
Women in Asia

Volume 16 Issue 2

July 1997

This is the first newsletter to be produced from the Gender Relations Project at The Australian National University. It represents a changing of the guard after the marvellous work of Louise Edwards and Anne Cullen over the last three years. Andrea Lanyon has volunteered to take over as Treasurer, so perhaps we should rename the newsletter the Andrea newsletter! See the short profile inside this edition for an introduction.

With regard to the production of the newsletter, there have also been some changes. The Women's Caucus will now be paying for the photocopying, however, the Gender Relations Project has generously offered to cover one half of all the production costs of the newsletter. The format has also slightly changed. According to Louise the newsletter started in 1981, which is why this newsletter is Volume 16, no 2.

Next year we intend to construct a web site for the Women in Asia Caucus and I think a subscriber list would be a useful way to cover all the advertising of conferences, jobs etc which normally are placed in the newsletter. Some of you may consider receiving the newsletter electronically, which would cut down on the amount of paper and photocopying expenses. Hard copies would still be produced for those of you who prefer

your news that way. Please let me know if you would like to be involved or have any suggestions for the web site.

The big news is that the Women in Asia Conference is coming up. Unfortunately, I will be in Thailand conducting field research and so won't be able to attend, but Andrea L. will be attending. The November newsletter will be late as I will be in Thailand, so it will come out in December.

Remember, please send us any information on activities, postgrad studies, publications or books for review via email, anytime. If the newsletter is to survive as a useful forum for networking and communication it depends on your input.

Happy conferencing!
Andrea Whittaker (GRP, ANU)

THE 5TH
WOMEN IN ASIA CONFERENCE
UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

3-5 OCTOBER, 1997
(see inside for details)

CONTENTS

Research Report: Chen Shuwen
Research Report: Maxine Whittaker
Research Report: Susan L. Bissell
Book Review: Rhonda Carew
Update on the 5th Women in Asia Conference

HECATE:
**An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women's
Liberation**

HECATE is interested in publishing more
work with an Asian focus.

It is an internationally circulated refereed journal. *Hecate* is
particularly interested in contributions which employ a
feminist, Marxist or other radical methodology and also
prints creative work and graphics. *Hecate* is published twice
yearly.

Contact: Editor Carole Ferrier
PO Box 99 St Lucia, Brisbane
Queensland 4067 Australia

Women in Asia
Publication Series
(WIAPS)

Allen & Unwin

The Women's Caucus of the ASAA operates a
publication series in conjunction with Allen &
Unwin. We are currently seeking manuscripts for
publication which deal with women in Asia. The
series has published several volumes over the past
few years including:

Malla Stivens' *Matriliney & Modernity*
Kalpana Ram's *Mukkuwar Women*
Norma Sullivan's *Masters & Managers*
Anne-Marie Hillsdon's *Madonnas & Martyrs*
Santi Rozario's *Purity & Communal Boundaries*
Julie Marcus' *A World of Difference*

If you have a project that may be suitable to be
published as part of the series contact
Louise Edwards:

Faculty of Arts & Sciences
Australian Catholic University
PO Box 247 Everton Park. QLD 4953
L.Edwards@mcauley.acu.edu.au
Tel (07) 3855-7252 fax (07) 3855-7245

Monash University
Centre of Southeast Asian Studies

**WORKSHOP ON
SOUTHEAST ASIAN WOMEN**

Monash University
18 July 1997

The fourth annual Workshop on Southeast Asian Women
organised by the Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash
University, will be held on Friday 18 July at Monash
University, Clayton Campus. The intention is to promote
research in the area and to facilitate exchange of ideas
among scholars and practitioners.

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 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

For further information contact:

Rhonda Lyons, Monash Asia Institute,
Monash University,
Clayton, VIC 3168, Fax (03) 9905 5370.

ACTIVITIES IN ADELAIDE

- Dr M.E. Allen, of the Women's Studies
Department University of Adelaide spent
January in Vientiane, Laos, undertaking a
feasibility study into the establishment of a
Women's Studies Centre at the new National
University of Laos. The study was
commissioned by the Swedish International
Development Agency and the Lao Ministry of
Education.
- In March and April Dr Penpuck Tongtae,
Department of Sociology and Social Work at the
Prince of Songkla University, Thailand, spent 6
weeks in the department in preparation for
establishing women's studies at the Pattani
campus of her university.
- Professor Meera Kosambi, Director of the
Research Centre for Women's Studies at the
S.N.D.T. Women's University in Mumbai
(Bombay) India, will be a Distinguished Visiting
Fellow in the Department from 8 July until mid
August. During this time Professor Kosambi will
deliver a number of papers on 19th century
Indian women's history and her other research
areas.

For further information contact Dr ME Allen, Women's
Studies, University of Adelaide Tel 83035975

The National People's Congress is currently the key organ for the Chinese people's participation and engagement in the political process in national and regional affairs. Every citizen above eighteen years of age is entitled to vote or to stand for election. There is a general election every five years. Each local government region also has its own Congress, with elections every five years. The Chongqing region, which is the subject of this article, has its own regional parliament, with 20 percent female representatives and 80 percent male representatives.

This article analyses the findings of a survey of women's awareness of involvement in politics in Chongqing. Chongqing is the largest inland city of China, and is located in the Southwest of China. It has a population of 30 million people, and is administered by the Central Chinese Government. This article will help the reader to understand the condition of women in this region of contemporary China, and to understand the progress of democratisation in China, in the context of the current political system in China. In particular, it focuses on women's political consciousness, as one element of the explanation of the patterns of men's and women's political participation in the region.

Three thousand women from different age groups, educational levels, and occupational backgrounds, such as teachers (15 percent), administrative clerks (15 percent), blue collar workers (15 percent), farmers (40 percent), and other social strata (15 percent) were surveyed. The survey was administered by members of the local women's committee. The sample included women from both urban and rural areas.

The survey had two aims: firstly, to investigate women's attitudes towards representation in the People's Congress; and secondly, to examine women's awareness of and participation in community work around Chongqing. In the questionnaire women were given multiple choice answers and asked to circle the response which represented their attitude.

RESEARCH REPORT

Women's Political Consciousness In Chongqing

Chen Shuwen

Gender Studies Research Unit
University of Melbourne

Urban and rural women's attitudes to political participation

Women were asked whether they wanted to be a representative in the People's Congress. The results showed that women in different age groups have different expectations for being a representative (see Table 1).

The data in Table 1 show the relationship between age and expectations for becoming a representative for urban and rural inland women.

Middle-aged women (36-55) have higher expectations than young women (18-35) and older women (56-65). This proportion of middle-aged women comprises 25.8 percent of those who live in urban areas and 18.3 percent of those who live in rural areas. This is because most middle-aged women are at the peak of their career, and they are the backbone of their various professions. There is a possibility for them to be representatives. This possibility is considerably diminished with younger and older women.

There is considerable difference between urban and rural areas. The percentage of women with expectations of becoming a representative is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. The percentage of women with little or no desire to become a representative is higher in rural areas than that of women in urban areas. This reflects an imbalance in the awareness of political involvement between urban and rural women.

Women with different educational levels have different expectations of becoming a political representative (see Table 2). From Table 2 we can see that the political expectations of women rise with their level of education. The higher the educational level, the stronger the expectation to be a representative, and the lower the educational level, the weaker the expectation to be a representative. Urban highly educated women's expectations of being a representative is higher than that of highly educated women in rural areas.

However, the educational level is not a decisive factor in the strength of women's awareness of

Table 1: Expectations for becoming a representative by age.

Age	18-25		26-35		36-45		46-55		56-65	
Area	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Expectation										
High	14.3	9.2	18.1	12.7	25.8	18.3	23.4	17.2	14.5	10.5
Medium	24.2	18.1	30.6	24.3	37.7	30.5	38.1	29.6	31.7	22.4
Low	55.5	62.6	48.0	56.4	34.1	46.3	35.0	48.2	49.0	58.3
No response	5.8	9.8	3.2	6.4	2.2	4.7	3.4	4.9	4.7	8.6

Table 2: Educational level and political participation

Education level	Primary		Junior		Senior		College		University	
Area	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Expectation										
High	12.3	9.7	15.1	11.8	15.9	12.2	13.5	13.1	16.1	14.3
Medium	16.5	13.2	18.4	16.0	21.7	17.9	22.8	19.6	25.2	22.4
Low	66.0	71.6	62.2	66.7	59.2	65.1	60.5	63.2	56.3	60.8
No response	5.1	6.2	4.3	5.4	3.1	4.7	3.0	3.3	2.3	2.4

involvement in politics. Even within university-educated levels and above, women expressing a strong expectation are only 16.1 percent in urban areas, 14.3 percent in rural areas, while those with no expectation are 56.3 percent in urban areas and 60.8 percent in rural areas. Among women with primary education 66.0 percent of urban women show no expectation and 71.6 percent of rural women express no expectation.

