

Gender and Transition in China and Vietnam

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Introductory Note

This paper aims to provide a reflective and general overview of gender and transition in China and Vietnam highlighting pertinent themes, patterns and processes to inform both a general and specialist audience; additionally it provides up-to-date data as available and appropriate. The paper is based on new and detailed empirical studies and incorporates some of the most up-to-date research conducted within and outside of China and Vietnam and by both Asian and European/American scholars. It also incorporates my own documentary and field research arising out of more than twenty years of study on China together with observations from relevant sessions at a recent Asian-wide conference on Gender and Development held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 28-30 November 1997. In this field rarely do data sources coincide hence the paper is more discursive than data-packed with data used to illustrate trends rather than as an end in itself. The importance of gendered statistics is noted throughout the text.

The paper is biased towards China rather than Vietnam due to an imbalance in volume of accumulated research on each country and my own background on China. The sections on Vietnam rely heavily on a recently published volume of twenty-four papers on **Vietnam's Women in Transition** edited by Kathleen Barry (Macmillan 1996). What is interesting about the study of the two countries is the degree to which development and gender policies and trends closely parallel one another despite differing historical backgrounds and the history of recent war and division in Vietnam. In some sections trends in China and Vietnam will be discussed separately and in others both countries are incorporated into the one discussion.

The paper attempts to provide a balanced view of the very mixed repercussions which women in China and Vietnam have experienced in their working and domestic lives by signalling both the gains and losses. Given the policy and practical aims of the paper, however, there is more attention given to problems but these discussions should take place with full appreciation given to the serious attempts in both countries to both modernise and redefine the roles and status of women.

In both countries there has been more of a concern with redefining the role and increasing the status of women than with the broader analytical concept of gender, which not only encompasses a concern with women, but also highlights women's roles, responsibilities and opportunities in relation to men. Although the relational term gender is used increasingly in both countries it still refers to redefining female roles and status leaving many unquestioned assumptions about socially constituted hierarchies and gender difference which shape the lives and activities of women within households, communities and societies.

This then influences the presentation of this paper.

Finally, because of the importance of the revolutionary background for present-day policies and practices, the paper provides a short introductory section on general socio-economic, political and gender policies and trends within the revolutionary periods of both countries before focusing on the one (Vietnam) or two decades (China) of reform and on the main aspects of gendered human development, employment and empowerment as requested by Sida.

1. Gender, Revolution and Reform

Any discussion or assessment of gender relations in China and Vietnam should open with an outline of those government's own gender-specific policies over past decades for both governments, as part of their revolutionary platforms, have perceived women as an important human resource in their war efforts, socialist development and subsequent transition or modernisation of their countries. Officially they were designated as both agents and beneficiaries of development: that is, just as female participation was deemed necessary to the success of development, so development was deemed essential to the improvement of female status and the redefinition of gender roles in China and Vietnam. In the examination of gender-specific issues and policies, each country's general and gender-specific policies and programmes closely parallel one another and they both constitute significant case studies because of the particular form which their development and modernisation have taken and the scope on which the redefinition of the role of and status of women has been simultaneously attempted. An analysis of the achievements and shortfalls of this combination of development and gender-specific programmes offers a salutary experience in examining and evaluating gender issues within the context of both revolution and transition.

This section provides a brief context for analysing gender issues within China's and Vietnam's development programmes by summarising the main socio-political and economic policies, programmes and practices which were designed to redefine the role and status of women during various phases of their development. China's development programmes may be divided into two main periods: the first thirty years of Revolution(1949-78) and the past twenty years or so of Reform(1979-1997). Vietnam's development programmes complicated by war, division and reunification(1975) may be divided between the years of Revolution(1945-1986) followed by the past ten years or so of Renovation(1986-1997) which for simplification of presentation is also referred to here as Reform.

1.1 Revolution

The overall aim of both revolutionary governments was to develop the rural and urban economy and transform their societies by redistributing resources on an equitable basis to the advantage of all their citizens. As part of these revolutions, the governments of China and Vietnam both adopted a number of policies and programmes to redefine women's roles and place them in a position of equal status with men in both public and domestic spheres. Taken together, the legal, economic and political programmes amounted to a comprehensive five-pronged strategy designed to (a)legislate for equality, (b)introduce women into social production, (c)reduce women's domestic responsibilities, (d)introduce a new ideology of equality and (e)organise women to both redefine and forward their own economic, political and social interests.

A. Strategies

(a) Legislation: During the early revolutionary years both new governments took rapid and decisive steps to incorporate women's equality, rights and protection into their constitutions and new legal codes such as land, labour and marriage laws. The promulgation of these laws was followed by extensive campaigns to make the new legal provisions and facilities widely known and available throughout the country. Legislation in support of women's needs and interests is common enough, but a distinctive element in the revolutionary strategies was the role assigned to education in publicising the new legal provisions.

(b) Production: A major goal of both governments was to expand women's economic roles in the countryside and to establish a new range of women's employment opportunities in the cities. Successive government policies aimed at the reorganisation of production into co-operatives and collectives thus separating it from the household and providing new opportunities and working conditions enabling women to take a full and wide-ranging part in economic production outside the domestic domain. The aim of the systematic and comprehensive attempts to encourage women into social production, exacerbated in Vietnam by the war (1954-75) and in China by the Great Leap Forward (1958-60), was to both expand and diversify production thus providing women with new opportunities to acquire new skills, new claims on public and domestic resources and an economic independence.

(c) Reproduction: The degree to which the Chinese government attempted to reduce the traditional domestic responsibilities of women was unusual even when compared with other revolutionary governments such as that in Vietnam. Nation-wide programmes in China were initiated to alter the domestic division of labour by advocating the redistribution of domestic responsibilities among family members within the household and by establishing community and service facilities to share domestic responsibility for raising and caring for children, supplying and preparing food, washing, sewing and other household services. In extensive family planning programmes both governments in later years provided women with the means and services to reduce their fertility rate.

(c) Culture: Unusually, the governments of China and Vietnam both attempted to establish a new set of cultural beliefs incorporating new definitions of gender roles and relations based on equality. These were designed to replace traditional ideologies which had customarily supported gender hierarchies based on Confucian-based male supremacy and female subordination and dependence. One of the distinctive features of later government strategies to redefine gender roles and relations was the belief that it was feudal attitudes which above all were responsible for sustaining outmoded beliefs, norms and folk sayings emphasising female dependence, inferiority and secondariness, incapacities and limitation. These, it was emphasised, despite new female economic roles in the revolutions and in the continuing war effort in Vietnam, almost single-handedly continued to circumscribe expectations of women and their own expectations of themselves.

(e) Organisation: The All China Women's Federation in China and the Women's Union in Vietnam were state-funded and sponsored separate organisations for women designed to enable and equip women to protect and expand their new legal rights and economic opportunities. The nation-wide organisations were made up of networks of local units centred on village and urban neighbourhoods and units of employment and had their own administrative hierarchies paralleling those of Party and State. They were encouraged to play a supporting role in raising female levels of health, education and vocational skills and more generally in acting as both a conduit for Party policies and for communicating the views of women on national and local policies.

On the eve of reform in both countries, and despite major changes in gender and general-related social, political and economic culture and experience, it could be argued that if there were to be further changes and improvements in female status then a number of shortfalls in policy implementation and policy definition would have to be rectified by each government's new policies of transition.

B. Shortfalls in Policy Implementation

(a) Legislative provisions for female equality, although unusually comprehensive and of many decades standing, had not been accompanied by appropriately supportive socio-economic conditions and there had been insufficient legal institutional support for those attempting to exercise their rights with few effective sanctions against those transgressing the law especially within domestic affairs.

(b) In production, despite high rates of female employment and entry into occupations hitherto denied them, there had been less attention given to women's position within employment including their intensity of labour, the sexual division of labour and equity in remuneration. The result was that in both societies the majority of peasant and working women still performed the least skilled, least mechanised and the most repetitive and lower-paid jobs in the less-developed and less-rewarded sectors of the economy.

(c) Additionally many of the services established to reduce **domestic labour** were short-lived because the resources allocated to them were insufficient. Those that had been retained were uneven in the type and quality of their service while, overall, demand far outstripped supply. Despite some attempts to alter the division of labour within the household, female domestic labour continued to subsidise the development programmes in both countries.

(d) Culturally in both countries the construction of an all-pervasive and favourable ideology of equality and its official celebration was a useful educational device, but it also masked women's own very mixed experience of revolutionary development and provided few opportunities to acknowledge the gap between rhetoric and experience. The result is that continuing discrimination against and subordination of women was largely and officially disguised by an all pervasive rhetoric of equality.

(e) **Organisationally**, the existence of the ACWF and the Women's Union as separate organisations for women were important pre-requisites for the definition and support of gender-specific issues. However they had been increasingly placed on the defensive and had not always intervened to protect or further the interests of their members. Primarily this was because the women's organisations mainly operated within boundaries set by their governments and because their relationship with Government and Party demanded that, in addition to improving the status of women, they also provide support for Party and Government policies which so often caused an uneasy tension between class and gender-based organisations.

C. Shortfalls in Policy Definition

If the governments of China and Vietnam during the years of revolution could be said to have placed gender-specific issues on their revolutionary agendas to an unusual degree, there continued to be more attention given to economic development and/or war than to the definition of gender-specific policies and to women's contribution to rather than to their benefits from national causes or development. In particular a continuing and pervasive rhetoric of equality denied official existence of any gender-specific problems or any discrepancy between the rhetoric of equality and experience which might have allowed for policy redefinition. Equity issues were defined outside of and with little reference to economic issues and this separation was the single most important factor accounting for the discrepancy between ideal and practice or rhetoric and experience.

Thus attention to new ideologies of equality was not matched by attention to providing resources for gender-specific policies and programmes and policy definition frequently stopped short of the allocation of resources. Even at the rhetorical level, gender-specific issues were frequently reduced to slogans and discussed in terms of a few generalised premises the meanings of which were often simplified or ambiguous and failed to take the complexity of gender issues into account. Rather, and more generally, policies which benefited revolutionary development were assumed to benefit women whose welfare was frequently perceived to be primarily derivative of broader economic and political strategies. However it was not so much that revolutionary priorities jeopardised the achievement of gender-specific goals but rather that the connections between gender and development issues were rarely or fully explored during the revolutions in China and Vietnam. In both countries, revolutionary policies have been succeeded by new policies to hasten the modernisation of their countries, to redefine women's roles and to protect women's rights.

1.2 Reform and Transition

The overall aim of reform in both China and Vietnam has been to rapidly transform their countries into a powerful and modern nation-states by reforming and developing all sectors of their economies. To effect a transition to a market economy, policy programmes have

emphasised the importance of education, skill enhancement, professionalism and technical research, profitability and the operation of economic incentives in the planning, management and expansion of production for both internal and external markets. It is expected that by contributing further to reform, women will also increasingly benefit from the economic reforms. To these ends in the past ten to twenty years there have been a number of modifications to their previous strategies to redefine gender relations by improving women's roles and status.

(a) Production: In both countries the period of reform has been marked by a new impetus given to the mobilisation of women to take part in production. Again women have been exhorted to improve their contribution to development and economic growth by both acquiring skills and improving their education, training and by taking advantage of the new employment opportunities offered by the recent urban and rural economic reforms.

(b) Domestic Labour: Although there is less attention in both societies to the demands that domestic labour continues to make on women's time and energy, there is some effort to ease supplies of fuel and water and to raise standards of housing and production of domestic appliances. In both societies, the implementation of a one- or two-child family planning programme is expected to foreshorten the female reproductive cycle considerably and reduce the familial roles of women although this may be offset by the rise in the dependency ratio which will increase the ratios of elderly requiring family care.

(b) Legislation: To reduce sex discrimination, there have been new laws in both countries in support of labour protection and the reduction in abuse and trafficking of women and other forms of violence against the female person. In each country, and especially in China, there is a new interest in the rule of law and again new legislation has been accompanied by extensive legal campaigns both to acquaint women with their rights and to provide for the exercise of these rights. There is a particular interest in reducing public and domestic physical and emotional violence which has been visibilised if not exacerbated by very contemporary economic reforms and family planning policies.

(c) Women's Organisations: Separate female organisations have continued to be most important in the definition and implementation of gender-specific goals while a new plurality and types of women's organisations is increasing their political significance. In both countries during the years of reform, official women's organisations have redefined and strengthened their organisational role in investigating and publicising discrimination against women and in defending female needs and interests. In both cases their political rôle has been redefined as a result of the proliferation of alternative women's organisations and study centres.

(d) Culturally new women's organisations as alternative or supplementary women's organisations are the result of a new consciousness of the discrepancy or gap between official revolutionary ideologies of equality and social or everyday practices in which prejudice and hierarchical gender-divisions of labour continue to discriminate against women.⁽¹⁾ During the period of economic reform in both countries, the rhetoric of gender equality has become much less pervasive as gender relations are examined anew.

