the women's section was still separate.

Andrews: This was a real break for you, wasn't it? To bring the conferences and the women's movement into that section?

Tsutakawa: Well, you know, it was a good thing and it was a bad thing. You know, the women's news, feminist movement news, should have been in the newsroom. But our editor wanted it to be in our section. And all of us, there were four or five reporters, we all liked having it in our section because, you know, it was something good, and it broke the traditional mold. It was the strength of our editor that it stayed there. But at some point it obviously migrated over, because the View section became more of a Northwest living type of section. So at some point, the Women's Movement news went over to the newsroom. But it may not have gotten as much support if it had been in the newsroom from the beginning. So I think it was all right.

Andrews: Did you participate in conference follow up activities in the short or long term?

Tsutakawa: I have to say that although I was interested, I did not. By that time, after I got married and had children, I was working full time for *The Seattle Times*, I did not participate as much. And I was not an active part of the later Asian women's groups. So you'd have to talk to somebody else about those. I was supportive. And, but then I think I started working much more actively in arts-based community activities. They were grassroots, but they were really based in promoting artists and the arts. I was at the *Times* from '76 to '81. I feel like my first literary anthology was 1980. Because I had started working on the early pioneer Asian American artists. It was an interest area of mine. So by then, by around 1980, by the time I left the *Times*, I was working more on visual arts and literary projects in the community, rather than women's groups. You know, you only have so much time. [laughs] Plus, I had two kids.

Andrews: Oh, yes. You've already mentioned the anthologies.

Tsutakawa: Yeah, that's right. Around 1980, I started working on the two different women's anthologies. One was with Seal Press, that was *Gathering Ground*. And then *The Forbidden Stitch* was with Calyx. It became sort of more of a specialization that I wanted to work with. Rather than the political movement, the mainstream political movement, I wanted to work specifically with the women writers, the women artists. And that became really interesting to me. I enjoyed that. In both of my two maternity leaves, I worked on books.

Andrews: Do you feel that that was a breakthrough for women artists?

Tsutakawa: Well, yeah, I was really happy to be able to create the avenues for these women to be recognized for their special voice. And they were, the two books were mostly literary. I mean, they were mostly writers that we were promoting. Although there were some visual artists. I was really happy to be able to include the women artists. And then later, I did curate and organize some Asian American, or women's art shows. But I guess you'd have to say that my interest in the women's movement, that my early feminist leanings, were kind of, became channeled more toward the specialization of promoting the Asian women writers through the books, and the artists through the art shows, because I definitely worked in that direction after 1980. And it continued on all through the time I was at Seattle Central Community College, and when I was working at King County, all the way until now. Yeah.

Andrews: *Gathering Ground* is, as I recall, was multi-ethnic.

Tsutakawa: Yeah, I really enjoyed that. Just have always really enjoyed the multi-ethnic situation. And I have to say one funny thing, which might be offensive. And that is that I always said that I would never be part of an organization that was only one ethnicity. So the subtext there is that I have never been part of an all-Japanese organization. I always felt that it was important to be in a multi-ethnic situation.

Andrews: If there were specific issues that concerned you in Ellensburg and Houston, are some of them still being debated? Or have they been resolved?

Tsutakawa: [laughs] No, nothing is resolved. Well, like I said before, the ERA did not become part of national policy. And I have to say that we're still laboring under a situation where women do not get equal pay for equal work. For example, in some of the more gender-designated occupations, like garment workers, and so on, there's still really horrible working conditions and low pay, principally for recent immigrants. And that's why I think it's really important that we in the mainstream Asian American political world, you know, take time to understand the refugees and immigrant women's situation. Including childcare and the need for English as a second language in our schools and so on. There are still a lot of issues that are not resolved.

I think that we have more women political leaders, women corporate leaders, and a number of them are women of color. I mean, look at Condoleezza Rice. Even my mother, who doesn't understand that much about politics, asked me, "Do you think Condoleezza Rice could be president?" It's just kind of a veneer. It's not a true recognition of the conditions of African American women just because one conservative African American woman could be a head of the United States government, one of the heads.

So I think that there's a lot still that's important that has to be done. I can't be more specific than that.

Andrews: And as a final question, I think you were already talking about this, but from your perspective, how have women's lives changed since the conferences? And how have they stayed the same?

Tsutakawa: Well I think, among Asian Americans in the United States who are American born, or who have been here for a while, that there has been this great upward mobility based on the amount of education and the willingness for people to work together in small businesses to develop more stability and higher pay because of greater professional expertise and elevation. But I think it's still really important for the Asian American community to recognize its diversity. It's a really awfully diverse community.