Women's expectation of becoming a representative is higher in urban areas than in rural areas.

Women's participation in community work in urban and rural areas

As for women aged 25-45 years, the data shows that 17.7 percent of urban women 'often participate' in community work and 12.2 percent of rural women; 32.3 percent of urban women 'sometimes participate' and 30.0 percent of rural women; 'occasional participation' is 38.4 percent for urban women, 38.1 percent for rural women; 11.5 percent of urban women 'rarely participate' and 19.6 percent of rural women.

The above data indicate that among women who have been surveyed, women who 'often participate' represent only a small group which amounts to 17.7 percent in the urban areas and 12.2 percent in the rural areas. But, the proportions of those who 'sometimes participate' and 'occasionally participate' are very much higher, 70.7 percent in the urban areas, 68.1 percent in the rural areas. These two groups make up over two-thirds of the total.

In addition, there is also a big difference between the urban and rural areas. Urban women have a

stronger expectation of participation in community work than rural women do. In the 'often participate' group the proportion of women participating in urban areas is 5.5 percent more than that of rural areas. But, in the 'rarely participate' group the proportion in rural areas is 8.1 percent higher than that of urban areas.

Women with different educational levels have different levels of participation in community work (see Table 3).

The above data indicate on the one hand that the women with higher levels of education have a greater concern with community work, and the women with less education have a lower concern with community work. On the other hand, rural women with higher levels of education have a greater concern with community work, but this tendency goes up at a slow rate, particularly in the 'occasional participation' group where there is a difference of only 7.5 percent between those with university education or above and those with primary education. This indicates that the educational level is not an essential factor influencing women's community work.

From the above factors, we can see that women's awareness of involvement in politics in China's inland areas is still at an early stage.

Analysis

Traditional ideas towards women seriously hinder the development of women's autonomy, and discourage involvement in society. Since ancient times in China there has been the attitude that women should 'assist the husband and raise the children'. After the founding of new China, the

Table 3: Educational level and participation in community work

Education level	Primary		Junior		Senior		College		University	
Area	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Participation level										
Often	17.2	9.3	13.9	10.8	16.8	12.7	25.0	21.4	26.7	22.3
Sometimes	21.5	18.1	26.4	24.9	29.2	26.1	38.3	30.1	46.4	43.8
Occasionally	46.4	43.7	42.2	41.6	40.4	39.9	31.1	36.1	24.5	36.2
Rarely	20.2	28.7	17.3	24.7	13.6	21.3	5.6	12.2	2.3	7.6

conditions of women have undergone a remarkable change. However, it is so deep-rooted that old historical habits are still surviving among the Chinese. This attitude has clearly restricted the complete development of women's roles, keeping them in a one-dimensional state.

There is a marked difference in the political socialisation of children. Male children are 'politicised' by society, but female children are 'depoliticised'. Female children are nurtured to have a non-political personality or to be less interested in politics. There is also a difference between the education of boys and girls from childhood. Boys are socialised to be concerned with politics. Girls, however, usually have less concern for politics. Male chauvinism dominates family affairs outside the house, while wives are usually in charge of the affairs inside the family. This forms a typical ideology of political socialisation.

The 'Opening and Reform' policy has led to the rapid development of China's economy. It has encouraged productivity, but, at the same time, increased competition has forced women to go back to the kitchen. In particular, the development of the economy has been unbalanced between the inland and coastal areas. Because of this imbalance, the democratic ideology in inland areas has fallen behind that of the coastal areas.

The self-consciousness of women is an internal factor affecting women's awareness of involvement in politics. Many women have weak self-awareness, considering themselves naturally weak and dependent on males. This negativity of women's consciousness severely restricts the improvement of women's awareness of involvement in politics.

As stated above, even if China is moving towards a democratic society after the policy of opening and reform, people's awareness of involvement in politics is still weak, especially that of the urban and rural women of inland China. If we want to change this situation, we need to work out policies to accomplish this.

We need to develop economic and educational opportunities, so as to improve the condition of

women's involvement in politics. Firstly, we should develop the commercial economy and change the mode of production in backward rural areas so as to enable women to escape from the grip of manual labour which enslaves them. Secondly, we should develop education, improving the educational quality in order to create a culture that encourages both urban and rural women's ability to participate in politics. This is an important way to realise women's involvement in politics.

Women need to overcome their psychology of inferiority and dependence, participate in social life positively, strengthen their consciousness of their own self-respect, self-confidence, self-dependence, and self-reliance, so as to adapt themselves to their needs of social development.

Finally, women's involvement in politics is not only needed for a modern democratic society, but also for an urgent awakening of a consciousness of women's liberation. The degree of women's involvement in politics is a criterion for the political democracy and progress of a country. It is also an important link in socialist democratic construction. If half the population is not involved in the political affairs of China, it is not possible to realise a true socialist democracy.

(Chen Shuwen is a visiting fellow at the Gender Studies Research Unit, University of Melbourne)

Note: I acknowledge Vera Mackie's assistance in preparing this article.

References:

- Ming Wenfen (1996) "Zhongguo nuzi jiaoyu de licheng tedian he qishi" (The modern process, feature and inspiration of female education in China), *Huadong shifan daxue xuebao Jiaoyu kexue ban* (The Journal of East China Normal University), Education and Science Edition, No 3, pp.73-78, Shanghai.
- Zhang Guihua and Fu Yajun (1992) "Funu can zheng cong zheng de sikao" (The thought of women's involvement in politics), *Jilin daxue shehuike xue xue bao* (The Journal of Jilin University Social Science), No 3, pp.96 - back cover, Changchun.
- Li Weisha (1992) "Nuxing canzheng de kuenjing yu chulu" (The predicament and way-out for women's involvement in politics), *Shehui kexue* (Journal of Social Science), No 4, pp.37-40, Shanghai.
- Yang Song (1993) "Gaige kaifang yu qianghua nuxing canzheng yishi" (name of journal in Chinese) ('Opening and reform' and strength for women's awareness of involvement in politics). *Tanqiu* (Exploration), No 3, pp.30-32, Guangzhou.

INTRODUCING OUR NEW TREASURER

ANDREA LANYON

Andrea Lanyon volunteered to take over the job of Secretary/Treasurer from Anne Cullen. Andrea works as Senior Research Assistant in the Consumerism and Environment Project within the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, The University of Queensland. She has been working in that department for the past seven years in various research and teaching capacities. She graduated from that department with an Honours degree in Sociology in 1989. She enrolled in a PhD in the department in 1990, the focus of which was an analysis of the strategies women develop over the course of their lives to incorporate public and private sphere interests and responsibilities within their lifeworld. However, during 1994 the opportunity arose to become involved in developing the Asia Pacific Sociological Association (APSA) and to conduct research upon the impact of rapid social change upon levels of social integration of individuals living in urban societies in various parts of the Asia Pacific. She found these opportunities very inviting and so withdrew from her PhD and worked on these two new projects. Her research interests in the Asia Pacific centre around establishing the extent to which social polarisation is a phenomenon in various countries (and regions within those countries), for example, in Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Australia. She hopes to develop a better understanding of the role played by post-modernising forces (globalisation, both cultural and economic, urbanisation and mass migration) in polarising processes.

This work provides her with the additional opportunity of developing her interest in Japanese culture and society (She speaks enough Japanese to get by). She undertook a series of interviews with Japanese women employed full-time by foreign banks whose headquarters were in Tokyo during the latter part of 1992. The focus and structure of these interviews was similar to that for her doctoral research. Recently she reported on the results of these interviews at the Asian Studies Association conference in Chicago and will present further data from these interviews at the October conference in Sydney.