In both countries the shift from reproducing rhetoric to documenting experience by the revived social sciences and new women's studies has led to a new interest in female discrimination, female entitlements or women's rights and a new research interest in women's studies and gender relations. As a result, one of the marked characteristics of reform in both countries, and distinguishing it from their revolutions, has been the increased recognition that previous rhetoric and images of gender equality do not match female experience of inequality either earlier during revolution or now in reform years. Thus the years of reform have been characterised by an increasingly open acknowledgement of female inequality so much so that it can be argued that female discrimination in education, in employment and in the family have received more attention during the years of reform than at any any time during the revolution.

This was not only due to the revolutionary legacy that had left the experience of women lagging behind the rhetoric of equality, but because many of the new reforms themselves, in altering the balance between plan and market, production and consumption and public and private forms of resource allocation, have had mixed implication for gender relations leading to both further opportunities for independence and an exacerbation of discrimination.

In terms of human development, female employment and female empowerment, several new, important and sometimes conflicting trends affecting gender roles and relations can be identified during the period of transition.

2.Human Development

Changes in a number of demographic indicators of female status over past decades in both China and Vietnam suggest an overall improvement in female health, education and income, but their access to services and rewards still remains less than those of the men of these societies and at the same time most of these improvements are fragile and hindered by country-wide shortages of resources.

2.1 Female Health

In both countries girls and women have shared in improved child immunisation programmes, sanitation, housing, nutrition and family planning, accessible primary health care and the control of many infectious and endemic diseases -although the degree to which they have done so is variable. The following indicators include some recent estimates for China and Vietnam as a whole, but take no account of regional differentials which can be highly variable. In both countries women in poor and remote regions continue to be especially disadvantaged.

A. China

(a) Survival

During the revolutionary years the probability of survival dramatically increased and for the most part these improvements have been maintained during the years of reform. The average life span has risen from 35 years in 1949 to 60 years in 1957, 61 years in 1994 and 69 years in 1996 with the average life span of females slightly higher than for males.(1) Overall mortality in China has declined significantly since 1949, once less than one for males(95.4 per 100 in 1954) it is now greater than one(106.5 per 100 in 1982).(2) Infant mortality has decreased from a high 200 per 1000 in the late 1940s to 140 in 1960, 39 per 1000 in 1988 and 35 in 1994 rising to 38 in 1996.(3) The child death rate also decreased to 43 per 1000 in 1994 and rose to 47 per 1000 in 1996(4), but when infant and child mortality rates are disaggregated by gender there is increasing evidence to suggest that sex ratios at birth and female infant mortality rates are not as low as they should be due to natural causes.

There has been a steady increase in sex ratios at birth over the 1980s and according to both foreign and Chinese demographers, the 1990 census eliminated any doubt that the sex ratios were high and rising in excess of an abnormal 112:100.(5)(See Table 1) For example, in some regions and for higher parity births, available figures both national and local can show a ratio upwards of 130 to 100.(6)(See Table 2) This decrease is attributed to son preference heightened by the one- to two-child family policy and is effected by sex selective abortion, non-registration of female births, female infanticide or abandonment.(See Table 3) Most Chinese and foreign demographers concur that under-registration and sex-selective abortion are increasingly the most important factors accounting for a significant increase in the sex ratios despite legislation against the use of ultrasound technologies for this purpose.(7) A comparison of infant mortality by sex and residence in 1981 and 1989 showed that while the infant mortality rate for boys decreased by 3.34 per thousand, the infant mortality rate for girls increased by 3.53 over the same period.(See Tables 4,5) While the infant mortality rate for girls was lower than that for boys in 1981(which is usually regarded as normal), the infant mortality rate of girls turned out to be higher than that for boys in 1989 and this trend seemed especially marked in rural areas.(8)

In contrast the child death rate, the causes of child death and nutritional data available on heights and weights showed no apparent differences between boys and girls that could be attributed to female neglect.(9) Health workers in urban and rural health clinics and hospitals were questioned on one of my own recent field trips about possible male/female differences in nutrition intake, disease profiles, access to hospital treatment and general parental care. They thought that there might be a slight but not significant difference between the care of boy and girl children. In most cases, health workers thought that boys might be brought more often to the hospital, but they were also adamant that all children were valuable to their parents and there was no difference in their care especially now that there were fewer children per household. They argued that child health care generally had improved with immunisation and routine child health checks which now uncovered a significant incidence of anaemia, rickets

and malnutrition and that any remaining son preference was not translated into observable female neglect. They may well be correct in their impressions, but evidence from a recent study in Southwest China suggests that the majority of boys and girls were taken to township health centres where medical fees were less than Y10. However the proportion of boy-patients whose parents paid above 10 yuan for their medical fee was slightly higher than for girl-patients.(10) A more recent estimate reported by the Women's Federation suggested that the mortality rate of sick girl children without any medical treatment was 8.6-13.9 points higher than that for boys.(11)

Given the lack of gender differentiation in the health data, other concurrent evidence of continuing son preference in say differentials in access to education and the scarcity and high costs of health care in so many urban and rural locations, it would not be too surprising if gendered disaggregation of health data did show some gender differences. Only further investigations will provide confirmation of the perceptions of health care workers that there may be slight but not significant daughter discrimination in access to health resources and services.

(b) Reproduction

The average age of marriage for females has risen from 19 years in the 1950s to around 22-23 years in the late 1980s.(12) There is some evidence that the age of marriage has stopped rising and has declined slightly during reform due to shortages of family labour and available mates because of migration. A widespread and efficient family planning network has been in place since the 1970s and the percentage of women of child-bearing age using contraception was reckoned to be 70 per cent in the late 1980s and 83 per cent in the 1990s.(13) The crude birth rate declined from 38 in 1965 to 21 per 1000 in 1988 and to 17 in 1996.(14) The total fertility rate declined from 5.7 in 1960 to 2.9 in 1980 and 1.8 in 1996. Given the stringent family planning policies it is not surprising to find that the number of births per woman has dramatically declined. In 1981 the beginning of the reform period, the overall birth rate was 2.63. Thereafter the most substantial decline has been in urban areas, from 5 to 1.4 in 1980s representing a 70 per cent decrease, while the rural birth rate declined from 5.96 to 2.91 or a 50 per cent decrease.(15)

There has been a substantial maternal and child health network established and maintained over the decades, and in 1992 there were 346 institutions for maternal and child health care, a 27.7 per cent increase over that of 1982(272), 2,841 clinics for maternal and child health which represented a 4.3 per cent increase over that of 1982(2,724) and 34 children's hospitals.(16) Since 1970, the Ministry of Public Health has systematised maternal care and promoted hospital deliveries which has effectively reduced the incidence of maternal complications and mortality. It is estimated that more than 90 per cent of pregnant women have access to pre-natal examinations and that 90 per cent of urban births and 30 per cent of rural births take place in hospital (See Table 6); the rate of using new antiseptic methods of delivery is 84 per cent. In 1992 the pregnancy and maternal mortality rate had declined to 95 per 1000.(17)

There has been much attention given to labour protection in industry but conditions of work continue to disadvantageously affect women's health and the increasing use of chemicals in factories and pesticides in the countryside require more attention. See Sections 3.2.A(d) and 3.2.C.

With the exception of the sex ratios and infant and child mortality rates which show a slight increase, demographic indicators in China during recent years do suggest an overall improvement in the quality of female reproductive health care. However it is also recognised in China that there is a need to collect further data and disaggregate demographic and health data by sex. According to recent studies and observations there are two current but opposing trends affecting reproductive health care in China today, the effects of which are only just beginning to be fully described and evaluated.

(i) There has been increasing and continuing research into common reproductive problems of rural Chinese women especially side-effects of contraception, of diagnosis and treatment of common reproductive tract infections and gynecological problems.

Several investigations have confirmed that common reproductive tract infections are a serious problem for rural women especially in poorer regions.(18) Results from a recent prevalence survey revealed that 70 per cent of randomly diagnosed women currently have at least one reproductive tract infection and that 58 per cent of all women currently have first, second or third degree cervicitis of unknown cause but which may increase the risk of HIV infection in exposed women, carry the risk of more serious health problems and potentially cause adverse birth outcomes for pregnant women. In one township, between 55-60 per cent of women reported at least one symptom during pregnancy, delivery or postpartum periods, and 80 per cent reported at least one gynecological symptom within the last six months and 90-95 per cent of women reported a contraceptive problem yet the number seeking help for these problems was minimal. Only 26 per cent of women sought care for self-reported symptoms during pregnancy, delivery or the postpartum period, 17.5 per cent for gynecological symptoms and only 25-31 per cent for problems following IUD insertion or abortion. There was a serious lack of knowledge of the potential consequences of untreated infections and women were embarrassed to visit health services largely staffed by male doctors.(19)

This study suggested that one of the most important constraints to reproductive health service utilisation in rural China is the lack of female rural doctors and the inability of rural areas to retain those that do exist.(20) It also showed that there was no routine screening for infections, that local health workers were not properly trained to diagnose and treat common reproductive infections and, that for problems relating to contraceptive use, women were reluctant to use the local family planning station for follow-up services.

(ii) At the same time preliminary reports suggest that major changes in the rural health financing, delivery and fragmentation of health services have had a detrimental effect on the provision and utilisation of reproductive health services including prenatal care and attended deliveries, diagnosis and treatment of gynecological problems, follow-up for contraceptive side effects and complications of pregnancy and during birth.(21) Specifically the move to a fee for service financing mechanism has reduced the delivery of preventative services and curative care especially for those who are in relatively remote rural regions and whose incomes

are lower than average. Providers at all levels are more concerned with generating salary support through fees for curative care than with providing purely subsidised preventative services.

Moreover the separation of family planning and health systems and the consequent withdrawal of family planning funds from the health service which had previously subsidised national health programmes has removed a guaranteed funding stream which had helped subsidise reproductive health services such as gynecological care or follow-up care for contraceptive side-effects. These changes have negatively affected the availability of reproductive health services, the quality of these services available in poor areas and the ability and willingness of rural women to pay for care. The increasing emphasis on curative care to earn income, the lack of funds and provider incentives for health education activities, and the shortage of female doctors contribute to very poor utilisation by women for services that do exist. Moreover service availability does not adequately match need, child delivery is not covered by pre-payment schemes and family planning services are too oriented towards the promotion of contraceptive use and do not pay enough attention to the follow up of problems from use.

In these circumstances screening and treatment for reproductive tract infections is either almost non-existent or determined by market forces. Increased attention is needed to examine actual morbidities of reproductive age women and their needs for services so that (a) market forces alone do not shape what services are available to them and (b) cost does not impede the ability of poor women to pay for services universally recognised as effective and necessary for adequate reproductive health.

B. Vietnam

(a) Survival

In Vietnam too the survival of female children and women has continued to improve over the past decade of reform. The number of children who die from the six main killers of whooping cough, tetanus, diarrhea, acute respiratory diseases, diphtheria and measles has been reduced considerably, as a result of an extensive immunisation programme, and although child malnutrition appears to be widespread in Vietnam, child malnutrition rates have declined by some 45-50 per cent in the past decade.(22) The crude death rate fell from 8 per 1000 in 1989 to 6 per 1000 in 1996 and the infant mortality rate has fallen from 147 per 1000 in 1960 to 35 per 1000 in 1994 and 33 per 1000 in 1996.(23) There has been a rise in the sex ratios at birth and discrimination against female children.

In his analysis of sex preferences for children in Vietnam, Goodkind used the sex ratio of child mortality as one of his indicators for sex preference in Vietnam. He found that the sex ratio of death probabilities at ages 1 to 14 shifted strongly between 1979 and 1989 from a surplus of male deaths to a surplus of female deaths. Such a trend in the sex ratio of child mortality suggests decreasing relative survival probabilities for female children in Vietnam.(24) Again, as in China, there is less evidence of gender bias in the nutritional status or medical care given to children suggesting that though Vietnamese parents hope for a son, and may have

additional births in order to have a son, once a child is born both boys and girls seem to be given similar food and health care. As in China again further research is needed to confirm these assertions.(25)

(b) Reproduction

There has been extensive maternal and child health and family planning networks set up in Vietnam so that over the the past 10 to 15 years maternal mortality was halved from 400 to 200 per 100,000 live births in the 1980s and reduced further to 135 per 100,000 live births in the 1990s.(26) The crude birth rate fell from 30 per 1000 in 1989 to 23 per 1000 population in 1996 and the total fertility rate was around 3 per cent.(27) Indeed Vietnam, like China, is presently in the midst of a sharp decline in fertility with the total fertility rate declining from 6.1 in 1960 to 5.1 in 1980 and 3.1 in 1996.(28) In large part this decline reflects the high priority that the government of Vietnam has given to reducing fertility and slowing population growth since north and south Vietnam were reunified in 1975. The active promotion of family planning by Vietnam's government has been supplemented more recently by an explicit policy aimed at establishing a new norm of a two-child family for most of the population.

