



Women in Asia

March 1996

*Women's Caucus
Asian Studies
Association of
Australia*

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Anne & I are encouraged that national support and interest for *Women in Asia* has continued to grow over the past 12 months. We have also made contact with organisations around the globe including some in North America, Europe and many parts of South, Southeast & North Asia. The promotion of research and information on women in the Asian region and remains our top priority. As is evident from the three contributions in this current issue Australian scholars are working within a broad number of disciplines & geographic areas. We aim to be able to reflect this diversity in each of our issues.

The forthcoming ASAA conference to be held at LaTrobe University this July will be the location for the Women's Caucus General Meeting. Please bring any

concerns and ideas for the future development of the caucus' activities to that forum. We look forward to seeing you there.

We would like to welcome Kathy Robison to the position of ACT state contact. She replaces Helen Creese who has taken up a lectureship in Indonesian at UQ. Helen will continue with *Women in Asia* as the Queensland contact. Louise Edwards (ACU-Qld)
Anne Cullen (Griffith)

NEXT ISSUE

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WOMEN'S CAUCUS EMAIL NETWORK
If you have email facilities and want to be on the list please send a message to Louise Edwards at ACU.

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***We have found a
host for the***

***5th Women in Asia
Conference!***

Sydney University

***All interested in helping
organise should contact***

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¶ The ASAA Women's Caucus would like to thank Australian Catholic University and Griffith University [FAIS] for their support in the publication of this bulletin. We would also like to thank Lyndsay Farrell of ACU's Visual Arts Program for designing the logo for *Women in Asia*

In the second half of 1995 I was in China on research leave, and since my area of interest is in gender relations and women and development in contemporary China it made sense that I should attend the NGO Forum on Women. All the same, I nearly didn't make it, because my confirmation of registration and accommodation did not arrive

until the very last minute. In any case, for me as for many others there were plenty of questions surrounding the politics of this Forum. Should we have boycotted it because of China's human rights record? Should we have refused to participate once we knew that the Chinese government had moved it to Huairou, 50 km from the centre of Beijing so that anything worth listening to would not be heard? Should we have avoided association with yet another huge UN pantomime?

Still, I got there, along with about 25,000 other women. My first feeling, driving in the bus from the airport to Huairou was a mixture of awe and disorientation because of the extent to which the entire landscape had been spruced up and rid of people. Not a single daggy peasant anywhere. That strange feeling remained with me for much of the Forum. In part this was because it just didn't seem like China. Within the Forum there were crowds and crowds of women, with the most astonishing array of different languages, different faces, different clothes. But outside the main venue the streets were almost deserted. It was as if the entire local population had been shipped out for the duration of the Forum. The other awe inspiring aspect of the Forum was its sheer size. It was spread out across 42 hectares and altogether there was an average of about 350 workshops to choose from every day. In addition, there were scores of protest marches, music, dancing and various performances during the evening, informal get-togethers and activities happening all the time, and a huge number of shops and stalls set up. The amount of paper around - pamphlets, notices, posters - was staggering. Information overload. And another forest gone.

The first sustained contact I had with anyone else in Huairou was with the 'volunteers'. There were about 100,000 of them: high school and university students from Beijing assigned to help with everything from registration and accommodation to finding the location of workshops, to interpreting. They helped many a hapless foreigner like myself who'd gotten lost again for the umpteenth time, and in many respects it was they who kept the Forum going. In turn, I think also, that at least for those with some English, this was a rare and wonderful opportunity to meet people from all over the world and to hear a whole babel of voices that otherwise in

GUEST COLUMNIST

*The NGO Forum on Women, Huairou
September 1995*

A Personal Account

TAMARA JACKA

China are carefully screened and limited. The high school students who were trying to find a room for me to stay in were not enjoying themselves though. They were not being paid and they had not volunteered - their school had simply been told it was going to Huairou. Everything

was in chaos, and even though it was only the afternoon of the first day, all the foreigners were very impatient and were taking it out on them. Their English was none too good, and very few of the visitors spoke Chinese.

The next morning I set out at 7.30 in the pouring rain. I had my raincoat on, but by the time I got to the bus stop my jeans and sandals were completely soaked. Then once we had arrived at the main venue site it took me another forty minutes to work out how to get to the first workshop I had chosen.

The Forum workshops were organised under 13 broad themes ranging from the economy, governance and politics, and human and legal rights, to health, the environment, spirituality and religion, race and ethnicity and youth.

I was particularly interested in the numerous sessions on women in migration, trafficking and prostitution. A large number of groups and coalitions from across the world presented various different perspectives. For some, the central concern was to improve the rights, powers and conditions of prostitutes and other migrant workers. Others were most concerned to provide education and alternative employment so that women would not be forced into prostitution. Yet others were concerned primarily with cracking down on illegal trafficking and bringing to justice the operators.