Andrea looks forward to taking up the position of Secretary/Treasurer for the WIA newsletter and Women's Caucus and will be at the October conference to chase subscriptions and update the database. We look forward to working with her.

RECONFIGURATIONS OF CLASS AND GENDER

The VIII International Meeting of the Comparative Project on Class Structure and Class Consciousness

1-3 August 1997
University House, ANU

Invited speakers are **Professor Erik Olin Wright**, University of Wisconsin - Madison, **Professor Wallace Clement**, Carleton University, **Professor Rosemary Crompton**, University of Leicester, **Professor Paula England**, University of Arizona, **Associate Professor Jan Pakulski**, University of Tasmania, **Professor Rachel A. Rosenfeld**, The University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, **Professor John Western**, The University of Queensland

The internet address for abstracts of invited and other conference papers are on

<http://coombs.anu.edu.au/Depts/RSSS/Class/conf.html>

or

<http://coombs.anu.edu.au/Depts/RSSS/Class/classabs.html>

For further details and registration contact
Dr Janeen Baxter or Dr Mark Western
Sociology Program, RSSS,
The Australian National University,
ACT 0200
Phone: (06) 249 3284. Fax: (06) 249 2114.
Email: janeen@coombs.anu.edu.au;
mwestern@coombs.anu.edu.au; or
mxd304@coombs.anu.edu.au

RESEARCH REPORT

Secret Stories: Reproductive Health In Rural Vietnam

Maxine Whittaker

Australian Centre for International and
Tropical Health and Nutrition,
University of Queensland, Brisbane

"The World Health Organisation estimates that over 200 million reproductive tract infections (RTIs) due to sexually transmitted pathogens occur each year among women in developing countries" (Ronald, A., Aral, SO 1992)

colleagues described the importance of understanding "the nature of human behaviour and its motivations, to describe the areas of human action and to focus on those actions promoting the contact and transmission of disease" (Newman, Zierler and Cheung 1991: 258) when

discussing sexually transmitted diseases.

"They (women) are reluctant to talk about this (gynaecological problems). Don't want to talk ... they only want to find a doctor to have medicine to treat the disease - so they have to go. It's a secret story, so you can't tell others" (informant 7)

Morbidity induced by reproductive tract infections (RTIs) makes severe demands upon human and economic resources. Infant, maternal and female mortality are possible outcomes from untreated or poorly treated reproductive tract infections. In addition, social ostracism because of the physical symptoms such as incontinence of urine, painful sexual intercourse and foul smelling vaginal discharge cause major social and health problems for a woman so afflicted. As one of my informants Phan says:

"They are afraid about (people thinking badly of them) if it (the discharge) is smelly, because the discharge often has a smell and may bother others"

The World Development Report, "Investing in Health" (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1993) listed treatment of STDs as one of the cost effective essential public health services for a country to invest in, especially if considering economic benefits from health services.

Many people interested in broadening the scope of reproductive health services from maternal health and family planning have called for a broader social science review of the RTI situation. The Barbados Conference on "Reproductive Tract Infections among Women of the Third World: Ending the Culture of Silence" (Antrobus, Germain and Nowrojee, 1994:19) stated: "research is needed on communities knowledge, attitudes and practices related to sexuality and RTIs. Language and symbols must be interpreted before messages and strategies can be designed." Newman and

Goldin (1994:1361) notes that the "interpretation of the cause of perceived symptoms (such as wasting) may have significant impact on treatment and prevention efforts" and that there is a lack of "phenomenologically orientated literature on STDs and stigma". She suggests that "ethnographic accounts and activist biographical/autobiographical works provide rich cultural descriptions of the meanings of stigma to those so characterised. ... By exploring the socio-economic and cultural frameworks of sexual behaviour, control of sexuality, and disease nosology to biomedicine, and prevention and treatment choices we can gain a deeper understanding of public health issues. Underlying this discussion is a basic assumption that illness is socially constructed, involving biological processes (disease) and cultural processes."

In Vietnam, the prevention and management of RTIs has been identified by a range of groups as an important area for development. The National HIV Committee identified STD management through the syndromic approach as important. Some groups including the Ministry of Health, the Vietnam Women's Union, the NGO called "Assisting family planning in rural areas" and the "Centre for family, gender and the environment welfare" have done small epidemiological studies in this area. (Do Trong Hieu, Pham Thuy Nga, Nguyen Kim Tong, Do Thi Thanh Nhan, Simmons, R et al 1996; Nguyen Thanh Mai 1994; Nguyen Thi Hoai Duc 1995).

A UNFPA review of reproductive health in Vietnam stressed the importance of undertaking social science studies related to RTIs. They identified as priority topics "women's and men's beliefs concerning RTIs / STDs, including issues of symptom classification, causation, prevention and

current treatment practices" in order to develop reproductive health policy and services. They identified present barriers to the development of a comprehensive programme as including the lack of information on:

- a) the size of the problem in Vietnam, even within the urban and commercial sex worker populations;
- b) present utilisation of health services, formal and informal for the management of RTIs;
- c) risk factors for the development of RTIs;
- d) information of the present knowledge, skills and attitudes of health care staff towards RTIs and towards the women presenting with these complaints;
- e) local terms used and beliefs about RTIs;
- f) ways of managing these illnesses and discharges locally (Alam, I., Khan, A.R., Fajans, P., Paxman, J., Whittaker M. 1995).

The provision of such information will assist in improving the quality of the presently designed programme in areas of health promotion, training of staff, development of the syndromic approach and costing of the interventions.

Knowledge of the terms used and perceptions of causes and management are important for the development of health promotion materials and activities as well as part of the education programme for women and men about women's bodies. Additionally, knowledge of the local terms used by women will be important in ensuring appropriate history taking and diagnosis and counselling by the health workers - especially as under the syndromic approach they are using symptom-based history taking as the means of making a diagnosis and prescribing treatment.

In order to implement the proposed programme of activities in Vietnam, an understanding of the present knowledge levels about the causes and management of RTIs, as well as attitudes towards these infections amongst women and health workers, is necessary baseline information.

At a theoretical level, the understanding of women's perceptions of their bodies and reproductive tract infections has been an under-explored area. Some studies discussed in the literature have identified briefly some folk aetiologies of the discharges. Very few, if any, have neither taken the women's perspective of the

infections nor explored the factors that have influenced the development of these perceptions. My research will contribute towards this body of knowledge.

I have been undertaking my PhD field work in northern rural Vietnam, and within the various national organisations that are involved with women's health for the past three years. My research aims to contribute to the theoretical knowledge about women's perceptions of reproductive tract infections and the various factors that influence that knowledge and women's means of preventing and managing infections and vaginal discharges. It will also contribute towards the continued improvement of reproductive health services in Vietnam and in particular among the women's groups in Ninh Binh.

My research aims to explore various concepts held by rural women and their health workers of the causes and management of reproductive tract infections. It has the following objectives:

- 1) To develop an understanding of women's perceptions of causes and consequences of reproductive tract infections;
- 2) to identify various means of and barriers to preventing and managing these reproductive tract infections including diagnosis, self-management and presentation to clinic;
- 3) to develop an understanding of service providers' perceptions of reproductive tract infections - causes, management and consequences.

During the first three months of 1997, I undertook intensive ethnographic field work in Yen Mo district of Ninh Binh province in the Red River delta region of rural northern Vietnam. In addition, I gathered information from health care records about the "rates" of presentation for, and physical findings of, reproductive tract infection symptoms and syndromes at the health care centres (from hamlet/commune level to the first level gynaecological facility).

My field work this year entailed group discussions, in-depth interviews, and observations of consultations, counselling and clinics as well as everyday women's daily activities.

This field work complements work I have undertaken with national and provincial medical experts, trainers of health workers, the Vietnam

Women's Union and national social science researchers. I have also collected a range of training, drug protocol and health educational materials for content and contextual analysis.