In Vietnam too, recent studies suggest that the reproductive health of women is not as good as it might be with 60 per cent of pregnant women suffering from anemia mainly caused by poor nutrition, high incidences of reproduction tract infections largely due to lack of sanitation and especially water sanitation.(29) There is reported to be a high rate of gynecological disorders with sharp increases in the incidence of disease in the countryside, in mountainous areas and among women over 40 years of age.(See Table 7) Studies of the reproductive health service in Vietnam also show considerable unmet needs for contraception(as evidenced by one of the highest abortion rates in the world), poor prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, relatively high maternal mortality and poor prevention of HIV/Aids.(30)

Recent studies also show the health of women to be increasingly at risk from occupational diseases and the rising use of insecticides. For example in the Mekong Delta, women's health is at risk from hygiene and toxic problems associated with water. About 80 per cent of diseases affecting rural women there are thought to be caused by environmental factors especially lack of safe clean water and the presence of toxic chemicals both as a war legacy and from increasing present-day use. Indeed a combination of these factors have led to high rates of gynecological diseases and reproductive tract infections in approximately 40-60 per cent of women in the Mekong Delta.(31)

In Vietnam too, there has been considerable concern about lack of labour protection and the number of work accidents especially in agriculture where studies of the intensity and heaviness of agricultural labour demanded of women have shown that the number of accidents is high compared to most countries and especially high in Vietnam among women aged forty years and more.(32)(See Table 8) For the whole country the incidence of disease varies between trades and localities, but generally there is little health protection for women which is becoming a pressing problem.

There is now increasing attention paid to the reduction of the heavy work load, the introduction of labour protection and the reduction of fertility rates and reproductive tract infections. There are ambitious health targets for women's well-being but, as in China, the achievement of the targets are also hindered by problems in general health service delivery due to lack of funding and state support. Again there is limited outreach in rural communities and a highly fragmented vertical programme structure in primary health care so that, as in China, women's health is unlikely to improve further as both countries plan and forecast without increased investment in health services.

2.2 Education

In both China and Vietnam, and for some years, parents have been encouraged by the government and the women's organisations to raise the educational levels of girls by emphasising the links between girls' education and their taking advantage of the new economic opportunities provided by reform. It has been widely reported in both countries in recent years that female education and training has shown much improvement as a result of such initiatives. In China national figures in all sectors of education for 1992 show an increase over 1980,(33)(See Table 9) and in Vietnam the 1989 census data on women's schooling documents the sharp reduction in the proportion of women with no schooling and a corresponding increase in the proportion of women who have continued their education beyond primary school.(34)(See Fig.1) However it is also officially admitted in both countries that they have not participated or benefited to the same degree as their male peers.

In China for example, in my own interviews in Beijing with Chinese ministries and other official bodies responsible for formulating and implementing gender-specific components of state policies and programmes, it was quite clear that education for girls had been identified as the first priority in improving the status of women and thereby redefining gender relations. In both China and Vietnam there have been concerted efforts by both the government and women's organisations following on from new laws universalising compulsory primary education in China in 1986 and in Vietnam in 1994 to reduce the numbers of illiterate women and to encourage girls to enter and continue schooling.

A. Female Illiteracy

Over the past few decades one of the factors which has drawn attention to girls' education in China and Vietnam has been high illiteracy rates among women and especially younger women. The figures compiled for China in 1990 showed that a total of 38 per cent of the female population compared to 16 per cent of the male population were estimated to be still illiterate and that women made up 70 per cent of the illiterate and semi-literate in the Chinese countryside.(35) In Vietnam in 1989, while 88 per cent and 84 per cent of the population and

women respectively are literate, 71 per cent of illiterate persons are women.(36) However since this time the number of literate women in both countries has increased due to literacy programmes. In China the female literate rate has risen from 68 in 1990 to 73 in 1995 and in Vietnam from 87 in 1990 to 91 per cent in 1995.(37)

There are further aims to decrease illiteracy among the 15 to 35 year age group for, what is especially worrying to both governments, is that the proportions of females of younger age groups who are illiterate suggests that short-term gains from a few years of primary education are often lost.(See Table 10) In China in 1988 the State Education Commission estimated that of the 2.79 million school-age children not in school the previous year, 2.25 million(81 per cent) were girls and that girls accounted for 70 to 80 per cent of the 3.69 million pupils who seldom attended school.(38) With official confirmation in both countries that girls had not participated in the substantial gains made in education since the revolution or benefited to the same degree as their male peers, girls' education became a focus of new attention in the 1990s.

B. Female Primary Schooling

In China and Vietnam there have been a number of policy initiatives generally aimed at popularising compulsory primary education among all children, improving the standards of schooling and helping to pay the school fees of children in poverty-stricken regions. Policy initiatives which are specifically aimed at girl children include raising awareness of the importance of girls' education within families and communities, investigating the numbers and reasons for girls dropping out and implementing a number of practical programmes to raise funds to help girl drop-outs return to school in poorer and remote regions.

(a) China

Most of the figures published in China show that, nationally, upwards of 90 per cent of girls are enrolled in primary school compared to 20 per cent in 1949, 93.6 per cent in 1986 and 96.8 per cent in 1993.(39) However when the figures are broken down by age, grade or location several trends become clear. The published national enrolment rates show that the girls' enrolment rates for each school grade are lowest, less than 85 per cent, in the first and fifth grades suggesting that they may start late and drop out early, that the enrolment rates for girls are consistently 10 per cent lower than those for their male peers and that the figures are lower in rural areas and fall to their lowest(73 per cent) for girls in the mountainous regions and among minority nationalities as in the northwest rural remote regions.(41) The government introduced compulsory primary education for children in 1986 and it aims that eventually all children will complete six years of primary education.

Already the figures for schooling are still high in comparison to many other societies, but excessive emphasis on registration of children in school for grade 1, from which the enrolment rates are calculated, is to miss a number of important dimensions of female schooling such as attendance and drop-out rates. Field visits in China have confirmed these as more appropriate areas of enquiry. Attendance of pupils in school is more difficult to gauge, but there is

certainly evidence that, of those enrolled, the drop out rates among girls are higher than for boys. The drop-out rates for children suggest that about 90 per cent of pupils who drop out do so between grades 1 and 4, that almost all (96 per cent) reside in rural regions and that in NW and SW China two-thirds (66.6 per cent) are girls.⁽⁴¹⁾ It is sometimes said that of the nine-tenths of children enrolled in school only six-tenths attend a full six years at primary school and three-tenths graduate.

Local case studies collected during field visits in China in 1995 confirmed these trends, but suggested that the problem might be more serious than national or county and other local enrolment or drop out figures indicate. In every case my own calculations for and observations in schools and villages showed drop-out figures to be higher than any of those given officially. A number of local sets of figures collected in Beijing for Hunan, Inner Mongolia and Sichuan villages showed that two-thirds to three-quarters of the dropouts were girls. Most or two thirds had dropped out at ages 9 to 10 years or during grades 3 to 4 although, if they started later, they may only have reached grades 1-2. More detailed studies were conducted on my own field trips in Ningxia and Anhui provinces in 1995. Ningxia had the lowest girls' enrolment rate in 1991 of 63.3 per cent and a number of country-school case studies showed that the proportions of young, mostly Moslem girls, attending school in 1993 could range as low as between 47 to 65 per cent. Girls also constituted a high proportion of the drop-outs largely because of the high numbers of Hui (Moslem) girls who, if they went to school, left at the age of nine years (grades 3) so that only 77 per cent of the girls between 9 and 10 years were in school and upwards of 80 per cent of the drop-outs were girls of whom three quarters were Hui girls.

In Han-peopled central Anhui province, in one county 99 per cent of girls, 97.3 per cent of 7 - 11 year old girls and 91.6 per cent at aged nine years were reported to be in school. Ninety per cent of the drop-outs were girls and, of the girls not in school, 63 per cent were nine years old and 81 per cent aged 9, 10 or 11 years. In one village 71 per cent of those dropping out were girls and, in several schools in different parts of the county where it was estimated that upwards of 97 per cent of the school-age girls were in school, observation in the top grades revealed there to be classes in which only one third were girl pupils. Moreover in every household visited near the school there were girls who had dropped out of school before or at primary school graduation despite official estimates that 100 per cent of the pupils in the village had gone on to junior middle school. In two townships, of 160 girls who had recently dropped out of school, three quarters had dropped out between 8 and 12 years and about half between 9 and 10 years. In another of my studies, in the first and third grades of full-time schools, girls comprised only 35 per cent of all students, and in 4th and 5th grades, part-time and irregular schools the figure was as low as 15 per cent.

It is probable that high enrolment rates for primary schools do reflect the initial registration of children in school, indeed their attendance at school in the first grades was often cited as a desirable form of child care for young children, but that the initial registration numbers mask the much smaller numbers who remain in school long enough to become and remain literate. It has been my own impression in villages for a number of years that short-term gains from primary education are often lost and that children had to be in school for at least three to four

years for there to be long-term and useful literacy and that fewer girls than boys in many poorer regions of China had such an advantage. This was confirmed in the field visits in Ningxia and Anhui from interviews with young women in their 20s and 30s who had received a few years of primary schooling and with younger village girls who had more recently dropped out of school. Those that had some primary schooling and even some who had graduated from primary school said that they no longer had the ability to easily read and write either because of low standards of schooling, a lack of schooling or lack of continuing use and practice in literacy and numeracy.

(b) Vietnam

In Vietnam in 1996, after little growth in the number of girls in primary schooling throughout the 1980s, it was estimated that 50.7 per cent of primary school pupils were girls.(42) An increase in the number of girls in primary schooling by some two fifths between 1993 and 1996 was largely due to the law universalising primary schooling passed by the Vietnamese National Assembly in 1994.(43)

(c) China and Vietnam

Although access to primary schooling has been the focus of some attention in both countries during the reform years there have been a number of factors common to both countries which have countered programmes encouraging equal access to schooling. These include the rising costs of education and continuing familial discrimination against daughters.

(i) Education Costs: A most serious problem in both countries, and especially in their rural areas, has been the increases in fees for children's schooling demanded of individual families to make up for shortfalls in the funding of schools, teachers or equipment. There is a congruence of opinion that the main reason for pupils dropping out of school in both countries is because of the increasing cash costs of education in relation to income and my own field work in rural China in the 1990s confirmed that this problem was not confined to poor counties. In richer counties too, reduced local state allocations and uncertain profits from village enterprises have meant that there is a heavy reliance placed on pupil fees which much to parents' chagrin, have escalated sharply in most regions over the past few years. Many, and especially those with more than one or two children, have taken on extra economic activities to pay school fees and it is a commonly expressed fear that in years to come they might not be able to continue to meet this rising cash expenditure. In field visits it was also clear that it was only some form of outside 'aid' from foreign, government or non-government agencies which provided for fee remission in cases of hardship and funds for new buildings and equipment. In both countries there is increasing evidence that the costs of schooling are likely to be increasingly prohibitive for parents in some rural regions and, so long as educational policies are heavily reliant on local funding, to especially penalise girls

(ii) Discrimination against Girls: In each country and especially in China it has been much more difficult to persuade rural parents that the advantages of long-term education for girls are the same as for boys. In the countryside, because daughters move to their husband's household and village on marriage and the reforms have encouraged the expansion of family

income-generating activities, parents are more reluctant to send daughters to full-time school and, if they do, girls frequently start at a later stage and drop out earlier. In both countries new family-based agricultural policies have meant that girls are more likely to be kept at home to supplement the family income, care for younger siblings and undertake domestic labour. Given the rising costs of schooling and competing claims on familial budgets, it was girls rather than boys who were frequently taken out of school when families tightened budgets or weighed up opportunity costs.

In China many girls interviewed in a recent field study said that they had been taken out during or at the end of primary school because their parents could not afford the fees. Girl pupils in primary school classroom-discussions also told how they themselves had to earn some extra income in order to help pay their school fees and several were still in school because they had received help with school fees under the auspices of national Spring Bud or Hope programmes launched to help girl drop-outs return to school. The main reasons cited for not paying school fees for daughters, and their dropping out, included distances between school and home necessitating boarding and hence a dramatic increase in costs of schooling, cultural or religious reasons demanding separate sex segregated education and poor standards of education lacking in curricular relevance to the practical demands of village life which had proved insufficient for examination success.

In China, in every village school and household visited, it was quite clear that it was girls' schooling which was at risk as a result of the economic circumstances of the family. If drop-out girls had brothers, they were still at school or had remained in school to a higher grade than their sisters. In some cases older sisters remitted wages to pay the fees of their younger siblings. Parents frequently said that they had the same expectations of their daughters as sons, but it was also quite clear that more often boys were seen to be brighter and expected to go further than their sisters. It was frequently said, directly by researchers or indirectly by villagers, that parents had high expectations of daughters only if they had no brothers or were seen to be very bright, whereas the expectations of boys were high in all circumstances. Many parents said of their daughters that they were not very bright or lacked ability, but what is probably more worrying is that there was some evidence that girls themselves had assimilated these messages. For instance many said that they felt that they had not received sufficient parental and other encouragement and many elder sisters said of themselves that they were 'not so bright' or 'lacking in ability'.

Girls did seem to have extra difficulties passing the examinations into junior middle school, but this was often due to a late start, part-time or incomplete primary schooling and low levels of self-esteem which were very much in evidence in classrooms and households. Girl drop-outs interviewed frequently said that they had been 'willing' to leave school because they were not benefiting from schooling or because of the poverty of their families. However as one young school drop-out who had migrated rather forcefully noted in a meeting of young women migrants in Beijing, it was these same 'stupid elder sisters' who were paying the school fees of their siblings and supporting entire families. As in China, it has been noted in Vietnam that, nation-wide, the number of girls dropping out of school has increased alongside reforms and expansion in educational and employment opportunities.(44) These gender inequalities in access to primary schooling likewise affect their entry into secondary and higher education.

