

*Talk by Ms. Yan at the April, 2001 National "Ain't I A Woman?!" Conference*

*New York City*

I'm a Board member of CSWA. My name is Yan. In the last decade or so I've been working as a supervisor in a garment factory. My job is to manage every single department of the factory. I'm working under very high pressure and I work very long hours. In order to ensure that every day clothes are being produced on time, I have to work more than 10 hours. Not only am I not able to take care of my family, I'm also not able to take care of my children. Every night when I get home, my kids are already sleeping, so what I have to do is to wake them up and feed them before they can go back to sleep. With things like this they are not being taken care of, they don't eat well, and no one is taking care of their homework. As parents we have not been doing our work, we have not been responsible for being parents.

I don't get home till very late and I still have to cook, clean up, and wash clothes. I don't get to bed until 2 or 3 am every single morning. And then the next day I have to get up very early, prepare breakfast for my children, take them to school, and go to work another 13-hour day. I've been doing this for more than 10 years now and I'm at a point that I can't stand it anymore. But there are five people in my family and I cannot just let my husband take on this burden all by himself. So in other words, I have to continue to work every day, to work and to take up this burden. This kind of labor has put me in a situation where I don't have any thoughts, I don't have any emotions, and I don't have anything I want to long for any more. I don't have any dreams. I've tried my best to

work very hard and I've been longing for many things but what happens is that I don't get anything in return.

Three years ago something terrible happened in my family. My oldest son dropped out of high school and for six months and we had no idea that this was happening. Why is this happening? It is because the parents have to go to work really early in the morning and don't get home till really, really late. We have no time to take care of kids at all. For example, my son, when he was in middle school and until he was in high school at the very beginning he had been doing pretty well actually. All I did was to provide him with some material needs and to satisfy those needs. (*Ms. Yan began to cry.*)

We never got a chance to understand his adolescent development. It came to a point where he felt that he was not getting the attention he needed. So he started cutting classes and what we saw was that he got up at six o'clock and left home every single morning. What we did not know was that he had been going back to the apartment every single day and was working on his computer. Because we were not home, every day whenever there was mail coming in from the school trying to tell us that he had been out of school for a long time, we were not able to receive that mail because we were not home and he had been keeping all this mail. Until one day the school called me at work and told me that "your kid has been out of school for six months, how come you were not paying attention at all?" Because we did not get to know this until so late, by the time we understood, by the time we heard about it was a little too late for us to do anything.

My kid was so used to dropping out of school and not being noticed by any one of us. It had become such a habit that by the time I switched him to another high school, he

was no longer able to go back to school again because he felt that no matter what's going on no one is going to find out, no one is going to be paying attention. So even when he's in another school, it's like, he could go to school for a few days and he could be out of school for another few days, he can do what he wants to do because no one is going to find out because we are never home.

I was left with no option. So my decision, what I did was I decided to quit my job in the factory, so nowadays my job is to send my kids to school and to pick them up from school. I'm thinking about the other two kids that I have too. We are working very long hours and we, both parents, mother and father have to be working every single day. What we gain is actually not enough to compensate what we lose. For one thing we are not able to take care of our kids, another thing, the truth is that no matter how hard we work, we are not making enough money, so all we have every day is just some very simple food.

I feel that women are also human beings. I feel that as women we have to come out and we have to stand up. We actually have a dual burden. One is we have to go out and make a living, wages. The second thing is that after we go home, we have to take care of our home, we have to take care of our kids, we have to take care of our family. Our work is very, very difficult and hard, and no matter how hard it is, the society has not recognized the value of our work. The general opinion in society is that women's work at home, taking care of the kids, taking care of the family, is something that is taken for granted, is something that women are supposed to do. This is not something that women can say I don't want to do it, can just avoid doing it, every day we come home we have to cook, we have to do the house work, we have to clean up, we have to do it. This work is so

difficult and so hard that I don't think it's fair for women. Even if women can get the same kind of wages as men do, we still have to work for another job after we go home. Work at home has never been compensated, it is never something that people will say that we will pay you separately for the work you do at home. Can you tell me, isn't it the responsibility of the society? We have to value the work of women at home, raising the next generation and taking care of our family. Why not value our work at home? Why not understand that our work at home is also work? If we have to send our kids outside we still have to pay people to take care of our kids, how come babysitters are making money and we have to be paying other people to take care of our kids? What I am demanding here is that society allows us to gain a kind of energy and time that we need to raise the next generation. And the young people who are here today, in every mother's eye, if you are not married if you are not with someone you are still a child.

Our children are our future. They are the ones who will be working in the future they will be contributing to the future, they will be working in big companies. They will be protecting their country and they will be contributing a lot to the future of our society. What we are demanding here today in this national gathering is that women's work, including work at home, should be valued and compensated by the society. We should fight for equality, fair conditions, and the fair compensation that we deserve.