Women described a range of ethnogynaecological knowledge of RTIs. Of particular concern was all forms of discharge:

"Every disease causes discharge -(you) have disease, weakness, and have discharge" (Woman in focus group in Vietnam)

"When you have anaemia it causes 'white blood' - it's a discharge. A lot 'white blood' when weak ... like a curette inside the body" (Cheng)

At present I am analysing the data to develop a taxonomy of terms for various symptoms and syndromes from focus group, in-depth interviews and pile sorting activities that I undertook with women in Ninh Binh. In addition I am developing case histories of women with various RTI symptoms and sequelae to document - their diagnosis, their help-seeking behaviour, the results and experiences of this help-seeking, their opinions of the various stages they experienced. In their narratives, women make clear statements about the socio-economic factors and gender relations that contribute to their ill health:

"Women say: '(We) always have this, so let's wait before seeking treatment. Let the children go to school or buy clothes for children. Buy something for the family first" (Oanh).

Women blame not only poverty, but the conditions in which they work, the heavy work itself and the burden of contraceptive use as all contributing factors:

"(we get infections) because in the field we have fertiliser and insecticide and ... manure waste and (we) take it and put it into the field. Pour it into the field. And women have to do transplanting and have to have contact with it. Water is not safe. A lot of disease" (Phung)

"The IUD is the reason (we) have infection - after IUD insertion" (Ngu)

Part of my research focuses on the various levels of health care providers' opinions and practices of the management of RTIs through observations, studies, in-depth interviews, review of training materials and chart audits, pile sorting and focus group

Women in Asia (July 1997)

interviews. This will include the formal and the informal sector as well as the population and the health "wings" at commune, intercommune, district and provincial levels.

Over the next year, my thesis will be developing, using an understanding of health beliefs, political, economic and social environment and gender analysis to broaden the understanding of rural Vietnamese women's realities in reproductive health and the secret stories of their lives.

References.

- Alam, I., Khan, A.R., Fajans, P., Paxman, J., Whittaker M. 1995 "Report on Vietnam Reproductive health / Family Planning Sector Review and Analysis" PRSD Series 1995 Ha Noi : UNFPA September 1995
- Antrobus, P., Germain, A., Nowrojee, S 1994 Challenging the Culture of Silence : Building Alliances to end reproductive tract infections " International Women's Health Coalition : New York
- Do Trong Hieu, Pham Thuy Nga, Nguyen Kim Tong, Do Thi Thanh Nhan, Simmons, R et al 1996 An assessment of the need for contraceptive introduction in Vietnam Geneva ; WHO
- Goldin, Carol S., 1994 Stigmatisation and AIDS : Critical Issues in Public Health Soc Sci Med 39: 1359 - 1366
- International Bank for reconstruction and Development 1993 :World development Report 1993 "Investing in health" Oxford ; Oxford university Press
- McDermott, J., et al 1992 "Infection : Social and Medical Realities" in "The Health of Women : A Global Perspective" Ed M Koblinsky, J Timyan and J Gay Boulder : Westview Press
- Meheus, A. 1992 "Women's health : importance of reproductive tract infections , pelvic inflammatory disease and cervical cancer" pgs 61 - 91 in "Reproductive Tract Infections" Edited by A Germaine et al. NY : Plenum Press
- Newman, L.F., Zierler, S., Cheung, D. 1991 Epidemiological and Ethnographic Methods for research in high-risk behaviour : integrated approaches to acceptability and intervention pages 258 - 266 in Wasserheit, J.N., Aral, S.O., Holmes, K.K 1991 Research Issues in Human Behaviour and Sexually Transmitted Diseases in the AIDS Era American Society of Microbiology : Washington DC.
- Nguyen Thanh Mai 1994 Pilot study of genital infection in two communes in Tien Hai district, Thai Binh Province *Vietnam Social Sciences* 1: 101 - 102.
- Nguyen Thi Hoai Duc 1995 Results of survey on reproductive tract infection in Vietnam Rural Women .Unpublished report UNFPA / AFPC Ha Noi
- Ronald, A., Aral, SO 1992 "Assessment and prioritisation of actions to prevent and control reproductive tract infections in the third world" pp 199 - 225 In Germain, A., Holmes, K.K., Piot, P, Wasserheit JN 1992 (Eds) Reproductive tract infections : Global Impact and priorities for women's health" New York : Plenum Press
- Wasserheit, J.N. 1989 "The significance and scope of reproductive tract infections among Third World Women" *International Journal Gynaecology and Obstetrics Supplement* 3 : 145 - 168
- Wasserheit, J.N., Holmes, K.K 1992 "Reproductive tract infections : challenges for international health policy, programs and research " pgs 7 - 33 in "Reproductive Tract Infections" Edited by A Germain et al. NY : Plenum Press

For over a decade Dr Maxine Whittaker has been active in family planning and women's health programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as operations research. Over the last four years she has worked in Vietnam with the UNFPA, WHO, Vietnam Women's Union, Family Planning Australia, AusAID, the Ministry of Health, National Council for Population and Family Planning and social scientists on reproductive health. She presently teaches at the Australian Centre for International and Tropical Health and Nutrition at the U of QLD.

Editor's Note: Yes, she is my elder sister!

Asian Studies Association of Australia

The ASAA is a professional organisation made up of academics, teachers and others with experience or knowledge of Asia. The ASAA has more than 800 members. The ASAA holds Biennial Conferences and publishes a range of book series including Southeast Asian Publication Series, East Asian Publication Series, South Asian Publication Series and Women in Asia Publication Series.

The ASAA's journal *Asian Studies Review* will be published and distributed by Blackwells commencing in 1998 and will feature scholarly articles and reviews of the highest international standard. *Asian Studies Review* will be the flagship journal for Asian Studies in Australia.

Membership rates:

Ordinary Members	—\$85.00
Full-Time Students	—\$35.00
Retirees	—\$50.00

Membership to the ASAA includes the journal subscription.

Payment can be made to:

Russel Hocking, Treasurer ASAA

School of Politics, La Trobe University, Bundoora,
VIC 3083

The Women's Caucus is an affiliate of the ASAA

CALL FOR PAPERS

2nd Asia Pacific Regional Conference of Sociology (APRCS)

Department of Anthropology and Sociology
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Malaya
Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia

18-20 September 1997

The first Asia Pacific Regional Conference of Sociology was held in Manila in May 1996. The success of this meeting has encouraged the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, to organise a second meeting of sociologists in the region. The conference will provide a venue for a meeting of minds devoted to sociological research in the Asia Pacific Region. Additionally, the constitution of the Asia Pacific Sociological Association is to be finalised during this meeting.

Themes cover the following topics:

*Family Diversity / Gender Relations / Cities: The
Problem of Urban Growth / Modernity and Identity /
Ethnicity, Culture and Religion / Economic
Liberalisation and Its Impact on Social Life /
International Migration / Health and Social Welfare /
Theory Formation in Asian Sociology / Media and
Communication*

Further information regarding the conference can be viewed at either of the following websites:

www.cc.um.edu.my (click on Conference button) or

www.uq.edu.au/~asalanyo/

or by contacting Professor John Western, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, The University of Queensland. Phone: (07) 3365 4454

Fax: (07) 3365 1544

Email: j.western@mailbox.uq.edu.au

USEFUL WEB SITES & LISTS

If you know of a web site that is worth a visit, please email me and we shall share the information of other Women in Asia readers. Likewise, if you know of a useful subscriber list please send us the address. This month I shall indulge in a small bit of self-promotion and encourage you to visit the ANU, Gender Relations Web Site at:
<http://online.anu.edu.au/nadel/GenRels.html>

THE 5TH WOMEN IN ASIA CONFERENCE

University of New South Wales

Sydney, Australia

3-5 October 1997

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of New South Wales will host the 5th Women in Asia Conference in October 1997. The Women in Asia conferences are organised by the Women's Caucus of the Asian Studies Association of Australia as part of its program to promote the study of women in Asia, in conjunction with the Women in Asia Newsletter and the Women in Asia Publication Series. Past conferences have been highly successful and attracted government representatives, business people and scholars from within Australia and overseas.