C. Female Secondary Schooling

In towns, cities and better developed rural regions, girls almost always attend primary school and usually go on to enter junior middle school and, at present, nation-wide in both China and Vietnam, approximately 43-4 per cent of secondary pupils are girls.(45) In China in 1986 legally compulsory education for all children was extended to include not only 6 years of primary schooling but also 3 years of junior middle school, but from the beginning there were different timetables for its implementation in urban/rural and better/less developed regions. Simultaneously two-tracked educational systems have been established with key schools for gifted pupils fast-tracked to higher education alongside technical and vocational schools aiming to provide the majority of secondary school students with vocationally-oriented basic education. The competition for the first category is fierce, and the higher and more prestigious the level and sector, the lower are the proportion of girls and particularly rural girls.

In secondary technical schools, technical schools and secondary vocational schools the proportion of girls has increased and now account for between 38 and 56 per cent.(46) In the more technical and vocational schools, girls tend to be early segregated into areas of specialisation different from boys and more to do with textiles, services, tourism, secretarial, child care and education thus both reflecting and emphasising gender divisions of labour. For the clever and more fortunate students enrolled in the more academic urban secondary schools, cutbacks in enrolments and subsequent increases in competition may have resulted in improved education. But for large numbers of rural children and especially girls these trends have closed off educational advancement. Not only do relatively few rural students pass the examination into secondary school but many reckoning that they have little hope of passing examinations simply drop out. Again reports show that in most cases the majority of students withdrawn before and part-way through secondary schools are girls for whom the opportunity costs within and outside the household are higher given alternative sources of employment.

In the countryside, there was little opportunity for village girls to continue into middle or higher education for employment opportunities seldom improved as a consequence. Motivation to study in secondary education was very much diminished by that fact that in many of the poorer villages, the girls(and boys), whether they were graduates of primary or even secondary school, were still expected to undertake agricultural or other farming work and they did not seem to be aware of any alternatives or range of choice except where there were local enterprises to which girls might be recruited whatever their schooling level. Even migrant women labourers who were illiterate seemed to have no difficulty getting distant factory jobs if they had connections. However an important exception establishing a correlation between educational level and types of employment noticed on field trips is that where there is a qualification entry, usually of junior middle school graduation, set by distant or nearby factories or county labour bureaux, this can carry a positive message to girls encouraging them to stay in school until they have received the requisite qualifications for sought-after entry into local or distant non-agricultural enterprises.

C. Higher Education

Women have entered higher education in China and Vietnam in greater numbers than ever before, but the proportions of girls and boys entering higher education in the rural regions of both countries is small and urban girls are still represented nowhere near the proportion of their numbers in the relevant age-groups. Presently the demand for higher and tertiary education outstrips supply and now that the educational system has again become highly selective, competition for places is fierce.

In China during the revolution, the numbers of students entering higher education increased from 20 per cent in 1949 to 25 per cent in 1980 with women making up 34 per cent of university undergraduates and 25 per cent of graduates in 1992.(47) Figures available for attendance at technical and vocational training courses show that female students generally accounted for some 30 per cent of the students and it is generally estimated that women students presently account for one-third of the total enrollments in institutions of higher education. There are wide variations between the major cities, Beijing (45 per cent), Shanghai (47 per cent) and Tianjin (51 per cent) and the inland provinces. In Hubei province 29 per cent of students are female and in poor and remote regions even fewer of the students are women. There are also wide variations between disciplines with relatively few female students in science and technology (24.7percent) compared to medicine (53 per cent), teacher training 42 percent) and foreign languages (53 percent).(48)

Despite uniform entrance examinations and rules instituting equality of opportunity, there have been frequent reports of higher education institutes discriminating against women students by demanding higher scores in the entrance examinations in order to limit their numbers. This discrimination in score marks for entry into higher education and into some sectors of employment were frequently cited by city women informants in 1995 as a cause for concern and one that affected women's own motivation to improve their education.

In Vietnam there was an even smaller percentage of young persons entering higher education. In 1989 it was estimated that 2.5 and 1.9 per cent of men and women respectively were college or university graduates and, although the numbers have increased during the 1990s, the proportions of women who have entered higher education attainment are markedly lower than for men.(49)(See Table 11)

2.3 Female Incomes

One of the most important and impressive repercussions of the urban and rural economic reforms in China and Vietnam has been the expansion in income-generating activities for women. Previously during their revolutions, almost all women between the ages of 16 and 60 years were economically active in some form of employment making up between 49 and 51 per cent of the labour force. As in other societies, the measures of women's participation in production very much depend on what definitions of work, employment and production are

utilised, but even allowing for the usual factors that lead to the under counting and under estimation of female labour in agriculture and informal sectors, it was estimated on the eve of reforms in both countries that the economic activity and rate of women in China and Vietnam was higher than most other Asian societies.

In China several years into reform it was estimated that women made up about 40 per cent of the total labour force and that the female participation rate was rising.(50)(See Table 12) In 1987 national statistics suggested that women continued to constitute a significant portion of those employed in commerce, industry, the public service, the professions and in education;(See Table 13) by 1990 in the fields of health care, sports and social welfare, the proportion of female employees surpassed 50 per cent and in public utilities and commerce, the proportion had risen to more than 45 per cent.(51) Although the majority of Chinese women are still in agriculture or allied non-agricultural activities, the expansion of old and establishment of new types of enterprises also broadened the range of sectors and enterprise types for Chinese working women's economic activities.

Vietnamese women also mainly live in the rural areas and, in the 1989 census, women made up 73 per cent of the country's agricultural labour force with the remaining 24 per cent equally divided between professional, industrial and service occupations.(52) In recent years the distribution of women's occupations has changed slightly with a reduction of women employed in agriculture and an increase in the proportion of women working in non-agricultural occupations. In 1996 Vietnamese women accounted for just more than half the labour force making up 70 per cent of those in occupations to do with education, 62 per cent in agriculture and in food industries, 64 per cent of those in light industries, 60 per cent of this in health services and 37 per cent in scientific and technical occupations.(53) Altogether the opportunities in China and Vietnam for women for generating income have undergone substantial changes and expansion as a result of reform and they have shared in the rise of incomes in city and countryside in recent years. However although women have opportunities to earn higher cash incomes than ever before, female incomes still fall behind those of their male colleagues and peers.

A. Income Differentials

Despite a long history of policies based on the principles of equal opportunity and equal pay for equal work in both countries, women still do not always receive equal pay even when they perform the same labour. More commonly the jobs accorded to women or in which they predominate are very rarely deemed equal with those of men. Whether jobs are evaluated according to physical strength, educational qualifications, skills or experience, women tend to be clustered in jobs at the lower end of wage scales. There are exceptions in that where women have conspicuously entered new jobs hitherto mainly occupied by men, and in many of the professions women were better represented than in many societies, women tend to have equal pay for equal work although not necessarily equal prospects for promotion and advancement and the professions themselves tend to fall behind in status and remuneration.

Exact disparities between the incomes of men and women are difficult to quantify because of the way incomes are earned, categorised and tabulated. According to one nation-wide survey of the social status of women in China in 1990, urban male workers received an average of Y193.15 per month compared to female workers who earned an average of Y149.60(100:77); in the countryside men's annual income was estimated to be Y1518 while women's was Y1235(100:81); and for Vietnam it is estimated that the average female is 72 per cent that of the average male wage.(54) Figures for other categories of workers are harder to come by but national studies in China and Vietnam, together with local field studies and reports, all confirm that women continue to receive less income than men and that they continue to be disadvantaged not only in terms of remuneration but also in pension rights and promotion prospects.(55) Another way of gauging the discrepancy or disparity in incomes is to briefly outline gender divisions of labour and labour markets where changes in type and forms of employment during the reforms in both countries have confirmed pre-existing divisions of labour and continue to consign women to the lowest- paid sectors and enterprise types.

B. Gender Divisions of Labour

One of the most striking features of China and Vietnam society during revolutionary years were gendered divisions of labour and these pre-existing divisions, reaffirmed during reform, have continued to shape both the ways in which income-generating opportunities and choices for women and men are shaped and the ways in which work is organised and recognised. Gendered stereotypes have been reproduced at all levels of society within and between industry, service and agricultural sectors and serve to legitimate and maintain gender divisions of labour in which women are concentrated in the more menial, labour-intensive and least remunerated tasks. Income gaps can be explained by the ways in which work is categorised according to skill, education, physical strength or experience within enterprises with women very rarely having equal claims to jobs changes, promotion, bonus or pensions. Additionally and more importantly, the income gap between men and women can be explained by gender divisions of labour between sectors and enterprise-types with work dividing skilled or technical from non-skilled or manual work, heavy from light labour and 'outside' from 'inside' types of work resulting in marked a most visible segregation in both China and Vietnam.

In cities and towns in China, women make up a lower proportion of the privileged state factory workers where wages are higher and there are more fringe benefits including housing services and labour insurance than in any other sector.(56) In Vietnam women workers made up a more equal proportion of the State sector (47.03 per cent)(57), but in both China and Vietnam the majority of urban working women within and outside the state sector still tend to be confined to the lesser-skilled, the 'lighter' though not less physically demanding jobs and the least specialised and mechanised occupations. In the cities of China they predominate in collectively-run service, textiles, food and other less specialised light industries, but these provide fewer jobs and lower rates of pay than the collectively-owned key and heavy industrial sectors. **In Vietnam** males were slightly more numerous in industry, particularly heavy industry so that in occupations relating to electricity and machine work, males accounted for 86 per cent of employees, in metallurgy 83 per cent, in energy 78 per cent and in construction

76 per cent. Females predominated in less heavy occupations such as clothing industry(77%), weaving(86%) and sales and trade(79%).(58)

(b) If in the state and collective sectors of both countries women perform the least skilled, least privileged and most repetitive and lower paid jobs, they also make up the majority of workers in the informal and private sector also based on light and service industries in which wages are lower and male-female income ratios much lower than in other sectors of the economy. Even among the skilled, mechanised, professional and higher paid public sectors of the urban economy, wages have fallen behind and frequently in both countries those employed in say health and education, who are likely to be women, have to moonlight in second jobs or work longer and harder to maintain or add to their incomes sufficient to maintain an adequate living.

(c) In the Chinese and Vietnamese countryside, the gender-typing of on- and off-farm economic activities is most marked but also very variable and largely dependent on the range and type of economic activities available within any one region. Although certain types of sideline activities such as livestock raising were traditionally undertaken by peasant women, gender typing of some activities such as field rice or grain cultivation, fruit farming, fisheries, forestry and many other activities may now be either male- or female-typed activities depending on the range of alternative economic activities generated by the expansion and diversification of on- and off- farm activities in the post-reform rural household. That is jobs continue to be gender-typed although definitions of male and female typed activities vary and change. For instance where there are no or few local off-farm activities, then males tend to undertake field cultivation and some other on-farm activities such as livestock raising, handicrafts and small-scale food processing. In China where there are a number of off-farm activities such as local or distant rural industries into which males are predominantly recruited then women undertake most of the field cultivation and sidelines. Where rural industries specialise in garments, toys or electronics then younger women are predominantly recruited into these leaving agriculture to older men or women or in some cases, and especially in the southern rice cultivation, to imported migrant labour.

(d) In the hierarchy of rural industries in China men predominate in the township and village enterprises to do with agricultural machinery and construction while women predominate in both the higher industrial, labour intensive township and village enterprise industries and the burgeoning privately-owned enterprises where their average wages are estimated to be 16 to 25 per cent lower than for male workers.(59) Not only are there differences between enterprises, but as in city enterprises, women very rarely attain the more skilled technical or supervisory and managerial positions and their income is very much related to very intensive piece-work. In these circumstances a new division of labour has been established: not that between skilled and unskilled or lighter and heavier work within agriculture as before, but between agriculture and non-agricultural occupations and, since the mid-1980s in China, there has been a widespread move to leave low-status agriculture and earn mostly higher wages in the non-agricultural sector. In rural Vietnam there are still fewer opportunities to move into non-agricultural work with women and men still participating in agricultural tasks with women to be found in the most arduous rural work where the hours are long and hard and receive lower rates of pay.

Whatever the form gender divisions of labour take, women are usually predominant in the low-status, labour intensive and lowest income occupations, so that gender segregation is manifested both horizontally with a concentration of men and women in different occupations and vertically with differences in income, skills, status and promotional prospects between men and women within enterprises. During the years of reform the gender-typing of occupations and divisions of labour in China and Vietnam have become increasingly segregated and segmented with the development of a new and growing labour market.