Well, actually, I have to say that in all of the four major ethnic groups— I mean, maybe I'm an old timer to still refer to them as "the four major ethnic groups." But it's very interesting that among the Asians, maybe not the Native Americans, but to some extent, the African Americans, the Latinos. The Chicanos, have been forced to recognize that there are people from many other Latin American countries. The African Americans have been forced to recognize that there are many people from Africa, and black people from the Caribbean, that are in this country. The Native Americans have recognized, have begun to recognize, that there's an international indigenous population of people. So we've all, all of the American ethnic groups, we've had to really pay attention to the global picture rather than just thinking of us in the United States. This is so much more important for us now than ever, that within our own communities, living next door to people that are newcomers and speak different languages, but they're the same color as you. It's so important. And in schools, and in building coalitions. They're only just starting to build coalitions across these different international groups or countries within the same racial group. Only just starting to.

And there was just an article in the *New York Times* recently about how an American Islamic mosque representative from Harlem went to visit a much more wealthy Islamic mosque in Long Island. It was the first time that they had actually spoken to each other and yet, you know, same religion. And then also among the Latinos, it's so important for them to build a stronger coalition, instead of just being considered Mexican-Americans or Chicanos and Chicanas, but to work with the other Latin Americans.

So this whole issue of globalism has economic as well as political implications and is really important for us to study. I think that again, the traditional roles of women within the newcomer ethnic communities, is really different. It really demands attention, from us. In my community, my community around the central part of the city, you see so many of the East African women in the traditional hajib, or in the long gown, completely covered, completely covered to the head and face and everything. And the girls, also. And issues such as the recognition of equality for these girls within schools, and whether they can play sports, or whether they can wear short pants, or have to take off the scarf, which is required of them to wear. There are a lot of issues that have to do with this clash or this juncture of the newcomers within our schools, within our same ethnic or racial groups.

So I think that's one of our big challenges that's really important. And how it's handled on a local government basis, or how it's handled for us to educate ourselves and to figure out ways of communicating with each other. That's our challenge right now. And I think that our different communities, the organizations within the ethnic specific communities, like, say, the Central District Forum for Arts and Ideas, or the Urban League, or the Wing Luke Asian Museum, or El Centro de la Raza -- every one of these organizations is starting to try and figure out ways to build these bridges and to recognize the differences, and also celebrate these differences with these other groups.

Like the Wing Luke Asian Museum had an exhibit just on the Sikhs, you know, the Sikh community of South Asians. And that is a huge breakthrough, because they are so different from what you think of as the traditional Asian American person. And that community was so thrilled to be able to have their exhibit at the Wing Luke Museum. And in the same way, the Central District Forum is starting to have more communications with the newcomer African groups. And I mean, that is something that is just really important and really exciting. You know, very interesting and exciting to have African dance as a key part of an African American celebration, like at Seattle Center, the Festival Sundiata. I think it shows a lot of growth. And there's a lot of potential for enriching our community by communicating in that way. Certainly among the women of different cultures, I think they have a ways to go to communicate with each other. It's a challenge. That's a challenge.

Andrews: In summary, was there anything you'd like to add?

Tsutakawa: Hmm. Well, I don't know if it's possible to dedicate anything I just spoke of to anyone, but I have to say that Yuri Takahashi was quite a leader, and we're all sad that she died of cancer. She was so young, and she had a daughter.

Andrews: How old was she?

Tsutakawa: She could have been forty. Could have been, she had a daughter who was only about seven. But she was such a great leader. It's sad to see her gone.

Andrews: I think it would be lovely to dedicate this interview to her, if you would like to.

Tsutakawa: [laughs] Yeah, I would. I had met her when I went to Japan, because she was a Japanese art scholar, and I thought that she was so effete and academic. And then later, we just started working together on so many real community-based things.

Andrews: Is there anything else that you'd like to say about her? Your dedication?

Tsutakawa: No. I just thought of something else, though, that's important. In the early progressive movement, in the early '70s, in the Asian American community, I know I spoke of Seattle Third World Women, and that we were multi-ethnic. But I want to also mention that there was a real important Filipino group called KDP. It was a Filipino name that had to do with, something like Katipunan ng [Demokratikong] Pilipino. It was a strong progressive movement, very strong, Filipino American movement that's purpose was to be against the Marcos regime. And within that group, there were very important women leaders. And you know, I want to give recognition to the fact that they may not have been active in an Asian Women's Caucus, per se, but they were very strong leaders. And in fact, KDP was not all Filipino. There were other Asians, like Japanese Americans and so on, who were part of KDP.

But it was purely against the Marcos regime in the Philippines. And eventually the Marcos regime did fall. And really, they weren't messing around. It was a very dangerous kind of situation. And in fact, two of the KDP leaders were killed in Seattle. They were [Silme] Domingo and [Gene] Viernes, two guys who were the head of the Alaska Cannery Workers, which was a stronghold of anti-Marcos sentiment. They were actually shot.

So women, I want to give recognition to the fact that Filipina women were very strong leaders, and they were not necessarily part of the other Asian American Women's Caucus, and all of that.

Andrews: Do you recall the names of any of the ones that were involved?