Overseas Guests

- **Qi Wen Ying**, Beijing University (Professor of History, Vice-Chairman of Centre for Women's Studies and Centre for American Studies, researching Sino-American cultural and education relations)
- **Yeong-hae Jung**, Hiroshima Shudo University (researching gender and ethnic identity)
- **Hesti R Wijaya** (Founder and Head of Women Studies Centre, Brawijaya University, Malang, East Java and Founder and Head of Rural Development Foundation (an NGO), Malang, East Java, researching women in politics and women as homemakers)
- **Mary John**, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi (author of *Discrepant Dislocations: Feminist Theory and Postcolonial Histories*, University of California Press, 1996)
- **Nivedita Menon**, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi
- **Laurie Sears**, Associate Professor of History, University of Washington, Seattle

Conference Program

The 5th Conference will begin with a welcome reception on the evening of Friday 3 October and continue for two days (Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 October). The Conference Dinner will be held on Saturday evening.

Day 1:

Plenary Session 1

Our invited speakers will discuss some of the philosophical and methodological issues involved in doing research on women. Their presentations will be followed by an open forum of questions and discussion.

Plenary Session 2

To be advised. This session will be devoted to a current issue and will follow the same format as Plenary Session 1.

Plenary Session 3

To be advised. We anticipate that this session will be based on a theme that is prominent in the submitted abstracts and complements the earlier sessions.

Day 2:

Parallel Sessions

The Search for the Individual
Women in Public/Political Life
Women and Literacy
Women and the Home
Women and Religion
Women Travellers

For further information please contact:

Heather Barker, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia. Email: h.barker@unsw.edu.au

RESEARCH REPORT

Introduction

At sixteen, fifteen, thirteen, and 'younger' the four sisters in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), Meg, Jo, Amy and Beth, each have

responsibilities in their family. This is particularly obvious in the early sections of the book when their father is away 'at war' and their mother is a single parent. In once scene, where the girls verbalise their disdain for the work they must do, their mother (Marmee), in a roundabout way, 'teaches' them the importance of their work. Afterwards she says:

Let me advise you to take up your burdens again; for though they seem heavy sometimes, they are good for us, and lighten as we learn to carry them. Work is wholesome, and there is plenty for everyone; it keeps us from ennui and mischief; is good for health and spirits, and gives us a sense of power and independence better than money or fashion...don't (however) go to the other extreme and delve like slaves. Have regular hours for work and play; make each day useful and pleasant, and prove that you understand the worth of time by employing it well. Then youth will be delightful, old age will bring few regrets, and life become a beautiful success, in spite of poverty.¹

This quotation, the entire book, and others like it of the same genre, speak of work and responsibility in terms which currently ring true in many countries in the world. In Bangladesh, the focus of my PhD research, work is a common feature in the lives of the almost 18 million children who are between 5 and 14 years of age; half of them are girls. They differ from Alcott's 'little women' in many ways, but the similarities are worth noting in the face of blunt international attempts to stop trade with countries like Bangladesh, where children are employed in the export sector¹.

A Trade Bill to Eliminate Child Labour

In 1993, American Senator Tom Harkin introduced a bill for Senate consideration. The bill was designed to prohibit the import to the United States of goods produced whole or in part using child

Little Women in Bangladesh - Working Children?

Susan L Bissell

Australian Centre for International
and
Tropical Health and Nutrition,
University of Queensland, Brisbane

labour. While the bill did not become a law, its effects as a mere threat reverberated everywhere. I happened to be working in Bangladesh at the time, and news of the proposed bill made the front pages of English and Bangla paper, sending shock waves through the garment industry. Almost immediately, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) began releasing children from their jobs.

The largest export earner for Bangladesh, and the single largest employer of women in an Islamic country, the industry could not afford strained trade relations and possible boycotts.

I was working with UNICEF, having months earlier transferred from Sri Lanka, and was overseeing children's rights and CEDC (Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances) programming. National non-governmental organisations (NGOs) approached the UNICEF office with reports of the summary dismissal of children from their garment factory jobs. We were told, and confirmed through rapid assessments of our own, that the children released from work were finding more hazardous and exploitative jobs to do. In one small study, of the 12 children interviewed, none had left garment work to go to school, and all had new jobs with lower pay and worse conditions of work.

What unfolded in the ensuing two years, and still goes on, is a debate about the elimination of child labour. As Alcott's and other fiction illustrates, books are rife with accounts of children working. So too are there historic accounts of children active in the labour force, of their miserable plights, and of movements to liberate children from horrible conditions of work (Horn, 1994; McDonald 1978). Horn describes child labour in the United Kingdom in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She says that two philosophies about childhood, each competing with the other, created an environment in which child labour could flourish. Proponents of one philosophy deplored idleness in children, revered the 'habits of industry'.² Such habits were, among poorer classes, inculcated through home-based, factory-based, or other forms of work. Wealthier classes relied on "...an emphasis on drudging memory work and the 'culture of the mind'."³ These and McDonald's descriptions are

hauntingly familiar when compared with contemporary descriptions of children at work. For instance, in Sydney, Australia:

In the leathergoods factories the children were employed in "upper and boot manufacturing" and the girls operated sewing machines while in the woollen mills their work consisted of joining threads" and as they grew older they graduated to working the looms. In both industries the wages of the young people peopled varied "from 4s. to 15s. per week" and while the work was light the workers were required to stand, no relaxation, except during the meal hours, being allowed. Tanning was often carried out "in close proximity to the buildings in which large numbers were employed" in the manufacture of leather goods and the commissioners found the stench "intolerable".^{iv}

'Stakeholders' in child labour debates of the past are similar to those involved today. Children, parents, national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), unions, governments, aid agencies, international organisations, and international business interests are very much a part of the contemporary child labour dialogue, as illustrated in the case of Bangladesh. Each has a stake in the perpetuation or cessation of conditions which permit or necessitate children's work. An analysis of each 'position' of representatives of these stakeholders, though beyond the scope of this brief paper, sheds light on just how complicated child labour really is.

The Nature and Extent of Working Children in Bangladesh

Most children busy themselves in one way or another. Once children are no longer *shishu* (very young dependent children), there are expectations they must fulfil. More than 80 percent of primary school-age children enrol in school, but those who drop out are invariably working full-time. Fewer than 40 percent of children enrolled in school complete the full five years of the primary cycle. Even those who do go to school full-time are only there for three hours each day; and they occupy themselves in a variety of jobs throughout the rest of the day.

Sources of information about the nature and extent of child labour include the national labour force survey, NGO studies, UNICEF surveys, a

UNICEF-ILO national rapid assessment of child labour, industry-specific studies, surveys in various workplaces, village surveys, and interviews with children and their families (Stalker, 1996). They are common in their findings only insofar as they illustrate the great range of the types of jobs that children do. They differ in their quantification of the magnitude of child work. All are invaluable in the qualitative contribution they make to our understanding of what, how, where, when and why children undertake the jobs that they do.

Accordingly, between 10 percent and 44 percent of children under the age of fifteen are working in Bangladesh. Numbers cited depend on the definition of child labour, who is reporting the incidence of child labour, and what type of sampling methods are used. The 1991 Labour Force Survey (LFS), for instance, estimated a participation rate of 36 percent for girls and 46 percent for boys. Also, the LFS found child labour to be more prevalent in rural than in urban areas. While the LFS does record unpaid, household labour, there are dubious aspects of the sampling method. First, it relies on reporting by the male head of the household. Second, it records only the participation of family members. Domestic workers are not included. Third, with the lack of specificity regarding age, it is likely that some children were left out in the survey process. Under-reporting is more likely than over-reporting given the stigma attached to the child labour issue.

Ahmad and Quasem (1991) studied a number of villages, and found that labour participation rates varied greatly from one village to the next. Overall participation was recorded at 34 percent. One village reported 16 percent of children working, while another poorer village reported 64 percent. The village study did record housework and other unpaid labour. 79 percent of male children were engaged in agricultural activities, while girls spent 71 percent of their time on housework.

In fact, this is consistent with the findings of the ILO-UNICEF national rapid assessment of child labour, carried out in 1994. The survey was a purposive sampling of more than 39 000 rural and urban working children. Of 5290 rural children in the assessment, 44 percent of whom were girls, more than 80 percent reported working in agriculture. Others were engaged in weaving or some kind of selling. For the urban children in the

rapid assessment, of 16373 there were reports of more than 300 kinds of jobs. They range from domestic service, to selling goods and services, to waste collection, informal factory work, formal factory work, and other occupations like brick breaking and prostitution.