(e) In the newly established labour markets, one of the substantial outcomes of economic reform in both China and Vietnam, women encounter not only a range of disadvantages in jobs, income and working conditions but disparities between men and women have been enlarged and stratified by the emergence of gender-segregated labour markets. In China separate labour markets each with different rules of transaction, kinds of contractual arrangements, modes of labour measurement, different work conditions and levels and forms of remuneration have emerged for each category of working population: urban men, urban women, peasant men, peasant women, male migrants and female migrants.(60) Within each labour market each job is not only defined as work of a certain gender and status identity with clear cut divergences in jobs, pay and working conditions between men and women, but boundaries between these gendered divisions are difficult to cross so that in most cases women are still both recruited into and confined within the lowest paid occupations and sectors. In both China and Vietnam commentators have agreed that gender segregation in the work place has not only continued but been exacerbated with increasing gendered disparities in work status and therefore income.(61)

(f) Although recent studies in Vietnam have suggested that reform has economically advantaged men first especially in the competitive labour market and produced a gendered time-lag between rises in men's as opposed to women's standard of living(62), studies in China suggest that this gendered time-lag becomes more permanent sharpening sex stratification of the labour force and intensifying female subordination. Together new labour markets and changes in labour processes due to market pressures have exacerbated previous stratification in the work force making for fewer women in positions of leadership, financial management, sales and procurement and higher and technical skilled positions. In China more detailed field study have concluded that the reforms have shifted but also reinforced dichotomies between heavy/light, skilled/unskilled and inside/outside types of work.(63)

What has happened in both China and Vietnam is that, despite major changes in work patterns, in the nature of different types of work and the ways in which work is organised, the reforms have resulted in neither a breakdown in the gender divisions of labour nor any re-evaluation of the content of women's work and men's work. The secondary value placed on women's work relative to men's is not only directly reflected in the continuing and frequently rising disparities in men's and women's incomes but also in new patterns and trends in male and female employment.

3. Female Employment

In China and Vietnam the majority of women are not only engaged in some form of income-generating activity but new patterns and trends in female employment in each country, as a result of their similar transitional reforms, show remarkable parallels both in the countryside and in cities.

3.1 Rural Female Employment

In both China and Vietnam upwards of 70-80 percent of women reside in the countryside where agriculture was still the main source of employment at the outset of reform. (See Table 14) In both countries the introduction of new policies including the rural production responsibility system, the diversification and expansion of agricultural and non-agricultural on- and off-farm economic activities and the establishment of a rural market have all had wide implications for the range and choice of rural occupations available for peasant women, the distribution of peasant women's labour, sexual divisions of labour and forms of resourcing and remuneration. One of the first and most important of the rural reforms in both countries was the redistribution of land to peasant households with a correlative decline of the collective and the emergence of the peasant household as the dominant unit of production with new responsibilities and new demands on its material and labour resources including those of its women.

Following this reform the peasant household took primary responsibility for agricultural production from the acquisition of inputs to the processing, transporting and marketing of the product. It became an increasingly complex and autonomous economic unit demanding new skills in production and resource management of its members to maintain it as a diverse economic unit responsible for production, processing and marketing. A second major economic reform in both countries was the expansion and growth of agricultural and non-agricultural activities in households, villages and townships and the enlarged scope of rural activities has increased choices and opportunities available to rural women. In both countries today, the majority of rural women remain employed in agriculture although, in China already and it is forecast in Vietnam in the future, women have increasingly participated full- or part-time in non-agricultural occupations.

There are two trends in rural female employment common to both countries and a third trend that is more characteristic of China. The first trend common to both China and Vietnam is that, though their women have long been involved in agriculture, it is increasingly becoming a female occupation so that it is possible now to speak of the feminisation of agriculture although it is more advanced in China; the second common trend is the development of diverse and multifarious peasant household economies inclusive of new agricultural and non-agricultural activities which have been encouraged and are flourishing especially in China. Thirdly, in China and Vietnam there is a general and popular move from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations which in China is again more advanced as women and especial younger women increasingly move into established and expanding rural industries.

A. The Feminisation of Agriculture

(a) China

In many provinces, and especially in central and northern and western regions of China, where there has been widespread movements of rural populations into local non-agricultural occupations and/or male migration, it is women who are more likely to be left behind to undertake agricultural tasks formerly the responsibility of the entire village or household. Even where there is local non-agricultural employment it is frequently the women who are left working in agriculture with other family members helping out-of-hours or at busy times. In many regions women represent nearly 70 per cent of the total agricultural labour force⁽¹⁾ and according to census data the ratio of men in agriculture declined and that of women increased over the past 10-15 years.⁽²⁾ Other studies confirm this trend. For example numerous village investigations revealed that 71 per cent of women compared to only 21 per cent of men were engaged in agriculture full-time.⁽³⁾ In a survey in 1995 only 34 per cent of male labourers and 50 per cent of female labourers listed agriculture as their sole occupation.⁽⁴⁾ In some areas it was apparent, by the mid-1980s, that agricultural work previously almost entirely undertaken by men had been taken over almost entirely by women so that by the 1990s a dominance of women in Chinese agriculture was widely taken for granted by Chinese commentators.⁽⁵⁾ Although it is not a new phenomenon for women to work in agriculture, it is the dominance of women in agriculture across much of rural China which is a very recent phenomenon and presents a radical shift in work patterns which has consequences for both agriculture and women.

Local village studies in a recent FAO field study in the mid-1990s have confirmed that the declining importance of agriculture and that the feminisation of agriculture have coincided and led to further and mutual downgrading of both the status of agriculture and the status of women.⁽⁶⁾ Indeed agriculture itself in many poor and rich regions of China has increasingly been downgraded and conceptualised as a sideline or, merging with domestic labour, termed 'courtyard gardening' or 'peasants' housework'. Generating an income in kind for consumption and taxes rather than cash, it is neither costed in terms of resources or labour inputs nor valued as an economic contribution to household income and well-being. As the status of agriculture has declined so has the status of those who undertake this activity. It is largely women, married and elderly women who are increasingly relegated to this 'lower' form of activity often because, it is said, they are not as 'capable' or sufficiently educated or skilled to take up any alternative occupations. Thus agriculture and female labour are each 'relegated' to the other and it is this equating of female labour with agriculture and agriculture with female labour which has worked to the detriment of both women and agriculture in the villages.

In several sets of village studies undertaken in this FAO field study there had emerged a new division of labour in which it was the married, middle-aged and elderly women who took advantage of the flexible working arrangements and conditions to combine field cultivation with other agriculture or non-agricultural sidelines, care for children or grandchildren and domestic labour. In an article in a national women's magazine in 1991 the feminisation of agriculture was billed as a 'quiet revolution' for women and the benefits for women listed.⁽⁷⁾ It

is true that women frequently spoke of the flexibility which agricultural production allowed them to combine their productive and reproductive roles and that incomes in earlier years of reform and in the richer regions from agriculture and associated sidelines could be higher than in local industry although this is increasingly less so. However the feminisation of agriculture also involves the concentration of women in an occupation in which income is frequently only in kind with few cash returns so that the consequences of their labour input is not fully recognised or costed into the reckoning of costs and benefits of agricultural production thus leaving them vulnerable in the distribution of family rewards and appreciation.

Additionally women as wives, mothers and grandmothers are as likely or even more likely to be left behind in the villages to single-handedly take responsibility for agriculture, sidelines and housework and these combined demands frequently make excessive demands on their labour leaving them tired and exhausted. In many poorer regions farming households have become to all intensive purposes female-managed and operated, a single-handed responsibility which the studies suggest may have several repercussions for standards and the modernisation of agriculture. More frequently the long hours and hard work required of agriculture and housework made attendance at any training or extension classes unlikely. In these circumstances, as these field studies showed, older women are left to undertake agriculture, they are rarely able to maintain the previous levels of cultivation whether measured in terms of land area or types of crops or to allocate sufficient labour and accrue the technical knowledge and inputs necessary for expansion into new cropping and agricultural activities.

(b) Vietnam

Although Vietnamese farming women too have always worked alongside the men of their households to assure family income and basic living standards by cultivating rice and other crops, more men than women move out of agriculture where there is now an expansion of non-agricultural activities, so that it is women who tend to be left in agriculture. In Vietnam in 1989, 78.6 per cent of women work in rural areas where they are in charge of most steps of agricultural production from ploughing, harrowing, manuring to spraying insecticides.(8) Particularly important is women's work in rice production, for although men and women co-operate in the production of Vietnam's staple food and export crop, it is women who carry the heaviest workload in most phases of its production. A recent study documented women's extensive contribution in the rice paddies especially during transplanting and weeding and recent nation-wide studies showed that women contribute 72.9 per cent of the labour in agriculture.(9)

In both China and Vietnam the feminisation of agriculture has led to new attention given to women in rural agricultural production in the 1990s: In the first years of rural economic reform there was little attention given to women's agricultural involvement in China, but by the end of the first decade of reform in each country this situation had significantly changed. Most projects for training and educating women in agriculture were primarily launched to boost agricultural production and ensure the supply of food and cash crops by improving women's low levels of education, literacy, occupation training and skills. These training initiatives,

undertaken by both government and women's organisations, represent a new recognition that women are critical to rural economic growth. One study in China indicated that only 13.6 per cent of women surveyed had received any training via government means despite the fact that almost all women had expressed a strong desire for training while a total of 71 per cent of the women surveyed said that they lacked opportunities for training.(10)

In China one of the most important initiatives was the 'Double Learning, Double Competing' movement which, beginning locally in the mid-1980s and reaching national level in 1989 was sponsored by the Women's Federation in conjunction with a dozen government institutions and organisations.(11) It not only supported women's efforts to enhance their income-earning ability but was identified as a key strategy of the government and women's organisations to help rural women participate fully in economic development, increase rural women's incomes, reduce women's disadvantaged access to training and provide short-term training opportunities combining literacy and income generating skills. According to official reports of the Women's Federation, some 120 million rural women participated in the 'Double Learning Double Competing' project from 1989-1994.(12) An important dimension of the project was to mainstream women into agricultural policy and resource allocation by involving government officials from the various ministries.

In Vietnam too it is acknowledged that efforts to improve agricultural production will rely mainly on women's skilled inputs and there have been moves to increase training for women in agriculture especially as its own 'green revolution' demanding new high-yielding seeds, fertilisers and pesticides gets under way.(13) In this respect Vietnam is reported to be benefiting from the experience of other countries and has been less inclined to ignore women's inputs. However in its enthusiasm for increasing yields it is not clear yet whether the government will take significant note of some of the disadvantages of the Green Revolutions elsewhere and especially the toxic effects of increased use of pesticides. Nevertheless there are signs that there is also a growing demand for training by farming women themselves. In one survey as many as 75 per cent of peasant women of working age wanted training courses in farming methods(31%), in new trades(11%) and in other skills to undertake alongside farming(33%).(14)

In both countries the feminisation of agriculture and especially field cultivation coincided with the generation of surplus labour and thus the encouragement and expansion of mixed peasant household economies.

B. Peasant Household Economies

(a) Surplus Labour

It was estimated that with the introduction of the rural economic reforms, the agricultural field labour force in China was reduced by a third and would eventually be reduced by some two-thirds giving rise to surplus labour of some 200 million persons.(15) Simultaneous the

President of the National Women's Federation identified lack of employment for peasant women as one of the major problems facing Chinese women in the 1980s.(16) Vietnam is one of the most densely populated rural regions of the world and in much of the country there is already a low average of cultivable land per person with farmers mainly confined to one rice crop per year taking only six months and producing an output which is rarely sufficient for subsistence let alone for generating a cash income.(17) In sum, in both countries, customary activities have declined and new activities have not yet developed so rural regions are characterised by surplus labour, low earnings and ignorance about alternative activities. Finding employment for this surplus labour and developing new income-generating activities within the rural economy has become an urgent problem for both governments and led to the expansion of on-farm economic activities in rural areas.

Both the Chinese and Vietnam governments have thus encouraged peasant households to diversify their operations and develop their commodity household economies to include animal husbandry, cash cropping, handicraft and a myriad of small industrial and commercial activities. In many regions in China peasant households have expanded their range of on-farm activities to include the raising of pigs, poultry and other animals, fish farming, fruit farming and the expansion of small industries and services for which resources, labour and markets were required. Rural fairs and markets have been re-established so that goods, foods, local handicrafts and daily necessities produced locally could be exchanged and procured for wider distribution and export. At present in China, it is estimated that women account for one third of the total(14 million) rural self-employed.(18) In Vietnam it has been a much later and more difficult task to encourage the expansion of peasant household economies largely due to shortages of capital and inexperience(19) for, as in China, there had been few such activities previously permitted within collective farming.

Nonetheless the majority of Chinese and Vietnamese peasant women continue to cultivate lands and now undertake, to varying degrees, a range of economic activities including vegetable cultivation, livestock raising and the production of handicraft goods and the provision of local services. It is one of the characteristics of domestic production that its scale of operation is predominantly determined by the household's access to female labour given that occupations such as cultivating vegetables, tending livestock and producing handicrafts were traditionally performed by the women of peasant households. However the establishment and expansion of most on-farm activities require that peasant women have access to a number of resources including credit, raw materials and machinery for production and processing all of which are still scarce in much of rural China and Vietnam.