As with the Forum as a whole, there were moments in these workshops that were very depressing, and some that were deeply moving, heartening and inspiring. There were awful accounts of the ways in which migrant women had been exploited, abused and denied basic rights. But it was also clear that women were forming organisations and coalitions, both nationally and across national borders to protect migrant women workers and reduce trafficking. As one speaker in a workshop presented by the Asian Migrant Forum said, such coalitions are essential. Already, in Malaysia and elsewhere one can see a difference between the way in which migrant women workers from the Philippines are treated and the way in which those from Bangladesh, Indonesia and elsewhere are treated. And the difference arises from the strength of the women's movement in the Philippines and amongst Filipinas the world over.

There were some serious conflicts and disagreements between different perspectives. On

occasion these generated interesting and worthwhile debates. At other times, however, the construction of hierarchies of power and correctness, the formation of singular dominant discourses and the marginalisation of others was what struck me most. My impression was that the most powerful group there was the Coalition against Trafficking in Women, funded by UNESCO. They ran a workshop entitled 'Sexual Exploitation and Women's Human Rights: Global Crisis and Legal Response'. I found this workshop disturbing because of what seemed like a steadfast refusal to see anything in terms other than the starkest and most simplistic, because of the continual slippages being made between sexual exploitation, prostitution, trafficking and migration and because of the claim that the whole lot was to be condemned and abolished, as the most vicious form of exploitation suffered by women. The speakers condemned prostitution as being the sale of human bodies, turning women into commodities, and they argued that prostitution harms all women, and that therefore no woman has the right to engage in it.

I privately reflected on my conversations with a couple of young rural Chinese women who had chosen prostitution in preference to the other forms of employment available to them. I reflected on what I had heard an American woman say in a workshop the day before - that she had been a police woman, but became so disillusioned with the brutality of the police that she became a prostitute. I wondered whether selling one's body as a prostitute was always so much worse a degradation than selling one's body as an exploited and underpaid factory worker. And it occurred to me that it was not an accident that global capitalism was not mentioned once.

But unfortunately this was not one of those occasions where arguments raged or debates flourished. The speakers were so articulate and so forceful and their presentations so emotionally charged that it would have been suicide to challenge them. No one did - at least not in that session.

There was a fantastic array of different voices and different viewpoints at the conference, with particularly strong representation from South Asia. All the same, Americans still seemed to dominate in many of the workshops. This, and the emphasis on sexual violence and sexual exploitation, was something that a number of Indian and Southeast Asian women I talked to felt frustrated by.

In addition, whilst the global nature of many of the problems facing women, and the need for links and networks on a global scale were themes running right through the Forum, it often seemed to me that China was not being seen as part of the world community. China was very rarely brought into discussions in anything other than the most tokenistic way, and few Chinese women participated in workshops other than those relating specifically to China.

In turn, I was one of very few non-Chinese women who participated in the workshops relating to China. Some of these were, however, amongst the best that I attended. In particular, the session put on by the Women's Research Institute and those involved in its Women's Hotline presented very interesting discussions of surveys they had conducted on sexual harassment and domestic violence, women's health, marriage and divorce and other issues raised by the women using the hotline. As you will have heard from the mainstream media, there were a lot of problems associated with this Forum. A lesbian group had their Chinese language materials confiscated, and a Chinese prostitute who was to have spoken in one workshop did not appear. Dai Qing, the well known Chinese writer and opponent of the Three Gorges Dam project was prevented from speaking at the launch of a book and was then sent to Harbin for the duration of the NGO forum and Women's Conference. Thirty boxes of freight belonging to the International Women's Development Agency got lost somewhere in between Melbourne and Beijing. And for women with disabilities the forum was a nightmare. Some women were unable to give talks that they had prepared because they couldn't get to the room that had been scheduled for them.

Asian Studies Association of Australia 20th Anniversary Conference

COMMUNICATIONS WITH/IN ASIA

La Trobe University
Melbourne 8-11 July 1996

The theme is COMMUNICATIONS with/in ASIA
(though in keeping with custom, papers not directly
related to the theme are also eligible)

April 1996 Deadline for abstracts of papers

Conference Convenor is Professor Robin Jeffrey,
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Vic 3083

Tel (03) 9479-2692

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Email: polrj@lure.latrobe.edu.au

To register your interest contact the conference
administrators:

ASAA 1996, Waldron Smith Management
93 Victoria ave
Albert Park Vic 3206

For everyone in fact the Forum was physically and practically very difficult and very tiring. But there was also an enormous sense of exhilaration and excitement. So many women of such diverse backgrounds coming together! Simply in terms of the workshops that I went to, this was by far the most informative and inspiring conference that I had ever been to. I also met all sorts of interesting people and established valuable contacts, and I had a lot of fun. The fact that I was continually getting lost, that half the time it was sweltering hot and the other half it poured like cats and dogs and turned everything into a sea of mud, the fact that the two Bahaman women sharing the room next door to me refused to adjust to the time difference and got up every morning at 4 am, and the fact that the plumbing didn't work and there was a flood every time we tried to wash - well I can't explain it, but it all seemed hilariously funny.