Karmaker (1994) studied the work of children in the informal sector in Dhaka. Hours of work are very long for urban children, the average being 9.6 hours in informal factories. Children in domestic service work the longest, many are on call at all times (Blanchet, 1996). Sellers, and others for whom the street is their workplace, are likely to have more flexible work hours. 'Recycling specialists', for instance, work early in the day and take long breaks around noon. For child garment factory workers, the typical working day is 12 to 14 hours.

The demands of rural agricultural work are dependent on seasons and on the weather. Ahmad and Quasem (1991) tried to estimate the number of hours children work by counting the number of hours children worked in a one year period. They then divided this number by eight, consistent with the number of seasons. According to their calculations, girls engaged in household and agricultural work put in 188 days of work per year; boys worked for an average of 144 days per year. Full employment would be 270 days per year.

Few children working in rural areas actually get paid for their efforts. Some male children do work for a daily wage rate during rice cultivation periods, and salaries vary depending on the particular stage of cultivation. Average daily wages varied from between taka 15 and 30 (between US\$.30 and .60). Girls, mostly doing domestic work or light agricultural work, such as tending goats or cattle, do not receive cash payments for their work.

The allure, for children and their parents, of the city is obvious if one looks solely at income earning capacity. While children's income range from nothing for young domestic workers, at the other end of the scale some young commercial sex workers reported salaries of taka 1500 per day. In an in-depth study of domestic servants in Dhaka (Shamim, Huda, Mahmud, 1995) almost 40 percent of the children studied received absolutely no payment. Another 26 percent occasionally received

a salary, 25 percent receive less than taka 50 monthly, and the balance were given something less than taka 100 per month. Girls were more likely to be given these small amounts of money than their male counterparts. It is noteworthy that more than 50 percent of the children gave even these paltry sums of money to their parents or guardians living in rural areas or in urban slums.^{vi}

In-kind payment of food and accommodation is more common for child domestics (Shamim, Huda, Mamud, 1995; Blanchet 1996). Child domestics are given the same food as adult domestics, though the quantity is considerably less. They are not permitted to choose food for themselves, are given food by the female head of the household, and generally receive the leftovers of the family meal. This results in erratic meal times for the children, sometimes having their last meal of the day between 10:30 p.m. and 11:00 p.m.^{vii} Blanchet (1996) paints a decidedly grimmer picture of child domestic servants, including the feeding and sleep habits. She recalls a Government study showing that 44 percent of households in Dhaka have full-time domestic servants, while another 29 percent have part-time help. *Bandha kaj* is the word used to describe the former, which literally means 'tied work'. The latter, *tsuta kaj*, relates to specific tasks which, when completed, means that the job of the servant is over and he or she may leave. Payment tends to be higher for this type of work, but it is seldom an option for children.

According to Blanchet the life and treatment of child domestics is consistent with the class structure which is part of Bengali culture. At every turn, servants are reminded that they are lesser people, with a lower position in life than their employers. Therefore: They sleep on the kitchen or the living room floor. They have no space of their own. They often eat cheaper food with cheaper utensils and sit on the floor, and not in a chair in front of a table as the employer's family does. They eat after everybody else has eaten and they are not allowed to help themselves to food...The lower status of the domestic servant is marked in countless ways. Hairstyle, cheaper clothing, subservient body language and the fact that they do not attend school all indicate their inferior status.^{viii}

For a child working full-time in a job other than domestic work, the average salary is around taka

500 (US\$11) (Pelto, 1995). Self-employed children typically earn close to taka 800 monthly, while those in small family businesses reported salaries close to taka 500 per month. Factory-waged employment, formal and informal, earned children average wages of between taka 362 and 492 (Pelto, 1995; Karmaker, 1995). Garment factory earnings for children could be as low as taka 400 and as high as taka 2000 monthly, though the average was taka 700-800. Work in a sandal factory yields taka 1500 monthly, while in a jewellery factory a child might earn taka 200.

Conditions of work are as wide-ranging as their salaries. In addition to the above-mentioned condition of child domestic servants, they are subject to tremendous domination, and potentially to sexual exploitation as well (Blanchet, 1996; Stalker, 1996). Harassment is actually quite common for children working on the streets, as porters in railway stations, and in all manner of factories. Children working in informal factories seem most susceptible to physical damage (Karmaker, 1995). In soap and aluminium factories heat is extreme, and work involves the use of dangerous chemicals. Similarly, in glass factories children are exposed to excruciating heat, to flame; accidents are not uncommon.

The conditions, hours and salaries of work that children do run the gamut of possibilities. Some would fall under the label of 'safe, light work' discussed in an earlier section of this paper. The majority would not. Purely measured in monetary value, it would be difficult to argue that children's work is really fruitful. But the picture is really much more muddled than is indicated. What would the children be doing if not working? Is there value other than monetary value in what they are doing? What kind of pride and fulfilment do they get from their work? Some would argue that these questions are insignificant if these children are missing their childhood and having their rights denied. I find that argument simplistic and deterministic, and am convinced that further research is required.

Further Research

It is this conviction, something stronger than curiosity but weaker than knowledge, that draws me to my current undertaking. I am keen to probe further into the psychosocial impacts of sudden attempts to eliminate child labour, hypothesising

that such dramatic approaches are harmful to children's well-being.

My fascination with well-being is fuelled by more than a decade of work with UNICEF, grappling with rights and 'beyond survival' issues. The child survival and development revolution has been a milestone in public health, and some really difficult quality of life challenges have emerged. With near-universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, states parties and partners are compelled to give equal weight to the survival, protection, development and participation of all children under the age of eighteen. Indeed, priorities need to be set, but due consideration must be given to issues like child labour, and others where interventions are more about equity and agency than charity.

Finally, from the earliest stages of my research here in Australia, and when I return to the field, I will naturally call upon my own experiences in and powerful memories of Bangladesh. I was heavily immersed in life there, and in rights and child labour issues. During my tenure I participated in the drafting of an historic Memorandum of Understanding among garment producers, UNICEF and the ILO. The intention was to transition children from factory workplaces to schools, with a stipend designed to partially compensate for lost wages. I continue to think that something was very right about that effort, but intuitively it never seemed like 'the solution' to an apparent and more widespread child labour problem. Children did lose their jobs in factories. They did go to school under the programme. But I was not able to find a single child who loitered or enjoyed their leisure time when not in the classroom. Every child found a new job: selling pens, working as servants in the home of wealthier Dhakaites. All worked in lousier conditions receiving less pay than they had in the factories. Better literate and labouring than illiterate and labouring? For all the 'little women in Bangladesh' and for the 'little men' as well, on this question the jury is still out.

(Susan Bissell is a PhD student studying child labour in Bangladesh at the Australian Centre for International and Tropical Health and Nutrition, University of Queensland.)

Notes

1 Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, 117-118.

2 Pamela Horn, *Children's Work and Welfare, 1780-1880s*, 9.

3 Marjorie Cruickshank, in Pamela Horn, *op. cit.*, 9.

4 David McDonald, 'Child and Female Labour in Sydney 1876 - 1898', 41. This is an apt quotation relative to my experiences in Bangladesh. I well remember Dr. P. Pelto, who was working with me at the time, returning from a visit to a tannery and, as I had on my own visit there previously, reporting a feeling of extreme nausea. Dr. Pelto had asked the working children in the factory about the stench, and they actually reported no concern for it. 'What smell?', one or two asked.

5 Otherwise known as garbage collectors, or waste collectors. A number of them in interviews with Dr. Pelto spoke with such pride about their work that he, with them, came up with a more 'elevated' title.

6 M. Hoque (ed.), *Child Domestic Work in Dhaka*, 60.

7 *Ibid.*, 61.

8 Blanchet, *op. cit.*, 101.

The Foundation for Women

Thailand

The Foundation for Women, a Thai NGO, have requested assistance with their library.

The FFW assists women with information, support, referral and emergency financial assistance to individual women, especially in cases of domestic violence; education and training in villages in the North and North-east of Thailand in developing ways to oppose the traffic in girls and women and sexual violence; media campaigns and distribution of materials for national and international distribution, and participatory research.

They have a library on women's issues, feminism, and women in development but due to the limited availability and expense, much of their library is very old.

They would greatly appreciate any donations from women's organisations, academics or publishers of more recent books in English (or Thai!) on women's issues.