While richer regions have a potential for expansion with peasant households frequently developing an activity and becoming specialised private enterprises earning their owners, frequently women, very high incomes, it is still difficult in the poorer regions to attain sufficient materials, skills and markets for there to be any large-scale development. It is equally difficult for women who have little education or connections within or outside the village to obtain formal access to credit and other resources and it is access to these resources, especially in the poorer and mountainous regions of both Vietnam and China, which have hampered the widespread development of a diversified peasant household economy.

(b) Initiatives

To enable women to increase income-generating activities on the farm, there have been a number of initiatives in China and Vietnam to supply credit to small farming activities, to provide training in livestock care and other activities and to open markets for such produce.

(i) China: One major project in China is known as the Courtyard Economy Project which was designed to help women initiate appropriate sideline production or further expand their existing ones through provision of market information, technology, credit and services. The term 'courtyard economy', the subject of experiments in 1984 and becoming more widespread in 1989, was used on the grounds that sideline activities such as breeding, cultivation and handicrafts were traditionally performed in the courtyard of the household and most frequently by women.⁽²⁰⁾ This emphasis on the development of the courtyard economy is advocated by the women's organisation echoing choices by farming women that the development of sidelines offer the most feasible opportunities for flexible self-employment.

At the present time, however, women frequently are subject to the authority of their men of the household, sub-contractors or middlemen because their skills in literacy, numeracy, technical processes, accounting and marketing remain sufficiently under-developed. Most commentators agree that there is a particular need for more skills in accounting and management to supplement present training opportunities which almost solely aim to impart technical skills to increase women's contribution to and benefits from work in the courtyard economy.

(i) Vietnam: In Vietnam the need to encourage extra income-generating activities and to promote exportable surplus products spawned the 'household economy programme' and, there too, the Women's Union has played a large part in helping to develop the peasant household economy by supplying start-up capital, tools, materials, training and markets for the development of new activities such as livestock raising, mushroom growing and a number of handicrafts such as embroidery.⁽²¹⁾ The Women's Union has taken the lead in providing start-up capital for these activities and in looking for markets for the selling of products thus providing much needed aid to peasant households to start small businesses with a little capital loaned at low rates of interest by the Women's Union for pigs, ducks, chickens, shrimps and mushrooms.⁽²²⁾ Indeed the development of the peasant household economy in both countries is identified as the main way of helping rural women to take advantage of its flexibility to combine field cultivation and domestic cares and in each country there is a new and increasing interest in micro-credit schemes modelled on the Grameen and other international examples.

Although in both countries the new courtyard economies are based on agricultural activities, they increasingly embrace non-agricultural activities and products for both domestic and foreign markets. In China however an additional and perhaps the most important opportunity for women to move into non-agricultural activities is to be found in the widespread and expanding local rural industries.

C.Rural Industries

Increasingly male and female farm workers in China have moved off the farm and out of agriculture into an extended range of off-farm non-agricultural activities including new township and village industries and rural private enterprises providing goods for the local, national and foreign markets and services for townships, towns and cities. Off the farm the main new sources of local employment in China have been the expanded township and village enterprises (TVEs). Originally small rural industries, producing goods such as bricks, farm machinery and fertilizer, were predominantly small, labour-intensive and based on local resources, required little capital input and mainly catered for the needs of local farm populations. However during reform there has been an expansion in rural and small-town industries which, while continuing to take advantage of local material and labour resources and provide for the needs of the local population, also began to produce under contract for local and city industries and for export. The proportion of rural women employed in these enterprises very much depends on the type of industry with the number of women employed rising sharply in textiles, light and clean industries.

In 1979 it was estimated that about one third of the 28 million work force employed by the 1.5 million small rural factories and enterprises were women; in November 1988 it was reported that 35 million women were employed in the fast-developing township and village enterprises and that they made up 41.2% of the 80 million of so workers in these industries; recently it was estimated that by the end of 1992, China's rural enterprises employed more than 100 million persons of whom more than 40 per cent were women providing 65 per cent of the total output value in food, clothing, knitting, toys, electronics, traditional handicrafts and service industries.(23) There has also been a growing shift in the ownership of rural industries with the addition and development of private and individual rural industrial enterprises which are mostly small and labour intensive and into which women have increasingly been recruited.

The private rural industries in which women are concentrated are mainly light industries and are characterised by a higher labour intensity, poorer working conditions and lower wages than the township and village enterprises. In an emerging division of labour collectively-owned township and village enterprises, except garment and textiles, are more male than female and it is the privately-owned enterprises which are also increasingly the major channel for incorporating women into rural industry. In 1993 women counted overall for 12 per cent of the rural labour force in all rural enterprises and for 35 per cent of the 120 million rural enterprise workers, with female workers mostly employed in individual and private enterprises which are almost exclusively concentrated in light industry and labour intensive sectors within which women are employed as the cheapest sources of labour.(24) Most of the collectively and privately owned rural industries are located in the better developed rural regions and, as a result of this geographical distribution, women living in the hinterland have fewer opportunities to enter rural industry than women residing in coastal rural areas.

In the better developed regions and in industries in close proximity to or within commuting distance of the village, the female work force in rural industries might be made up of women

of all ages but, more often than not, the rural industrial work force is made up of young unmarried women who are asked to leave on marriage or on the birth of their first child. Advantageously rural industry does provide a new and much sought after opportunity for young women to move out of agriculture, but they are concentrated in unskilled lower paid occupations and the skills they acquire are rarely transferable. Their long hours of work are often undertaken in poor conditions with either few controls on labour protection and safety which are sometimes fatally hazardous and, in the longer term, potentially detrimental to their health.

Where there is surplus labour and few local opportunities for young women in China to find employment in the village or nearby township, they increasingly became part of the expanding millions-large mobile labour force often migrating long distances from interior to coastal provinces and to the larger cities where an increasing number have been recruited as maids in city households, into joint ventures or small household -based enterprises. Most village women follow friends and relatives either on their own initiative or via agencies organised by the Women's Federation and other bodies. Some village women are forced by poverty and lack of local income-generating activities and employment to move out but others, on their own admission, are lured by the city lights and opportunities to live away from their families and control their own wages and spending. Some stay in the cities for but a short period, others return to the countryside on marriage and some remain in city households for many years. The large numbers of migrant women who usually return to their village to marry have had many problems in reintegrating back into the countryside to live and work. The problems of returned migrants, much under-researched compared to city migrants, have been cited as one of the causes of China's abnormally high suicide rate among young married women in the countryside.(25)

D. Intensity of Female Labour

There have been many commentaries in both countries about the long days and hard work of peasant women in the countryside during reform for one of the main means by which a peasant household could immediately expand its economic activities was to intensify demands on family and especially female and child labour. Although the economic reforms have altered the ways in which peasants structure their working day, many peasant women recognise that, though they have greater control over production processes and flexibility, their daily routine is even more demanding than before the reforms. In particular the diversification of on-and off-farm activities, the responsibility for procuring production inputs and arranging for the disposal or sale of farm products take more time than previously. There may be more water, more fuel and more fodder to be collected now that their sideline activities have expanded and in many regions there is an increasing shortage of fodder and fuel entailing supply trails over longer distances. Marketing may also entail several hours of walking several times a week or month to dispose of the farm's produce. Moreover in regions where all members of households are employed outside of agriculture, women who have moved into full-time waged labour off the farm may still be required to cultivate the fields and raise domestic livestock as part-time farmers after work or on their days off.

Additionally one of the ways in which a peasant household can recruit additional labour is still via marriage and the demand for a daughter-in-law's labour has lowered the age of marriage and increased the expenses of marriage many of which led to reports of the sale of and abuse of young peasant women. The demand for child labour in the countryside is one of the main reasons why female children were more likely to be spasmodic in their attendance at school and to be withdrawn from education earlier than their brothers. In turn, one of the serious side effects of the high rates of illiteracy and education drop-out rate among peasant girls is a circle of disadvantage for entry to extension training schemes frequently have literacy or educational requirement and, in turn, access to credit often required prior attendance in training schemes.

E. Female Autonomy

Now that the peasant household is once again the dominant unit of production, the degree of independence and autonomy accruing to peasant women very much depends on the sexual division of labour and the relation of individual women to the male household head. The more separate the location of women's labour and the greater their visibility as producers, the more likely it is that their individual contribution is separately rewarded with an ensuing bargaining power operative within and outside of households. Several studies show an increase in women's decision-making within the household(26) but it is likely that their claim on resources within and outside of the household is very much dependent on the sexual division of labour and the visibility of their separate inputs. The rapid growth and diversification into on- and off-farm economic activities of the post-reform peasant household certainly has the potential to increase the autonomy of peasant women but only if they have the skills and experience to participate in new technical and business methods of operation which can equip them to participate in all the technical, business and management facets of their peasant household economies and protect them against male domination both within and outside of their families.

3.2 Urban Female Employment

In China and Vietnam there has been some restructuring of the urban economy as a result of (A)enterprise reform which has particularly affected the privileged state-owned enterprises, (B)the establishment and expansion of the private and particularly the informal sector made up of myriads of individual and household managed small to large enterprises and (C)the establishment and expansion of joint-foreign ventures which have employed, in increasing numbers, a new labour force much of it made up of young migrant men and women from the countryside. In both countries these reforms have broadened the range of sectors and enterprise types open to women and, in both countries, women have been encouraged by both the government and women's organisations to learn new labour processes in each of the sectors and enterprise types and to increase their managerial, productive and technical skills . Government policies have also called for the elimination of sexual discrimination in the

recruitment, training and promotion of women workers and have aimed to better working conditions and provide for women's labour protection. Generally as part of economic reform, the Chinese and Vietnamese governments have sought to improve the working conditions within enterprises by attempting to regulate working hours, space requirements and noise pollution levels.

In China in 1988, and in Vietnam in 1991, special regulations for working women have been re-emphasised updating those earlier issued in both countries.(27) These regulations for the protection of women's labour make special provision during various phases of the female reproductive cycle(menstruation, pregnancy, post-partum, nursing and menopause) to preclude women workers from undertaking certain types of jobs, to permit shorter hours, provide for leave without incurring penalties and pay out maternity benefits. However in both countries, alongside reforms expanding employment opportunities for women and gender-specific policies to regulate and protect their employment, economic restructuring together with new employment practices have caused substantial changes in the nature and conditions of employment which have particularly disadvantaged women employees in a number of important respects. These disadvantages are visible in all sectors of the urban economy including the shrinking public and state-owned sectors, co-operative-, family- and individually-owned and operated enterprises in the expanding private sector and in foreign and jointly-owned ventures.

A. State Owned Sectors

In China ten years into reform, women constituted a third of the labour force in state owned enterprises and up to 90 per cent of the work force in light industries, the textile and food processing industries.(28) In Vietnam the proportion of women employed overall in state-owned enterprises is somewhat higher, nearer 50 per cent(29), but in both countries, in this shrinking but still privileged sector, workers generally earn higher wages, have more fringe benefits including labour insurance and have greater opportunities to acquire training in new skills. It is a shrinking sector in both urban China and Vietnam for in both economies it has been the state-owned enterprises which, in China since the 1980s and in Vietnam since 1993, have been the focus of urban reform. In China many are bankrupt or on the verge of bankruptcy and in Ho Chi Minh city in Vietnam it was recently estimated that only 30 per cent of the state-owned industries make a profit with the remainder also on the verge of bankruptcy.(30) In both countries state-owned enterprises are due to undergo further restructuring and, as a result of planned reforms, they are becoming increasingly responsible for their own profits and losses so that it is likely that there will be dramatic declines in the numbers of workers in the State-owned enterprises.

Additionally state-owned/public service enterprises have increasingly assumed responsibility for the recruitment and organisation of their labour force alongside the procurement of their own resources and markets. As they become more accountable for their own profits and losses with new controls over the disposal of profits, enterprises have been permitted more autonomy at the same time as they have become more vulnerable to market forces. This new

autonomy and new vulnerability have disadvantaged urban women workers in a number of important respects. The most serious problem for women to emerge during recent years has been the reluctance of employers in the state and public sector to recruit and retain women workers.

(a) Recruitment

Generally in the interests of product and market competition and maximising profits, enterprises have preferred to recruit or retain male workers rather than meet the costs of providing for the benefits and services required to accommodate the reproductive functions of female workers. Factories and enterprises, especially those with low profit margins and/or a high proportion of women workers, have been increasingly reluctant to bear the costs of pregnancy, delivery and nursing benefits and the losses incurred by maternity leave and absences related to child care. Reports and surveys in China in the early years of reform suggest that enterprises, once they became responsible for their own profits, losses and hiring policies, either refuse to accept women assigned to them by the government or disadvantage women by artificially raising entry requirements for women recruits. In a 1987 survey conducted by the All China Federation of Trade Unions of 660 factories with 15,000 workers, only 5.3 per cent of the employers indicated that they were willing to have women in positions that could be filled by men or women; of the 89 textile mills surveyed, 75 per cent said they preferred to hire males; and in the 66 financial enterprises and 77 commercial enterprises women recruits were required to gain 12 to 13 points more in the entrance tests.(31) These practices particularly affected women graduates, a high proportion of whom had great difficulty in finding employment.