Tsutakawa: Well, Elaine Ko. This is Elaine Ko who is now the head of Inter\*Im, the International District Improvement Association. So she could be found there if you wanted to talk to her. And Terry Mast, the wife, and Cindy Domingo, who was the sister of Silme Domingo, who was shot. Cindy Domingo was one of the, she was so young, but she was such an important leader of that group, the KDP. So, I mean, this is just to say that there were other important women leaders in the community.

I don't want to leave out any particular outstanding Asian American leaders from the early time. Dolores Sibonga. Well, Bettie Luke and Martha Choe, but they came a little bit later. And also, another person who was really important was Bea Kiyohara, who was part of the early Asian women's group. And she became an administrator at Seattle

Community College. But her great contribution was the Asian American theater. What's it called? Northwest Asian American Theater. She gave birth to that, and she's been an articulate leader for a long time.

And I mentioned Diane Narasaki. Diane Narasaki, right now, is probably the most prominent progressive Asian American woman leader in Seattle, as opposed to other ones who are elected officials. She's the head of ACRS Asian Counseling and Referral Service. I think I told you that name before. In a way, I would say that she's probably the most progressive.

Andrews: What about Assunta Ng, editor of the *International Examiner*?

Tsutakawa: What am I going to say about Assunta? That she's a successful businesswoman? I'll say it a different way. That a lot of us in the Asian American community who are more progressive have supported the *International Examiner* newspaper. The *International Examiner* is over thirty years old. And that has always been the core communications vehicle for the progressive Asian Americans. Other newspapers have come up, but people who support the *Examiner* feel that some of the other newspapers are more commercial vehicles.

Just one other person that I think is really important now, who came later, is Sue Taoka, who in terms of Asian women leaders in Seattle, is a long-time leader. She has been in the International District, the ID, the International District, PDA, Preservation and Development Authority. And she has just been a key intelligent leading force for preservation in the International District. So I just want to point out key women leaders in our community. She has definitely been very, very important.

Okay, if I'm going to name women who have been very important, Ruth Yoneyama Woo. Ruth Woo. She is one of the most, through the years, most powerful people in the political arena. So I would say in later years that she made it possible, and nurtured, Asian women to become, to run for political office. She was this key, pivotal influence.

Ruby Chow was important in the Chinese community in the International District, but she called it Chinatown. And her daughter, Cheryl Chow, who became, is a leader in the education arena. I think Ruby was really important to the Chinese community in developing and promoting the goals of Chinatown and the Chinese business community. She was a political leader. She was in elected office. And I think that she accomplished a lot.

Unfortunately, some of these characters, because of issues in the International District, Chinatown, there have been divisions within the Asian American political scene. And I think that Ruby Chow, because she was associated with the Chong Wa Benevolent Association, which had some differences with some of these other International District Asian American organizations, that there hasn't been a real close unity among those different parties. Probably, I'm sure Cheryl Chow is working more with some of the other Asian Americans now.

I have been involved for a long time. I was married for fourteen years to a man who is Chinese American, so I do know a lot about Chinese Americans. And he was involved in the development of a certain business in the International District for many, many years. So we basically had been involved in the community, and the Asian

American business, historical district, the International District, since 1972, '71. On and off, all that time. I'm not married to him now, but I still continue to be involved in supporting the Wing Luke Museum and the Asian Counseling Referral Service.

Oh, you know what? [laughs] I forgot one other thing. But I have a daughter, and it's been really important to me to make sure that she's been exposed to all of these different aspects of my life, including the arts. She's twenty, and she's in college. So—

Andrews: What's her name?

Tsutakawa: Oh, it's Yayoi, and then Tsutakawa, and then hyphen Chinn. So she's multi-ethnic because she's Japanese and Chinese. And both of my kids, I have a son, also, an older son, who's Kenzan with the same last name. And he lives in New York. He went to school and he lives in New York. He's involved in the design, industrial design. But Yaya – we call Yayoi Yaya – is twenty, and is going to school in Portland. And I'm really, really interested in both of them, achieving some political recognition. But her in particular. She has become much more, even more active in the multicultural students movement and demands on her campus. And she has, both of them have worked in all of these community organizations when they were growing up that we were involved in. So they have a lot of knowledge and experience. But she's really become the activist, the campus activist. And she feels really strongly that she wants to work in the community organizations in Portland.

And the thing is that because of having a daughter, I have observed a lot of the younger women coming up. And I think that they are growing up with a stronger sense of the ability of women to be equal partners, and to achieve whatever they want to achieve. So I do want to say that I'm very happy to have a daughter who is active, and who seems to be a confident young woman. She was involved in sports in a regional and national level. And so I think that she's really capable and a thinking person.

Andrews: Well, I like the positive summary.

Tsutakawa: [laughs] The next generation, I'm leaving it all to them.

Andrews: Hope for the future. Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

Tsutakawa: It's a good—

Andrews: Trip down memory lane.

Tsutakawa: All right.

[End Interview]