If you have any spare copies of recent books that you have published or know of any organisations that may be able to help, please let Andrea Whittaker know and she will arrange to send them or put you in contact.

Andrea.Whittaker@coombs.anu.edu.au

The Culture Mandala

Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural &
Economic Studies
at Bond University

The Culture Mandala is a non-technical Bulletin aimed at increasing academic and public awareness of cultural and political affairs which impact on East/West relations.

For more information contact the general editor

R. James Ferguson

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Bond University, Gold Coast, QLD 4229

Tel (075) 5595 2522

Fax (075) 5595 2545

National Visiting Scholarship Scheme for PhD Scholars

Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies

RSPAS seeks applications from graduate students at other Australian Universities who are currently enrolled in a course of study for the Doctor of Philosophy degree and who wish to spend periods from one to three months at the School to enable them to consult with leading scholars in their research area both in the School and more widely within the ANU, and to use the ANU Libraries and the National Library.

Applicants should be undertaking research on a Pacific or Asian country or region and in a discipline covered by the Division of RSPAS.

Applicants must have been oncourse for a minimum of 6 months at their home university at the time of their projected arrival and should be able to take up the scholarship in 1997. The School provides return fares, living allowance of \$215 per week and office facilities.

Contact: Secretary RSPAS, ANU, Canberra ACT 0200

Tel (06) 249 2678 Fax (06) 249 4836

schlsec.rspas@anu.edu.au

Aust. Longman Publishers 360pp.
\$29.95

BOOK REVIEW

Contemporary Australian Feminism

Kate Pritchard Hughes (ed.) 1997

Reviewed by Rhonda Carew

Australian Catholic University, Qld

This book is a revised and expanded edition of *Contemporary Australian Feminism*, which appeared in 1994. Six of the original chapters have been supplemented by seven new pieces. The contributing authors include prominent scholars and activists in the vibrant field of women's studies in Australia, such as Lyn Richards, Sevgi Kilic and Carmel Shute. The issues discussed in the volume range from the perennial questions that vex the feminist movement, for example, "Sex and sexualities: contemporary feminist debates" and "Gender roles in contemporary Australia", to those of more recent appearance, such as "Telegram, telephone, tell a woman: gender, communication technology and everyday life in Australia".

One of the main unifying threads running through *Contemporary Australian Feminism* is the debate surrounding the questions of "Who is a feminist and what is feminism?" It is unfortunate that in 1997 such a discussion need take place. However, feminism has never been a popular movement within mainstream Australian society and, as stated in Pritchard Hughes' article, "Feminism for beginners", even now does not enjoy favourable media coverage. In a country whose national identity has always been male-oriented and where mateship - between men - has been the most publicly valued virtue, any challenge to the cultural ideals and norms has little chance of open and independent debate. Female virtues within this patriarchal society included housework and motherhood and led to an image of the Australian middle-class mum, content with her Malley's washer and modern, streamlined kitchen, waiting for her breadwinner to come home from work. This iconic woman was feminine, fulfilled and did not question the validity of her designed role. A few real women questioned the disparity between the reality of their lived experience and this icon of feminine domestic bliss.

From the early 1960s the media image of feminism has been of strident, hairy, unfeminine women of dubious sexuality, who not only hate men, but who also seek to undermine, and therefore threaten, a

society that appeared to be functioning quite well. The fact that much of the adult population of this society found major flaws in the firmly established

political, legal, educational, medical and societal infrastructures was, and still is in many instances, treated with derision and regarded as of little or no consequence. It is this lingering attitude which makes books such as *Contemporary Australian Feminism* a necessity.

Feminism has always been a political movement, consisting of groups whose interests and views are as diverse and colourful as the multicultural national identity many are striving to attain. However, despite their diversity these groups are united in seeking to change a staunchly patriarchal society, where the male viewpoint has been the only one used to construct both historical and current paradigms. Of these masculinist constructions one of the most damaging to women has been that of what constitutes a 'feminine' woman. Submissive, passive, amenable to male demands and acquiescent to the physical shape deemed to be beautiful at any historical moment. As Barbara Brook indicates in her chapter, "Femininity and Culture", women have always had to accept the guidelines of male observance and approval. Despite the research and current emphasis on the benefits of women adopting healthy diets and engaging in sport throughout their lives, as is also indicated in Brook's chapter, the benefits of money and fame still only arrive for female sport participants who retain their femininity. Women who resist the current image of beauty - thin, waiflike and fragile - by engaging in sports requiring the development of large, strong and muscular physiques find very little "favourable fame" and even less sponsorship (p.107).

Contemporary Australian Feminism acknowledges that the issue of femininity/female has been a divisive topic for women. As stated in Lyn Richards' chapter, "The ideology of the family", "...women's lives in Australia are dominated by ideology ... Women's behaviour shouts of their ideological constraints: women are expected to bear and nurture children, to take caring roles and to

avoid heavy work and the tasks of leadership and authority." (p.162). These traits are presented, through advertising and cultural norms, as biological facts, a part of being female. This question can still rouse all women, from the most radical feminist to extreme "family values" conservatives to argument. Many women would be loathe to lose the image of female-nurturer, but cannot happily accept the passive and narrow space allocated to them by the patriarchal construct of "mother". For other women, nurturing instincts should be developed by both genders and cover all aspects of life, including our attitude to the environment. The rise of ecofeminism reflects such views and allows many more women to have some input into conservation or environmental decisions. As explained in Lesley Instone's essay, "Denaturing women: women, feminism and the environment", women's involvement in conservation movements have been seen as instigated by men. For instance, the green bans, which halted work on some development schemes which endangered certain open spaces in Sydney in 1971, are usually accredited to the male-dominated trade union movements. However, it was an environmentally interested group of women, "the Kelly's Bush Battlers" (p.135), who initially requested the placement of the bans. Without the acknowledgment in a publication such as *Contemporary Australian Feminism*, many women would remain unaware of just how much can be achieved by local action by disillusioned women.

Tied in with the masculinist ideology of femininity are the problems surrounding the issues of women's sexuality and women's attitudes towards pornography or uninvited sexual suggestion or attention. The masculinist ideology of femininity does not really have a place for the sexually active woman, nor for the woman who actively rejects unwanted sexual advances, or harassment. Like the issue of the "nature of feminisms", pornography has also divided the feminist movement. Moreover, while many women actively campaign against all pornography, others see distinct differences between the place of the female in subtle erotica and the problems which arise inside a society that condones violent pornographic images involving female bodies. Women's sexuality is dealt with in a number of these chapters in ways that acknowledge differing opinions and needs. For many women, sexual liberation meant the ability to participate in an active sex life. Others, both in Australia and

elsewhere, have a greater need to be able to safely reject any such participation. This diversity of need has meant that women's sexuality has become one of the problem areas of feminist thought. Date rape, rape within marriage and sexual harassment are areas which many people, both men and women, feel should not impinge on either government or court time and where individual women should be capable of action to suit their circumstances. It is vitally important that the community be given access to information that enables this debate to continue, as these are areas where media coverage does not always concede the inequality that still exists between the genders.

Other issues discussed in this book that feminist organisations have had to come to terms with include development and poverty. For many decades it has been assumed that the various types of development found to work well for western nations should merely be superimposed on other cultures on the assumption that similar "success" will naturally ensue. This attitude was widespread amongst not only feminist groups, but aid and banking groups as well. These attempts to provide western style solutions to ethnic or indigenous women's problems did not meet with a great deal of success. The need to adjust development to suit individual communities is a notion that is now gaining credence throughout the world. The implications of the application of western-style development on newly developing nations is extensively covered in Jeannie Rea's essay on "The feminisation of poverty; an international perspective". This chapter highlights a number of issues, including the fact that many people see poverty as a product of over-population, rather than the maldistribution of resources. This application of western ideas has led to conflict between many organisations and the diverse cultures they are seeking to assist. For instance, as stated in Rea's chapter, western women have struggled to obtain adequate contraception and abortion rights. Many women in developing nations have had to resist contraception and sterilisation being forced upon them in areas where "... fear of the 'population bomb' ..." is that it may delay or reduce economic development. Indigenous and ethnic women need access to information that will assist them with exploring all options available, enabling them to choose methods of birth control, dress, development, occupation and cultural change that

will not alienate them from their community.