But we live in a grim and difficult world, and for all our hopes for global sisterhood, this was no haven or panacea. I must tell you about the Esprit bags. Every participant received on her arrival a cloth carry bag, generously donated by Esprit. Of course, it didn't take long for us to figure out that those bags had been made by young rural Chinese women working 14 hours a day under appalling conditions in Special Economic Zones in the South of China. Someone told me that there was a campaign on to return the bags to Esprit with rude messages on them. But I never did find out who was running the campaign, or where I was to send the bag. In the end I kept it, because it was useful for carrying all the chopped-down forests, and because it seemed like an appropriately ironic souvenir.

All the same, the Forum was valuable as a chance for women to speak, to listen and to share. And there were moments when we looked at each other and thought it possible to change the world. For those moments alone, it was fantastic.

According to some women, the greatest limitations of the NGO Forum were the enormous difficulties faced by those attempting to influence the UN Conference, and the fact that the Forum did not come up with its own strategic action plan to complement, and where necessary contrast with, the UN Platform for Action. Certainly, time pressures, and the way in which workshops had been structured, made it difficult to convert speeches and discussions into concrete plans for action. The Forum should not be seen as a singular event in isolation though. Nor, perhaps, is it so useful to keep on churning out plan after grand plan. In the end, perhaps the most important thing about the NGO Forum on Women was that it was the culmination of months and months of acting, lobbying, and networking, and that it will be the beginning for much more.

[Tamara Jacka lectures in Chinese at Murdoch University, WA]

GENDER STUDIES: NEWS AND VIEWS

A Bilingual English-Chinese Bulletin Published by
the Gender Research Programme of Chinese
University of Hong Kong

Chief Editor: Eva Hung
Editorial Board: Eleanor Holroyd, Eva Hung, Susan
Ma, Marie Wong, Yip Hon Ming

Previous issues included articles on Women and Literature,
Women and Health, UN's Beijing Conference on Women, and
New Zealand Chinese Women.

Gender Studies: News and Views welcomes any essays,
reports, reviews as well as information on gender issues in
English and Chinese. Please send your contributions,
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Gender Research Program
Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
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ANU—Institute of Advanced Studies
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Closing Date 10 May 1996

REF: PA 6.3.1

I am a PhD student looking at the social and economic impacts of rural feeder roads in Sarawak, Malaysia, and have recently returned from a 12 month period of fieldwork. Three study sites were selected for investigation; one in an Iban area (the Iban comprise 30% of Sarawak's population), and two in Bidayuh areas (the Bidayuh comprise approximately 8% of the population). In recognition of the importance of disseminating information at an early stage, I wrote a Discussion Paper for the Agricultural Economics section at the University of Queensland entitled *Women and Rural Development in the Interior Areas of Sarawak: Some Early Impressions from Fieldwork*. The following is an extract from that paper and focuses on the productive role of women in their communities.

Introduction

Rural households in all areas of Sarawak have traditionally relied on some form of agriculture and it is women's role in agriculture that is given prominence here.

Information in this section is largely gathered from the two Bidayuh areas for which more detailed observations were made than the Iban area. During survey work in separate villages, various individuals or groups were asked whether specific farming activities involved mainly men, women or both. In the five Bidayuh villages in the Padawan area, responses were gathered from four male key informants and three women's discussion groups. In five villages in the Bau area, responses were collected from four women's discussion groups and four male key informants. Unless otherwise stated the discussion on female and male involvement in farming activities and decision making relates to these two Bidayuh areas of study. Frequent reference is made to Gerrits (1994) who completed an in-depth study of a Bidayuh village farming system in the Padawan area.

Agriculture

The farming systems in the interior of Sarawak combine characteristics of three often separately described sub-systems. The principal food crop, hill padi¹, is grown under a system of shifting cultivation; farms include a commercial cash crop sector; and there is still a considerable reliance on the forest for hunting and gathering activities.

It has long been recognised that men and women both participate in agriculture in Iban (Freeman 1955) and Bidayuh (Geddes 1954) areas. If specific farming activities are considered separately, some tasks are associated with a gender distinction, e.g. men may do the heavier tasks such as felling trees to

POSTGRADUATE PROFILE A LOOK AT BIDAYUH FARMERS IN WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE SARAWAK, MALAYSIA

JILL WINDLE

clear a new padi field. However if farming is considered in its entirety, female and male labour are apparently equally important. The acknowledged equality between male and female labour is manifest in both Iban and Bidayuh

systems of *exchange labour* and *community labour*.