Of those 'awaiting employment' in 1986, an estimated 61.5 per cent were women rising to 70 per cent in 1992.(32) One of the main reasons employers cited to explain their reluctance to recruit women was the high costs of providing for maternity leave, child care and other related benefits. The costs of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding were estimated in one survey to cost an enterprise more than Y1,259 per worker; another survey showed that a male worker could earn Y10,600 more than his female counterpart who was pregnant and involved in childbearing and caring over the same two-year period.(33) There was also the cost of providing nurseries and other services. After the reforms these costs were to be borne by the enterprise and they have showed a reluctance to accept the higher costs and lower profits involved in employing female workers. These services were either reduced as in Vietnam, or as in China several measures were introduced to spread these costs more evenly across the sectors and by cities but even these measures failed to stem discrimination against women in the state sector.(34)

(b) Retrenchment

In the shrinking state sector in China and Vietnam, women have also been the first to have their employment contracted or terminated in enterprises engaged in some reorganisation and streamlining of staff. Surveys by the Women's Research Centre and the China Managerial Science Academy in 34 enterprises in eight provinces in 1988 confirmed that the percentage of women who had been made redundant was higher than their proportion in the work force. It

was estimated that 70 per cent of all workers losing their employment as a result of job rationalisation were women and it was anticipated in 1988 that of the 20 million workers who stood to lose the jobs, as many as 15 million were likely to be women.(35) Women were usually the first to be laid off part-time or temporarily in the two to three million state-owned factories and enterprises not in full production and contracting their labour force either due to efficiency measures or restructuring. Married women workers, older women and women with young children were particularly at risk from part-time or short-term lay offs. For instance although all the evidence suggests that women preferred a maximum of six months paid maternity leave in the interests of retaining their income, skills and promotion prospects, there were reports of enterprises encouraging women to take a long, sometimes up to seven years, maternity leave at 50 to 75 per cent of their pay in order to save on the costs of benefits and providing nursing and child care services. Although in 90 per cent of the factories, women received their full wages during maternity leave, their bonuses and other benefits were not guaranteed leading to a decline in their income by more than one third.(36)

Some enterprises provided home-based work to offset the cost of providing nurseries and other services for mothers of young children. At the end of the first decade of reform a survey of more than 400 enterprises in Shanghai showed that 6 per cent of women workers (of whom 80 per cent were between 24 and 40 years) were forced to stay at home either because the enterprises had all the workers it needed or did not have enough work for its labour force.(37) In Vietnam too, many women have been laid-off in one form or another in state owned enterprises with reduction in state subsidies and in numbers of state-owned enterprises which has resulted in lay offs and unemployment for numbers of working women who are reported to have lost their jobs 'in droves' and had to seek new occupations.(38)

(c) Retirement

Officially commissioned surveys have showed that women workers in China have been encouraged to retire earlier, in some cases at aged 40 years or up to 20 years less than the official retirement age for women. There also has been some evidence to suggest that a disproportionate number of older women workers in state factories aged between 40 and 45 years were at greater risk from enforced retirement at a younger age than male workers. One factory had a policy that when there was a work shortage, women over 45 had to go home(39) and in Shanghai a survey of more than 100 large and medium-sized enterprises showed that 92 per cent of the directors preferred to dismiss female workers because there were more of them than male workers. The directors said that if the decision was up to them they would discharge one fifth of their women workers and after the reforms it was the directors who were increasingly likely to make such decisions.(40)

(d) Working conditions

For those remaining in state-owned enterprises the terms and conditions of employment have altered in recent years. In China since the July 1986 Regulations for Employment which introduced contract work into the State Sector to enhance labour productivity, most workers newly employed in this sector are now given contracts varying between one and ten years depending on levels of education, training and skills and with no guarantee of renewal. The

number of contract workers in State enterprises has grown rapidly and at the end of 1988 it was estimated that there were 10 million of so contract workers constituting 9.3% of all workers in state enterprises. (41)

Several studies in recent years in China and Vietnam reveal how women are particularly disadvantaged by the new forms of insecurity and labour intensification in State-owned enterprises.(42) The labour process has been fundamentally reorganised emphasising individual rather than collective responsibility and the introduction of new incentive and penalty systems. These have imposed new forms of stress and pressure on women workers largely because of the widening disparities between the ways men's and women's work is measured and rewarded. Indeed it is the fast, detailed and repetitive mechanical work of the factory floor of the type more likely to be undertaken by women which has been intensified by enterprise reform, by individual responsibility systems and by setting quotas for piece work, wages and bonuses rather than the skilled, technical and leadership positions.

One very recent study of cotton mills in China showed how women were increasingly stressed due to harder physical labour, longer working hours and contract payment for bonuses.(43) Their health had deteriorated as they had lost their lunch hour, funding for labour protection decreased and harmful colouring agents were used in new and faster production lines. The division of labour had hardened so that men now held most of the charge and tenured positions even substituting for female section leaders. The study concluded that in the reorganisation of labour and labour process in these factories women had suffered heavier losses for they, rather than the male technicians, leaders and managers, were at the sharp end of production where reform had concentrated. Such was the exhaustion and stress of work in the cotton mills and the resulting tension between women's domestic and working lives that new jobs in the mill, once a privileged occupation for urban women were being increasingly undertaken by young country women from nearby rural areas.

What this suggests is that without gendered labour quotas, care and protection as previously provided by the State, it is likely that women will be increasingly disadvantaged in the planned restructuring of the state-owned enterprises in the near future. Most of the women who are laid-off from the state-owned enterprises have found or hope to find full or part-time employment in the newly-emerging private and informal sectors of the cities in both countries during reform.

B. Private Sector

In the cities and towns economic reforms have led to the expansion or indeed proliferation of new enterprise types including small private co-operative, family or individually-owned and operated enterprises. Enterprises already established were expanded and managed by new owners and many new enterprises have been established by units, families or individuals and run by company managers, groups of workers or household heads. After an interval of many decades, urban residents have been actively encouraged to set up their own large-medium or small-scale private individual or family-based enterprises to make available a wide range of

small goods, foods and services to urban inhabitants. Many of these individual- or family-based enterprises are managed and operated by women who take advantage of neighbourhood employment, flexibility of working hours and, although the boundaries between work and domestic labour are still blurred, they report that they do have some individual control over the labour process. According to the Chinese Individual Women Workers' Association, by the end of the first decade of reform there were 21 million individual traders with licenses from 13 million households of whom 5 million were women mostly with licences for hair dressing, sewing, commerce, handicrafts and household services.(44)

In Vietnam too, women account for the largest number of workers in this sector. Even in 1988 they accounted for two-thirds of workers in this sector as hairdressers, itinerant traders, street vendors, small traders in markets, baby sitters, typists, matchmakers, porters and photographers in parks or

other occupations which are likely to be simple mobile jobs which require little or no capital and earning low incomes are poor and marginal.(45) Indeed in China and Vietnam most such private businesses are small, marginal and unstable although some of the enterprises privately owned by women have become enormously successful earning high incomes. There is also some evidence that female entrepreneurs have had some difficulty in gaining access to raw materials, credit, technology and markets. A spokesperson from the newly-formed Female Entrepreneurs Association in China thought that its members received little support for their economic activities and that, as a consequence, they had set up their own organisation.(46) Several more recent studies have shown that women entrepreneurs have not found it easy to either establish the necessary networks or overcome discrimination sufficiently to acquire capital or negotiate loans, markets and materials. They feel that society discriminates against them and that they have neither rights nor support. (47)

In the plethora of new private and smaller enterprises women are less likely to have the protection and benefits of progressive laws made on their behalf.

Where the labour process was fast, fragmented and repetitive with payment calculated according to piece work there was evidence to suggest that women worked for longer lower-paid hours, conditions of work were cramped and there were few provisions for the implementation of new and improved labour protection regulations. In China in these enterprises, especially the smaller enterprises operating with low profit margins in a competitive market, there are frequent complaints that there is no concept of a minimum wage or laws preventing arbitrary increases in working hours, summary punishment or dismissal of workers and that the supervision of existing labour protection regulations is lax.(48) At the end of the first decade of reform in China a national survey found that about half of the country's private enterprises and units investigated did not implement the women's labour protection laws and regulations effectively. More than 44 per cent of the surveyed factories did not reduce the heavy work of pregnant women or take them off night shift.(49) More recent research in China in 1996 has suggested that, compared to women in state, government and joint ventures, women in the private sector are most disadvantaged in terms of income(50) and in terms of social benefits such as housing, labour and medical insurance and that this is especially so where women undertake home-based work and casual labour.

Although home-based work had been a permanent feature of some rural villages, it was a newer phenomenon in the cities where many women began to work at home rather than in factories or enterprises as a result of expansion in the putting-out or contracting out of work to individual women in their own homes. For those outside of established units of employment, that is those in small-scale neighbourhood, household or individual enterprises where the labour process is unregulated and unsupervised, the insecurity and isolation has to be deemed considerable in an urban economy where the status of the unit of employment is still an important source of benefits and social security. Women also constitute a high proportion of the new casual labour force, much of it migrant, contracted to produce electronics, textiles, clothing and automobile components and other light industrial goods primarily but not only for the export market. Moreover many female workers in family-based urban enterprises have become de facto employees of the male head of the household with all the attendant disadvantages deriving from the structure of familial authority reproduced in production.

Much of the casual labour in the urban private sector and particularly in domestic service, textile factories and the trading and service occupations in both countries is increasingly undertaken by young migrant women from the countryside who may travel long distances to enter the urban work force. Several recent studies in China have shown that women migrants, who now number some millions, earn less than male migrants in the heavier construction, mining, service and manufacturing sectors and are likely to be incorporated into urban services particularly domestic services, canteens, hotels and stores which have rapidly increased in the cities of China. In the new commercial, service and catering enterprises, where casual labour predominates, it is estimated that 80 per cent of the work force are women and more than half are migrant women.(51) Increasingly in the cities and towns new divisions of labour are emerging in which urban women are becoming the shop assistants, cashiers and accountants and leaving the waitressing and cleaning jobs to women migrants who have now moved into positions left vacant by urban women for reasons of low pay, job insecurity and physical exertion. Domestic service is a major source of employment for migrant women(estimated to be more than three million)(52) with many transferring to urban service enterprises as soon as they find an opportunity to escape this domestic and menial occupation. Young rural migrant women in casual labour markets have been found to be the most disadvantaged of all categories of urban women labourers and at risk from physical insecurity, hardship and sexual harassment. Many turn to prostitution which is becoming a growing problem in both countries and especially in Vietnam where tourism and insecurity of employment have greatly increased the number of women prostitutes on city streets.(53)

C. Joint-ventures

A major innovation in both China and Vietnam since the reforms and one which affects the range of and opportunities for female employment, although in concentrated regions, is the introduction and encouragement of foreign or jointly-owned enterprises within special economic zones established to attract foreign capital, technology and systems. Since 1979 in China and 1992 in Vietnam foreign and jointly-owned ventures have been established to

produce electronics, textiles, clothing and automobile components and other light industrial goods primarily, but not only, for the export market. These factories may be financed by foreign investment, make use of imported raw materials and assemble foreign parts but most importantly they also take advantage of China's and Vietnam's cheaper labour power and a high proportion of that cheaper labour is female.

Various estimates suggest that up to 80 per cent of the workers in the foreign or jointly-owned enterprises are young single women whose pace and conditions of work are such that their health and safety are frequently jeopardised. In China those particularly thought to be at risk include young women workers and particularly young women migrant workers from the rural areas in small manufacturing enterprises many of them funded from Hong Kong or Taiwan where workers are likely to be forced to work overtime - sometimes between 12 to 16 hours daily on piece work payment - and are hired, harassed and fired at will with no legal contracts. They do not receive equal pay and little attention has been directed to safeguarding women's health or safety. After surveying 914 foreign-funded enterprises, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions released a report to the media in summer 1994 on the 'appalling working conditions' that women suffered despite their 'increasingly vital work in foreign-funded enterprises'. The survey found that women were hired and fired at will, had no legal contracts, did not receive equal pay and that many enterprises paid no attention to labour protection regulations safeguarding women's health and safety. In view of the harassment of female workers, the report recommended that women, without channels to voice their complaints should form 'women workers' organisations which were 'badly needed to safeguard their rights and interests'.(54)

There have been some recent studies of foreign-owned factories in the export-processing zones in China which show how young rural women are relentlessly disciplined for the production line and factory dormitory. The stress of long hours, intricate and intense work on their young female bodies was such that few were able to remain in this type of employment for more than a few years(55). In Vietnam's export-processing zones female labour is also primarily recruited to attract foreign capital and paid significantly less than Vietnam's minimum wage.(56)

4. Female Empowerment

If empowerment is interpreted as a political concept that means more equitable sharing(or a redistribution) of power and resources with those who previously lacked power then, because of asymmetric gender relations in both China and Vietnam before and during the revolution, at the outset of reform women still constituted a category permitted very few public positions or occasions to exercise any never mind equal authority, power and leadership. Both governments during their revolutions and again during reform have sought to empower women by providing them with (1) equal rights, (2) general political representation and (3) their own gender-specific organisations to represent equal rights and interests.