The benefits of this collection of essays on such a variety of topics is that whilst it does acknowledge the gains feminist organisations have made, it is also quite clear on the reality that, as yet, equality between the genders across the cultural spectrum has not arrived. There have been enormous gains in legal areas, such as domestic violence, stalking and divorce laws. In addition, changes in gender role ideas have allowed women to participate in non-traditional occupations. However, these gains are offset by a subtle continuation of pressure to conform to gender roles within the home. This pressure, when combined with a continuing emphasis on the importance of "family values", is regarded by many women as merely a return to an entrenched patriarchal stance, and an unseen, but implacable, opposition to women's advancement in the professional or business world. Throughout this book, statistical information is provided which proves what many women - and a good many men - have long realised. Despite the rhetoric, the introduction of equal pay, women's refuges, childcare facilities, easier access to education, legal and medical advice, there remain a significant number of arenas where Australian women need to continue challenging traditional notions.

One of the most disturbing elements of this book is the acknowledgment that feminism is still perceived as a white, middle-class women's movement. The media focus, when favourable, has tended to be on women's issues that encompass family and reproductive issues, such as newer methods of contraception and gynaecological operating procedures, improvements in the treatment of breast cancer, legal changes to the custody, divorce or domestic violence codes, the provision of childcare for working mothers, and the changing roles within relationships. Whereas it was previously accepted that men in relationships would have very little to do with the actual nurturing of children or what was regarded as "women's work" inside the house, media images of male participation in these roles have contributed to their gaining legitimacy. Although most of these issues have great significance for Aboriginal, ethnic or white women at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, it must also be realised that as with newly developing countries, women from these marginalised groups have greatly differing needs from the white, middle-class woman. It is also

Women in Asia (July 1997)

obvious from some of the essays that many people in the wider community have merely perused the gains made and assumed that a feminist movement is no longer required. Unfortunately, there is a degree of complacency amongst both men and women within Australian society and a feeling that feminism is somehow obsolete. The problems with this complacency are demonstrated by the ease with which so much money has been cut from spending on women's issues and departments by the present government. It would be hoped that books such as *Contemporary Australian Feminism*, which incorporates a number of issues in an accessible manner, will allow Australian women to continue to debate and challenge these issues.

(Rhonda Carew is an Honours student at the Australian Catholic University (Qld) working on the travel documents of an English female explorer.)

MEDIASWITCH

MediaSwitch is a national non-profit organisation which monitors the portrayal of women in the media

- *builds community awareness
- *lobbies for change
- *offers innovative training & educational materials
- *advocates for realistic, representative & diverse imagery of women in the media

You can become a member of MediaSwitch
Individual—\$20.00 Organisation—\$40.00

Contact MediaSwitch (Qld) Inc. PO Box 1321, Toowong Qld 4066

ALiTrA

AUSTRALIAN LITERARY TRANSLATORS' ASSOCIATION

ALiTrA is an organisation dedicated to the promotion and development of literary translation in Australia. It publishes a regular newsletter which features information on grants, translation support schemes as well as articles and literary translations by Australian translators.

Membership of this professional body is \$25.00 per year and can be sent to Simon Patton (address below).

Contributions of translations, news or articles for the newsletter are welcomed and can be sent to:

Simon Patten ALiTrA 182 Annandale Street
Annandale NSW 2038 FAX (02) 660 5580

For general information about ALiTrA activities contact:

Simon Patton (02) 660 5580 or Judy Armstrong (03) 387 6885

WINNER

Women's Information National Network and
Emergency Relief

For further information contact

WINNER

10 Barnetts Road

Winston Hills 2153

Tel (BH)02 9739 2947

Fax: (BH) 02 9739 2905

(AH) 02 9963 94654

CONFERENCE UPDATE

The Women's Information National Network and Emergency Relief Inc will be involved in the 5th Women in Asia conference. They are organising several panels and a Multicultural Performing Arts Festival. The panels include:

(Day 1) Current Perspectives in Australia I

- A community development officer's perspective,
- Bonded by caste and gender: the feminisation of poverty in rural India
- Feminism and the future - a Sri Lankan experience
- Feminist and NGO movements in the Third World: the other revolution

(Day 2) Current Perspectives in Australia II

- Migrant resource centres as settlement service brokers
- combating racism including issues in Australia
- Victims of Mad Cow and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease imperialism: developing countries and infertile women
- The role of women in Aboriginal reconciliation

(Also Day 2) International Perspectives

- Feminism, femininity and female bodies in post-Cultural Revolution China
- Women and literacy - a Malaysian perspective
- Apartheid and post-Apartheid after 21 years: a South African experience
- Quinacrine sterilisation: the Nazi sting of population control's medical paradigm
- Globalisation of women entrepreneurs

(Day 3) Multicultural Performing Arts Festival
Sunday 5 October (7:30 pm) at Parramatta Town
Hall, Parramatta NSW

This is just a sample of what the conference will have to offer... sounds like it will be a great program!

1998 IFRWH/FIRHF CONFERENCE

WOMEN & HUMAN RIGHTS,

SOCIAL JUSTICE,

& CITIZENSHIP:

INTERNATIONAL HISTORICAL

PERSPECTIVES

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

30 June - 2 July 1998

The International Federation for Research in Women's History/Federation Internationale pour la Recherche en Histoire des Femmes announces a conference on the theme 'Women and Human Rights, Social Justice, and Citizenship: International Historical Perspectives', to be held in Melbourne, Australia, from 30 June to 2 July 1998.

Program enquiries should be sent to Diane Kirkby, History Department, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Vic. 3083, Australia.
hisdek@lure.latrobe.edu.au

All other enquiries can be addressed to Patricia Grimshaw.
pat_grimshaw@muwayf.unimelb.edu.au

WOMEN IN ASIA EDITORIAL BOARD

Please send information for the newsletter to the editorial board member in your state or directly to

Andrea Whittaker
Gender Relations Project,
RSPAS, ANU,
Canberra ACT 0200

Western Australia

Tamara Jacka,
Humanities
Murdoch University,
Murdoch, 6150
Tel (09) 360 2993
jacka@central.murdoch.edu.au

Victoria

Alison Tokita,
Japanese Studies
Monash University, Clayton, 3168
ATokita@arts.monash.edu.au

New South Wales

Monika Bhatia,
Vice-Chancellory
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney NSW 2060
Tel (02) 9739 2947
m.bhatia@acu.edu.au

South Australia

Lesley Potter,
Geography Dept.,
University of Adelaide, SA 5005
Tel (08) 303 5647 Fax (08) 303 3772
lpotter@arts.adelaide.edu.au

Tasmania

Nerida Cook,
Asian Studies,
University of Tasmania,
GPO Box 2520 Hobart, 7001
Tel (002) 202914

Northern Territory

Chrsitine Doran,
Faculty of Arts
Northern Territory University
Darwin NT 0909
c_doran@banks.ntu.edu.au

Australian Capital Territory

Andrea Whittaker,
Gender Relations Project,
RSPAS, ANU, ACT 0200
Andrea.Whittaker@coombs.anu.edu.au

Queensland

Helen Creese, Asian Languages and Studies
University of Queensland
Queensland 4067,
Tel (07) 3365 6413 Fax (07) 3365 6799
Email H.Creese@mailbox.uq.oz.au

COPY DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE

December 5 1997

Women in Asia (July 1997)

Reports, reviews and comments and activities past and future are most welcome.

The views expressed in *Women in Asia* are those of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the ASAA or the Women's Caucus

Subscriptions

A two-yearly subscription costs \$20.00 (waged) and \$10.00 (unwaged). Send payment to Andrea Lanyon. Receipts will be issued.

MAIL SUBSCRIPTIONS TO:

Andrea Lanyon
Consumerism and Environmentalism Project
Anthropology and Sociology
The University of Queensland
QLD 4072
tel (07) 3365 2287
fax: (07) 3365 1544

I wish to subscribe to *Women in Asia*. Please find enclosed my cheque for \$20.00 waged/ \$10.00 unwaged.
(make cheques payable to *Women in Asia*)

NAME: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

EMAIL: _____

OR:

Please update my mailing address to take into account the change in my title/name/address/email

CHANGE TO: _____

ISSN NO: 0729-3178