Exchange labour (basically if a person works on another's farm for one day, the recipient owes the donor one days labour) is still commonly practised, and while work can be allocated to cash crops it is more likely to be associated with hill padi. Labour exchange is not strictly task-oriented: the donor can perform a task on somebody's farm and be repaid by the recipient performing a different task on the donor's farm. Similarly male labour can be repaid with female labour and vice versa. If a household lacks strong male labour needed to clear a new padi field from old growth forest, males can be employed under the exchange labour system and be repaid by females performing a different task, e.g. underbrushing (Freeman 1970:237; Gerrits 1994:121).

Community labour is where each household in the community must contribute one person for communal work, e.g. cleaning the compound or constructing communal buildings. Again no distinction is made between female and male labour, although females and males may perform different tasks. It is recognised that gender differences are overridden by the fact that some people are stronger than others and some work harder and more consistently than others. Certainly some women can work harder than men. Participation in community labour illustrated how the labour input of different individuals varied considerably.

In contrast to the equality that exists in exchange labour and communal labour systems, when it comes to wage labour this "inherent equality" evaporates and women are paid less for a days work than are men. In 1994, the daily wage rate for men was RM 10 compared with RM 8 for women (AUD = 1.8 Malaysian Ringgit [RM]). While this difference was sometimes explained by males performing the tasks requiring stronger physical labour, this was not always the case and raises the question why physically demanding labour should be rewarded more highly than the more dexterous qualities associated with female labour.

Farming in general and the cultivation of hill rice in particular is hard work for both women and men. Padi fields can be located up to two hours walk from the village and villages can be located up to four hours walk (in steep hilly terrain) from a road or navigable river. There is no use of animals or adapted vehicles for portage: everything has to be carried on people's backs and women, men and children are all capable of carrying heavy loads

¹ Hill padi refers to the system of growing rice on hill slopes that are neither terraced nor irrigated. Only one crop is harvested per year.

(women up to 50kg and men up to 70kg). A caption in one of the photographs in Sutlive (1988) suggests men carry loads up to 80kg. There is no status attached to carrying heavy loads, apart from the respect all hard working people are afforded. The main determinant is the fitness of the individual: a young healthy woman can carry more than an older male in poor health.

Cash Crops

In many countries, particularly African, where women's involvement in agriculture is considerable, women are usually associated with the production of food crops and men with cash crops (Boserup 1970). This is seen to disadvantage women in two ways: first, men can sell their produce and control the cash income of the household; and second, while women contribute to the non-monetary income of the household through their supply of food, it is not considered of equal importance to cash income. In Sarawak, women are involved in both cash crop and food crop production. In 1994, as there was little rubber tapped, pepper was the main cash crop and in general both women and men in Bidayuh areas recognised that activities relating to pepper were carried out by both genders. In both Bidayuh areas, women (in discussion groups) and men (through interviews with key informants) were asked whether they thought women or men were mainly involved in pepper cultivation. Whilst all women responded that both males and females were involved, some men responded that mainly males were involved. As it was explained that opinions should relate to a community rather than household context, it suggests some men perceive their involvement in cash crop production differently than women. Participatory observation confirmed the involvement of both genders.

Food Crops

The cultivation of hill padi has enormous cultural and religious significance as well as providing food for the household. Great respect and social prestige was afforded households that constantly produced a rice surplus for the year. Apart from rice, a padi field also contains maize and tapioca that feeds both the family and any livestock, and provides a variety of vegetables for about nine months of the year.

Throughout Sarawak, both males and females are involved in padi production. In Bidayuh areas, the decision on how much padi to plant is sometimes made by the men only but usually both women and men are involved in decision-making. Women argue that if they are to work in the padi field, they must be consulted on pertinent decisions. When asked who decided what varieties of rice to plant, women thought that they made the decision (apart from one women's discussion group where they thought the decision was made by men and women), whereas some men said the decision was made jointly and some said that they made the decision themselves. This perceptual difference is supported by Janowski (1991) working in a Kelabit area who suggested that

although decision-making in rice cultivation appears to be made by both men and women, in reality, key choices are made by adult women. Schwenk (1994), working with the Iban, also found that the most authoritative and up-to-date information about padi comes from the older women who not only work all stages of a rice crop but are also "guardians and like mothers to the sacred rice".

The importance of secondary crops in the padi field was highlighted generally (Dove 1983), in relation to the Iban (Cramb 1985) and in a Bidayuh context (Gerrits 1994). However no gender distinction is mentioned regarding these activities. Cramb (pers. comm., 16/8/1995) suggested that in Iban areas, both men and women are involved in secondary crop planting and harvesting and Gerrits (pers. comm., 18/8/1995) while acknowledging that women are mainly involved in the harvesting of secondary crops, considered both to be involved in the overall production of secondary crops. In this survey, key informants and women's discussion groups were asked who was involved in the production of secondary crops and three crop categories were specified: tapioca, maize, and vegetables. In the Padawan area, apart from two male informants, both women and men thought mainly women are involved in all three categories. One male informant thought both females and males are involved in vegetable production and another thought both females and males are involved in tapioca production. In the Bau area, all respondents thought that mainly women are involved in the production of tapioca, maize and vegetables. It should be emphasised that "mainly women labour" does not mean exclusively women and so does not mean men are not involved. As with cash crop production, some men perceive their involvement to be more important than do women. It can be argued that men's perceptions are not dissimilar to those of women and rather the difference between the responses "mainly women" and "both women and men" is not distinct enough. However, all of the women and most of the men did not appear to be confused over the distinction.

