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**M**y Burch experience began when I stepped off of the train from the airport at Kashiwa, Japan and met my host mother, Keisei. Keisei was born and grew up in Shanghai, attended college in Japan, and currently works as an accountant at an American company based in Japan. She is married to a Japanese man and has a two year old daughter. Throughout my time in Japan, Keisei helped to guide me both through the ins and outs of living in Japan as an outsider, and in my research.

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## CHINESE WOMEN IN JAPAN: EXPLORING LAYERED IDENTITIES IN THE DIASPORA

I set off to Tokyo, Japan to interview Chinese immigrant women living in Japan about how they felt their identities as women and Chinese affected how they were treated in Japanese society. I had become interested in this for a few reasons. I had always been interested in feminism, and my major is Chinese. Last year I spent the summer interning for the Maple Women's Psychological Counseling Center, Beijing, and became very interested in Chinese feminism. Much of what had gone on in recent Chinese history sets the nation's society and culture apart from surrounding Asian nations such as Japan, Korea, and even Taiwan. I wanted to examine just how differently issues of gender equality were treated in Japan as opposed to China, so I decided to ask the people I thought would know – Chinese women living in Japan.

My experience began slowly. I adjusted to jet lag and began to become acquainted with the culture. Living with a host family was ideal for this. I ate home cooked Japanese and Chinese food and had patient friends who were ready to help me with any questions I had about anything. Once I began my research, Keisei was instrumental in helping me get started with my research. I interviewed her and she introduced me to several of her friends who had come to Japan for similar reasons: higher education, opportunities, and work.

On one occasion I was able to observe the opening of a foreign languages school. The headmistress was also a Chinese immigrant living long-term in Japan. She made her living teaching Chinese. Keisei introduced me and I was able to talk to her about how she felt about living Japan. I was surprised that although anti-Japanese sentiment is rampant in mainland China, some Chinese I met in Japan had very high opinions about Japanese people, the government, and society at large.

But the majority of these women still firmly considered their nationality immutable. Keisei, for instance, was unwilling to exchange her Chinese passport for Japanese citizenship despite her marriage, career, child, and every intention to remain in Japan indefinitely. I asked her why and she gave me several reasons. Firstly, she stated she was Chinese. There was no qualifying factor: here nationality was tied to her identity at the most basic level. American citizens may have a harder time understanding this because ours is more so nation of immigrants, but Keisei and others felt that giving up Chinese citizenship would be a kind of betrayal of their identity.

I interviewed students as well as career women. The students I talked to were more ambivalent about Japan, and had not decided whether they would remain in Japan or return to China. Some also voiced concerns about economic opportunities. This generation was more deterred by the problems Japan had faced since the Bubble

Chinese living in Japan are planning their futures.

Many people I interviewed spoke not only to the experience of Chinese women in Japan but also the experience of being an outsider. About half of the people I interviewed spoke of an invisible barrier they felt between themselves and their Japanese friends. They attributed it to a cultural expectation of privacy in Japanese society that was not present in Chinese

society, but some of the others felt it was more universal, similar to the biblical experience of the "stranger in a strange land." While there are some universal aspects of their experiences, the individual characteristics tell a lot about the contexts and backgrounds of the interviewees.

Documenting these varied experiences helped me get a better grasp of how Chinese women felt about their surroundings, but it also gave me a small taste of how those surroundings, Japanese society, felt about them. Living with a home stay not only helped me get a taste of Japanese food, but helped me improve my Japanese as well. The language immersion brought me closer to Japanese society while I was examining Chinese perceptions of it. Compared to China, Japan is a much more economically developed and strictly ordered society. Chinese society is more casual, along the lines of American society. Though these are sweeping generalizations, they are generalizations that most Chinese and Japanese I met made. I hope that someday when my Japanese language skills are more fluent I will be able to explore the differences from another perspective, perhaps by interviewing Japanese women living abroad in China. I hope that by documenting these experiences I can spread awareness about feminism in Asia and its diversity.



economy burst. The pessimism and social unease about this event sharply contrasts with the unqualified capitalist

optimism. At the same time, China's economy has developed rapidly since the economic reforms of the eighties. This changing economic dynamic probably accounts for some of the discrepancies between how the older and younger generations of