

## CHAPTER 4

# Universities, Women, and the Dialogue among Civilizations

*Ruth Hayhoe*

The United Nations declared 2001 the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The purpose of this designation, as elaborated on a special website, is as follows: to ‘emphasize that the present globalization process does not only encompass economic, financial and technological aspects, but must also focus on human cultural, spiritual dimensions and on the interdependence of mankind and its rich diversity’ (<http://www.unesco.org/dialogue2001>). UNESCO sees this dialogue as ‘an essential stage in the process of human development that is both sustainable and equitable. It humanizes globalization and lays the basis of an enduring peace, by nurturing conscience and a common basis for human existence, rooted in history, heritage and tradition’ (<http://www.unesco.org/dialogue2001>).

This call to dialogue presents a significant challenge to universities, given the dominance of certain patterns of knowledge and approaches to epistemology in the university’s traditions. This chapter will explore ways in which women scholars in the university community may contribute to overcoming the constraints of these patterns, and stimulate active participation in dialogue. Two experiences over the past decade gave me a sense of the particular qualities women scholars could bring to such a dialogue. One related to a major project of development with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the second to preparations for the United Nations World Congress on Women held in Beijing in 1995.

Between 1989 and 2001, I was involved in two major CIDA projects supporting a number of normal universities or teachers universities in