The evidence indicating perceptual differences in women's participation in agriculture, is restricted to a suggestive nature, as the number of respondents involved was relatively small. Even in the women's groups where many women were present, the groups only realistically represented the opinions of a few.

Livestock

Women generally, although not exclusively, tend the domestic livestock (pigs and chickens) and are mainly responsible for gathering (wild yams) and processing food for the animals. Harvesting tapioca (a secondary crop) which can be used as pig food suffers the same problems of perception as mentioned above: women perceive their involvement to be greater than men perceive the situation. Iban men exclusively, care for their fighting cocks, often

buying feed, but cock rearing is a leisure activity and does not contribute to household income. In fact in many cases, it can be a drain on household income as money is lost through gambling.

Agricultural Extension

Agricultural extension officers are all male and while they have a good relationship with both women and men in the rural community, their extension activities are directed at men and mainly focus on subsidies for cash crops. In Iban areas information is delivered on the *ruai*, the communal area of a longhouse, where meetings can be attended by all. While women are more likely to sit on the periphery where they can move around more easily and attend to the children, they can listen to the discussion and are not excluded from contributing. In Bidayuh areas, where they mostly live in separate dwellings, information is delivered in the *Balai Raya*, the community hall, and although, theoretically, all are welcome to attend meetings, they are attended by the heads of household, usually male. The women and the elderly who do not attend these meetings rely on others to disseminate information. The effectiveness of dissemination to women relies very much on their relationship with their spouse. In all the women's discussion groups held in Bidayuh areas the women were dissatisfied that while they participate in agriculture, extension advice is delivered to the men. When one extension officer in an Iban area was asked why he directed his information to the men, he confidently replied that they were the main farmers.

In defence of this bias, the Agriculture Department claims that women are addressed through the female agricultural staff and the Home Economics Program which mainly emphasises domestic matters such as cleanliness, nutrition and child care. Some agricultural advice and subsidised inputs are provided for use in home vegetable gardens, a domestic activity as opposed to a farming activity, but one of increasing importance as the sale of vegetables gains importance. It is interesting that one group of women in the Bau area, when asked by the Home Demonstrator what they wanted to do in the "sewing program", replied that they preferred to be given maize seeds so they could grow and sell more maize and would then have enough money to buy their clothes!

Technological Change

It is sometimes thought that technological innovations favour men and may even displace the labour of women (Boserup 1991). In Sarawak, labour rather than land is the major limiting factor in the upland farming systems, and so technology that displaces labour is likely to be considered beneficial. To consider if new technology has a gender bias, consideration must be given to who is involved in a given task, before and after adoption of the technology.

Two main innovations can be seen in the upland farming systems in Sarawak. First the introduction

of the chainsaw has replaced the use of axes to fell trees to clear the padi field. Women do not use chainsaws, but they did use axes to fell trees, particularly in areas where secondary growth was not too extensive. Colfer (1981:83) confirmed this in East Kalimantan where before the introduction of the chainsaw and outboard motor, women and men could both use all tools available to the Kenyah. Padoch (1978:106) also mentioned how some women are good at wielding an axe and can clear quite large secondary growth. Gerrits (1994:121) noted that women also participated in felling trees, though he also mentioned that secondary growth up to 20 years old can be felled with a machete and an axe is only needed for older growth (Gerrits 1994:165). The chainsaw is new technology which favours men as women do not use this new tool but did use the tool it replaces. As the new technology is increasingly employed in associated tasks, women will be increasingly excluded from participating and whilst this frees their labour for other, maybe less arduous tasks, it reinforces a gender distinction associated with the activity and promotes the concept that women cannot perform the heavier tasks in agriculture.

The second innovation is the use of chemicals and particularly the use of weedicides. Prior to this weeding was done by hand and mainly by the women. Although Gerrits (1994:193) stated that only men will apply chemical weedicides, in this study women were observed using weedicides in both the Iban and the Bidayuh areas. This innovation has favoured women as it has released them from the drudgery of hand weeding and has not excluded them from using the new technology (a somewhat dubious benefit when considering the hazards of improper use of chemicals).

NATIONAL VISITING SCHOLARSHIPS SCHEME FOR PHD SCHOLARS

Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies

Visiting fellowships from PhD scholars from other Australian universities are invited to apply for grants to spend up to three months at the ANU. RSPACS will provide office facilities and financial support in the form of return travel and a living allowance to the successful applicants. Applicants should be undertaking research on a Pacific or Asian country or region and in a discipline covered by the RSPACS. Applicants must have been on-course for a minimum of 6 months at their home university by the time of their projected arrival at ANU and should be able to take up their scholarship in 1996.

Closing Date: 1 April 1996
REF: PA 28.2.1
Information from School Secretary
RSPACS, ANU, Canberra ACT 0200
Tel (06) 2492678
Fax (06) 249 4836
email: schl.sec@rspas.anu.edu.au

Income

Household income is generated from a variety of sources including the following.

a) Sale of cash crops. The main crops involved are pepper, rubber and cocoa, with both men and women sharing activities.

b) Sale of food crops. In the Layar area, food crops are not sold apart from on a very informal and not well established local level. If there is a school, clinic, or agricultural sub-station, some produce may be sold to staff. At the two other sites, increasingly the vegetables grown within the padi field are being sold via three principal channels. First, vegetables, especially the heavier ones, can be sold to local shop-keepers or traders who come and buy from the farmers. Produce must be carried to the road where it is sold or collected. Second, produce can be taken to a market for sale, either in Kuching or at one of the intermediate markets between Bau or Padawan and Kuching. This involves both women and men, but is more likely to be associated with women. Third, the lighter produce can be hawked, i.e. selling from door to door. This appears to be the exclusive realm of the younger women as the men and older women are too *malu* (embarrassed) to do this. Some men also appear too *malu* to sell produce in the market but this varies from village to village.

c) Sale of fruit. Fruit trees may be planted in orchards or may be scattered through the forest. Trees are owned either privately by a household or in common by a descent group or a community. Both genders are involved in their collection & sale.

d) Sale of jungle produce. Generally both genders are involved in the collection of jungle produce, with women predominantly involved in its sale at a market. An important source of income in the Bau area is from the collection of birds' nests (used to make birds' nest soup). This activity is specialised and dangerous and is restricted to a limited number of males.

e) Wage labour. This concerns both genders and is discussed in detail below in the section on Employment.

f) Home production. This includes several activities such as livestock, handicrafts, honey, and alcohol production. While honey and alcohol are not gender specific activities, women are generally involved in livestock rearing and the making of handicrafts. Traditional handicrafts such as baskets and mats are items with a well recognised market value but the handicraft skills the younger women are taught at school enables them to make items for household decoration but which do not have a market value. In the Bidayuh areas, few young women learn to make traditional handicrafts, but in the Iban area of study, some young women had acquired those traditional skills.

g) Remittances. Females were more likely to remit money to the household than males, even if they earn less. This opinion came from the women's groups in Bidayuh areas which perceive the males as spending more money on their own well being where as the females have a prior commitment to their family.

h) Savings. While it is often perceived that savings accounts are more likely to be in the males' name than the females', in all three study areas both males and females in the same household were equally likely to have savings accounts. People do not have joint bank accounts. Women in both the Iban and Bidayuh communities perceived females as being better able to save money than males.

Spending

In both Bidayuh and Iban areas, both genders are generally involved in spending household income, although there are differences between households. In Bidayuh areas where women have more access to cash (through wage employment and the sale of vegetables), it often appears to be the case that whoever earns the money will spend it. While in both Iban and Bidayuh areas there may be little consultation over expenditure on food, expenditure on large items does usually involve consultation. Women in both Iban and Bidayuh areas see themselves as being more efficient financial managers for the reasons mentioned previously. In one Iban longhouse, a woman said women usually decided how to spend the money as they knew more about what was necessary for living. Komanyi (1971) found that most women when asked who held the family savings or decides what purchases should be made, answered "the men do" but in reality they were consulted on matters of expenditure. She also found that while small sums of money were always kept in the house and were accessible to both women and men, larger amounts were kept in a bank account in a man's name. It appears more common these days for women to have their own savings accounts.

Summary

Throughout Sarawak, women are well recognised for the importance of their role in agriculture generally and in rice cultivation in particular. Colfer (1981:82) mentioned that although they provide only slightly more than half of the agricultural labour, women are considered by the Kenyah to be the backbone of agricultural activity.

In Iban and Bidayuh areas, women and men are generally considered to be equal participants in agriculture, from both an internal and an external perspective. Bidayuh women are famous amongst the Iban as working harder than the men. However when particular activities are considered from a gender perspective, some discrepancies arise which highlights the problem of taking the specific into the general. Certain tasks may be carried out mainly by one gender but, depending on the labour composition of a particular household, or the fashion in a particular village, the task may be carried out by the other gender. When considering cash crop production as a whole and not in terms of its component parts, women are perceived by some local men and extension staff as not being equally involved, though women themselves believe they are. This has important implications and certainly emphasises the need for both men and women to be consulted (separately) if comprehensive information of a farming system is to be gathered.

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"I would like people to even dimly perceive a little of this existence which is ours, a little of this country where we... suffer the voluntary exile in which we spend our young, our strong years, struggling against the spleen, the heat, physical illnesses, nervous states, misunderstandings and hostility from nature and people alike." So wrote Jeanne Leuba, one of the best writers to hail from Vietnam, then part of French Indochina, in 1913. In 1995, during a collective interview, a French woman, born and brought up in the ex-colony said that she did not feel French if not Vietnamese. Others claimed that as children they were often ashamed of their white skins and at some stage the interview dissolved in the rather emotional rendering of a Vietnamese song.

Taking French colonial women in Vietnam from about 1865 to 1940 as a case study, my research project focuses on colonial women as an ambiguous category of migrants. Indeed, like colonised nations and new migrants alike, they were denied political rights (French women only started voting in 1945) but nevertheless occupied a conquerors position derived from the colour of their skin and their nationality. In this context, I explore the various itineraries they took, either individually or as a cross generation group, towards the physical and mental appropriation of the colonial environment and the construction of a syncretised homeland. Through the analysis of the contradictions arising both at the level of their daily lives and in their relation with the Vietnamese environment and people, I address the question of the nature of the cultural overlap which took place in the colonial space. The aim, in other words, is to unravel what Robert Young calls 'the mechanics of the intricate processes of cultural contact, intrusion, fusion and disjunction' (1995:5) which could be said to constitute the daily road towards acculturation. This process, I argue, passes by the acquisition of a sense of place.

Spanning roughly four periods, and keeping in mind differences of class, generation, and location, I concentrate, broadly, on three generations of women. These either came from France or were born and bred in the colony. The four periods correspond to the three moments Louis Malleret called the heroic period (from the fall of Saigon in 1859 to the end of the 1890s), the period of adaptation (before the first world war) and the bourgeois period (especially in the 1920s). The fourth period (1930s to the end of the war), signals the end of the French empire in Indochina, both through the revolutionary movements which

RESEARCH REPORT

SENSE OF PLACE AND SHIFTING IDENTITIES:

FRENCH WOMEN IN COLONIAL VIETNAM

BY ANNE-MARIE MEDCÁLF

exploded in the thirties and the Japanese occupation (Malleret, 1934, Brocheux, 1995).

As starting points, I take on board texts dealing with the structural ambiguity of colonial women's position (Knibielher and Goutalier, 1985; Stoler, 1991, Mills, 1991) and the debate around the idea that the arrival of women on the colonial scene heralded the 'end of the Empire' because their assumed racism and

jealousy towards indigenous women effectively put 'an end to racial integration' (Kapman, 1986, Strobel, 1991, Stoler, 1992). I also look at post colonial writings dealing with cultural and sexual transgressions and with constructions of race in the context of migration, diaspora, and exile (Bhabha, 1991; Young, 1995, Friedman, 1995). Finally I explore studies concerned with the construction of space (Foucault, 1986) and with the French women's perception of the colonised space (Malleret, 1934, Laude, 1990, Lombard, 1995).

As far as sources are concerned, I have so far drawn on archival and literary sources and on interviews. I have yet to adequately explore newspapers of the time and will not address them here. Archival sources come mainly from the Fonds Indochinois des Series géographiques and the Fonds des Amiraux et Gouvernements general of the French Colonial archives housed in Aix en Provence. Not surprisingly, organisation and content wise, they reinforce the idea that colonisation was a male enterprise and this at least up to the 1920s. Women thus are either absent from these archives or appear mostly in population statistics or when in trouble.

Number wise, and for what it is worth considering the fluctuating meanings covering the legal term French citizen, in 1865, French women represented 7% of the 577 colonial people in Cochinchina, the first area to be conquered. In 1937, they amounted to 40% of the 32 000 strong French population of the colony. This, it should be noted, does not compare well with, for instance, British Malaya or the Dutch East Indies (Roquebain, 1944; Stoler, 1992; Butcher, 1979). Individually, archival sources show colonial women as disempowered, dependant on the will of the administrators and forever waiting: for news of their male kin, for financial help, for permission to settle and work. In the early years policies concerning French women moving to the colonies were in fact very similar to contemporary western immigration policies and favoured family reunion, connections, wealth and specific skills.

From literary sources emerge a much more dynamic picture. Women like Jeanne Leuba who

wrote in the early part of the century, Claudine Chivas-Barron, a feminist and novelist of the 1920s and Marguerite Duras and her well known Indochinese novels are good representatives of this perspective.

In spite of diverse geographical and social circumstances, first generation women all find themselves in an environment often fraught with discomfort, illnesses and danger. It is also alien to the space of their first perceptions and to their cultural baggage. As a result, descriptions of the environment are often linked to issues of safety and mental and physical health while the country is seen as vampire like and potentially perverting, and this in sometimes very sexual terms (Leuba, 1920: 263).

At the same time, the unwritten brief of colonial women was to recreate the domestic centre of the empire and a comfortable, safe and above all French home. This, however was a contradiction in terms since French habits, furnishings, gardens and food were often either unsuited to the Vietnamese environment or simply not available. Hence, writers, through descriptions of everyday gestures, testify of the ways in which the requirements of the Vietnamese environment syncretised the homebase of colonialism. This shift was often accompanied by an emotional shift which led women (and men alike) to be homesick wherever they were but also give in more freely to an acquired sense of space.

Finally and for the later period, I call on the memories of the second and third generation colonial women I interviewed in France or corresponded with since 1992. For these women, the story was a different one but one no less filled with contradictions, in that their sense of the colonial environment was both a primary one and grounded on the practices and ideas of exile. Because they were brought up in the privileged translation of French homeland created by their parents, they were part and parcel of the colonial enterprise. Nevertheless, their relation with nature, nourished with local myths and childhood experiences, was largely one of trust, devoid of the sense of danger and constraint their mothers had experienced. As a result, they often developed beliefs, tastes, forms of behaviour which conflicted with the dominant colonial discourse, and positioned them as transgressors. The ultimate transgressions pertained to the physiological and sexual domain. Indeed, interviews echo later writings (Duras, 1984, Prou, 1985) when they reveal that some of these second generation women perceived themselves as having moved physiologically towards the Vietnamese model. A few others had sexual encounters with the colonised, which in the colonial context branded them as outcasts (Medcalf, 1993).

That these transgressions marked a shift in identity which threatened the boundaries erected by the colonial establishment between colonised and colonisers, is evidenced by the amount of literature of the time deploring the uncouth behaviour of

colonial young women while novels warned against any sexual transgressions. That this shift was beyond return and had serious social implications was attested at the end of the colonial adventure, when these women had to go home to France, by the rejection they experienced from French people and by their own feelings of alienation, feelings which were still lingering at the time of the interviews.

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WORKSHOP ON SE ASIAN WOMEN

The third annual workshop on Southeast Asian women organised by the Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, will be held on Friday 4 October at Monash University, Clayton campus. The Workshop will have parallel sessions on different themes relating to women in Southeast Asia, including politics, history, health, development, literature, anthropology. It will run from 9.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.

Offers of papers (including a brief abstract) on any subject related to Southeast Asian women should be sent to Dr Susan Blackburn, Politics Department, Monash University, Clayton 3168
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WOMEN IN CHINA NEWSLETTER

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They have recently published a bibliography of research on women in China.

Heike Frick, Mechthild Leutner and Nicola Spakowski (eds)

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Federalism Comparative Perspectives from India and Australia

Monash University
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India and Australia are both, in part, products of British colonialism. Largely as a result of their British colonial heritage, they have evolved broadly similar political institutions and constitutional conventions. More specifically both have opted for a federal system, with power shared between centre and states. Yet while all this has been widely acknowledged, there has been little scholarly study or discussion of the similarities—and differences—in our two polities. Such debate is at the moment particularly desirable because both countries are approaching something of a constitutional crossroads—Australia as it ponders the transition to a republic, India as it enters an era in which Congress Party hegemony can no longer be assumed.

This colloquium will provide a forum to debate these vexed constitutional questions. We hope it will also serve to establish some lasting links between scholars of constitutional affairs in India, Australia and other parts of the commonwealth. Themes include:

- the imperial context: British legacies
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ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF SOCIOLOGY

Manila, May 28-30 1996 at Philippine Social Science Centre

A meeting held in Brisbane in October 1994 between sociologists representative of countries in the Asia Pacific Region and hosted by The Australian Sociological Association (TASA), affirmed the desirability of closer links between sociologists in the Asia-Pacific Region. The Asia Pacific Regional Conference of Sociology (APRCS) aims to provide a platform for the development of a forum between sociologists and social science practitioners in the Region.

The Steering Committee for the APRCS comprises representatives of TASA and other sociologists from the Asia Pacific Region including China, Malaysia, Japan, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Singapore. The Chairperson of the Steering Committee is Professor John S. Western from The University of Queensland in Brisbane.

Two specialist meetings of Research Committees of the International Sociological Association (ISA) will be held at the conclusion of the APRCS. Registrants at the APRCS are invited to attend either of these meetings (for an additional fee). The two Committees staging these meetings are: Research Committee 05 on Race, Ethnicity and Minority Relations, & Research Committee 31 on Labour Migration in East and SE Asia.

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Papers are invited from interested persons for all sessions, the deadline for receipt of abstracts being Mid November 1995.

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Conference registration \$150 (after 12 Dec 1995).

For further information about the conference, please contact

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The Sixth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women is to be held in Adelaide, South Australia, 21-26 April 1996. These Congresses have been held every three years since 1981, in different parts of the world. They aim to bring together scholars and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines and areas of expertise, to share insights, experiences and research, and to explore issues of importance to women throughout the world.

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