4.1 Women's Rights

Legislation in support of women's rights, protection of person and equal access to political, social and economic institutions was a priority for both the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutionary governments. Legal codes incorporating women's equality and rights in their constitutions, marriage, labour and land laws in both countries gave women equal access to land and equal rights to participate in waged labour and political institutions. In offering women access to legal personnel and courts of law the governments had hoped to provide them with opportunities for independence and support in defying familial and male authority. Legal intervention and public education in China and Vietnam encouraged women to pursue their new rights but more generally and the implementation of legislation, though followed by extensive educational campaigns to make the new legal provisions asserting female entitlements and just claims to equality widely known throughout the country, has been hindered by under-developed legal institutions and facilities.

A. Women's Legal Rights

During the reform period earlier laws affecting women have been updated by new legislation in both countries. In China the promulgation of a new marriage law in 1980 followed by a new inheritance law and the new constitution in 1992 all drew renewed attention to women's rights and the protection of women within and outside the family.(1) In Vietnam a new revised Marriage Law was published in 1986 and the new constitution in 1992 reaffirmed women's equal rights in political, economic, culture, social and political life.(2)

In recent years in both countries however, and despite new legislation outlawing such practices, there has been much publicity given to cases of abduction and trafficking of women either as brides or in organised prostitution and to cases of physical abuse, rape and domestic violence. The former have been reported widely in the media with traffickers, abductors and sexual offenders severely punished while domestic violence constitutes a more recent issue in both countries and one which currently concerns Chinese and Vietnamese women's organisations alike. They have recently held meetings and workshops to draw public attention to abusive practices within the family such as wife beating and other forms of domestic violence and their own recent research suggests that in both countries domestic violence is still widespread in rural areas.(3) In Vietnam it is estimated that 30 to 60 per cent of divorce cases are due to maltreatment of women and, although there is still said to be much silence regarding sexual and physical exploitation and abuse in the family, the government has identified prostitution as one of its top ten concerns.(4) (See Table 15).

In view of the incidence of physical abuse and abduction of women and other forms of discrimination, the Chinese government took the unusual step of introducing a new Law Protecting the Rights of Women in 1992. This was the first law specifically defining a set of women's rights in China and was thus heralded as illustrating the importance which the

government attached to women's rights and interests. Chen Muhua, Vice Chair of the National People's Congress Standing Committee and President of the All-China Women's Federation stated:

'The law on protection of women's rights and interests will produce a profound and far-reaching influence over China's efforts to protect women's rights and interests raise the status of women, promote equality between men and women and arouse the support of women for socialist modernisation and reform. It indicates China shows special concern for women and attaches great importance to women's rights and interests.'(5)

The Law set out the rights of women in political, economic, cultural and social life and with regard to property, marriage, divorce and the family. It protects the rights of women to life and health outlawing infanticide, abuse or any form of abduction.(6) When these lawful rights are infringed by others, women now have the right to request and expect departments concerned to help remedy the infringement or to take legal proceedings with the people's court and disciplinary action is to be taken against those who did not provide the requisite help. It has been stressed in China that 'the awakening of women to gender rights' would be completely impossible without the strong support of China's laws and that more and more Chinese women will get accustomed to safeguarding their rights and interests through legal means.(7) To accustom women to the idea of resorting to legal means(8), the promulgation of the law was followed by a month-long women's rights campaign to study and publicise the new law.

Although legal recourse in appropriate conditions had never been institutionalised in China and instead, rather less accountable local cadres had mediated disputes and dispensed judgments within the units or regions under their rule, what distinguishes the reform decades in China is the new interest in the role of law and the establishment of newly available and accessible legal institutions. The Women's Federation has played its part in acquainting women with their legal rights and providing help in obtaining legal redress in the face of discrimination. From its experience in the early 1950s, one of its spokesperson noted that it has learned that legislation in support of women's rights and education in support of the law is not enough. There also has to be back-up legal institutions, personnel and individual support available to women to aid them in the exercise of their rights. Indeed experience had taught grassroot women's organisations that

'the rights and interests of women and children are best protected by enforcing the laws and regulations designed to help abused women and by acting as their legal advocates and helping them exercise these rights'.(9)

In support of the various general laws and regulations published at the onset of reform in the 1980s, one of the main aims of the Women's Federation was to set up a network of legal centres to advise female victims of violence, collect evidence and pursue offenders through the courts. These centres have been set up at provincial, city and county administrative levels to which lawyers and legal workers, most of whom were women, were recruited to provide legal counsel and allied services to women.(10) To sensitise women to the protection provided by the new laws and the availability of legal services, short and concentrated publicity programmes were instituted in many localities during 1993-4. Classes were held to enable women cadres to study the pertinent provisions of the constitution, the Marriage and other

civil laws and to follow the procedural laws on criminal cases. Public forums were held on the laws and legal counselling centres were set up on street corners and in parks where legal advisers made themselves available to answer queries and investigate grievances. It was reported that the most common questions on which help was sought had to do with inheritance of daughters, the legal rights of the elderly to support and matters to do with divorce procedures.(11)

It is publicity and practical campaigns such as these which provided an infrastructure for new campaigns in support of the new Women's Law in China.

During one of these campaigns it was reported that the cases brought to the notice of the Women's Federation in a single month totalled that usual for half a year. In one case reported in the media, the Women's Federation in Beijing received an unusual joint telegram from 118 women employees of a power station in far Heilongjiang province outlining their refusal to be charged double in the fund-raising for the factory's new living quarters. Instead of turning to their husbands, relatives or some sympathetic factory leaders, they decided to base their case on Article 23 of the new Women's Law which stated that 'Women should be equal with men in the allotment of housing and enjoyment of welfare benefits'. This was widely cited as an example of the ways in which 'women are awakening to this new 'legal shelter' and more women have 'learned to resort to legal means instead of swallowing unfair treatment'.(12) There have been many similar campaigns more recently.

The new law was also the main subject of discussion at the Seventh National Congress of Women held in September 1993. Of the nine main goals outlined by the Women's Federation for the 1990s, four referred directly to women's rights of person, in society, in employment and in marriage and the family. The remaining three advocated an increase in female participation in politics and education and wealth and improvements in their health and reduction in domestic labour.(13) In Vietnam there has been less detailed attention to legal processes but in recent years there have been many cases involving trafficking of women brought to trial at the Supreme People's Court.(14) If recent interest in legislation and legal institutions and processes constitutes a shift towards recognising the rights of women in both countries, there has been less attention given to the rights of girls.

B. The Girl Child

During the reforms and particularly in the 1990s despite a general increase in attention to and general improvements in the well-being of women and children there has been increasing evidence of the vulnerability of the girl child in China and Vietnam. During the reform period over the past fifteen years in China and five years in Vietnam, three factors have particularly drawn attention to discrimination against the girl child in rural areas. These include the introduction of the one- or two-child families, new interest in universal primary schooling and international initiatives sponsored by outside agencies including UNICEF. Investigation into forms of discrimination experienced by the girl child in rural China suggest that she is particularly vulnerable before and immediately following birth.

In China the increase in the sex ratios at birth and in towns and countryside are evidence that have confirmed the fears of demographers in China and abroad that millions of girls are 'missing' either from the statistics or physically. There is much evidence to suggest that informally, too, daughters receive everyday evidence that their position in the family is different from that of preferred and privileged sons. In my own field work, one of my most potent memories over the years has been the contrasting status accorded to sons and daughters within the family which constitutes a message for daughters that is still unmistakeably clear. Although it is no longer the practise to reckon daughters of so little account that they are omitted from tallied lists of family members, in hundreds of household interviews over the years, sons are without exception enumerated before daughters whatever the birth order; many sons are the cause of congratulations, only daughters the occasion of commiseration. Daughters too have been further reminded that they are transient, passing through and ultimately belong to another family by the resistance to the one- and two-child family policy in both countries which has provided increasing proof to daughters that they are not just secondary but substitutable.

There is evidence to suggest that daughters are aware that they are of secondary importance to their parents. Recent village studies by anthropologists have suggested that the prodigious efforts by young unmarried women to work hard and earn more than their brothers, despite discriminatory wage rates, has to be interpreted in the context of an age-old attempt by transient peasant daughters to work to more completely affirm their relationship with their parents and validate their status within their families.(15) This tallies with some of the suggestions on my recent field trip that girls were thought to have to acquire skills which would be of economic value and, by implication, earn status in the eyes of their parents. In programmes to promote equality of women, there has been little attention given to the acquisition of confidence, value or self-esteem by young girl children which is largely due to a previous lack of interest in both female confidence and in the socialisation of young girls.

While discrimination against young girls and especially young rural girls is generally acknowledged to still exist, its causes are frequently simplified and reduced to 'the weight of 2000 years of custom' or 'backward' and 'feudal' attitudes which can be persuaded away through education. Although economic factors which underlie discriminatory attitudes such as age-old support are recognised and policies formulated to take account of these, it is the persistence of the old attitudes themselves which are highlighted and held responsible for continuing discriminatory practices. What is less frequently discussed is the ways in which these old and differential attitudes towards sons and daughters in the countryside are not just inherited from times past but reproduced in contemporary practices of marriage and conceptions of family future.

It is still very evident in both countries that families recognise the link between sons and income, security and future so that, despite increasingly strict birth control policies, there is de facto a 'single-son' policy operating in rural areas with numbers of children still directly linked to birth order of sons and daughters.(16) In Chinese villages it is still evident in field work that, in households with son/s there is a degree of confidence and investment in the future of the family displayed, that just is not characteristic of families with only daughters. Those with son/s were hustle and bustle, building houses, storerooms and new kitchens, anticipating and

planning as they are for future expansion following marriage and births of children and grandchildren; in those with only daughters there is no housebuilding, no store room and no new kitchen, all signifying silence or a lack of anticipation, an absence of plans and the demise or foreshortening of the future. Here in practice is continuing visible and audible evidence of the continuing efficacy of the old adages which emphasises differences between the value of sons and daughters in support of old age.

While virilocal marriage or the movement of the bride to the groom's household has long been recognised by scholars, Chinese and foreign, to be a major obstacle to upgrading daughters, this observation has rarely been incorporated into policy or widely recognised as a continuing impediment to gender equality. Although during the revolution and reform years there have been a few attempts to introduce new rules of post-marital residence, customary movements of brides and patrilocal residence remains the norm in much of rural China. Moreover it is even less likely in the future that parents of only sons will consent to their movement in marriage. Although there has been a rise in the establishment of separate households by the bride and groom after marriage in China, these are almost always in close proximity to the groom's parents within his village. Only new practices such as village endogamy or marriage between bride and groom of the same village, and there is some evidence that this practice is increasing, may modify marriage patterns sufficiently to upgrade the value of daughters and given them equal opportunity and confidence with sons. The Women's Federation and other groups in China and Vietnam are beginning to pay special attention to investigating the status of the girl child.

4.2 Political Representation

In looking at political participation and representation, the current processes of reform have worked to the disadvantage of women in politics and have resulted in a dramatic decline in women's representation at all levels in party and state and other forms of political and female participation. Together the transition to market, the withdrawal of the state in certain sectors, changing lines of management, new institutions and organisations and a new stress on individual merit, attributes and qualifications have all reduced the representation of women in political, economic and social decision-making bodies.(17) Even during China's and Vietnam's revolutionary years there was clear evidence that women were less likely to be promoted into managerial positions and the predominance of men in the leadership, managerial and administrative positions, whether based on technological and professional skill or political attributes, could be easily observed and documented. In political organisations and institutions, women had most visibly not entered into formal positions of decision-making in proportion to their numbers either in production or in the population as a whole. They may have been involved in mainstream political meetings and study groups, but they were still marginalised from decision-making bodies and leadership positions so that one of the most striking impressions of any visitor to China or Vietnam whether during revolution or reform has continued to be the predominance of men in leadership positions at all administrative levels of both government and party.

In China, the proportion of women appointed to full membership of the Party fluctuated around 7% in 1977, 5.2% in 1982 and 6.3% in 1992(18), and one local survey at the township level showed that most of the women members were in an older age-group and had joined the party some years ago.(19) At all administrative levels from ministries, provinces, cities, counties and townships it was reported in 1990 that women made up 7 per cent of the state administrative cadres.(20) In 1991 China had a total of 10.04 million women state and other cadres who accounted for 30 per cent of the cadre corp as a whole and represented a twenty six fold increase over 1951. Nevertheless in 61 per cent of party and government ranks at prefectural and municipal levels, in 50 per cent of the county and district levels and in 85 per cent of the township levels there was not a single woman cadre.(21) The proportion of women basic level cadres has declined sharply since the early 1980s. In the 1950s, 70 per cent of the villages of rural China had at least one women head or director, while in the 1990s only 10 per cent of the villages throughout the country were found to have a woman head.(22) In 1993 women accounted for only about 3.8 per cent of the county's township administration, 5.9 per cent at the county level and 5.8 per cent of municipalities.(23) In Vietnam too women have headed only a few ministries and held few cadre positions and constituted about 19 per cent of the congresses at various levels.(24)

Mainstream political participation in China and Vietnam most markedly occurs through two distinct channels, the work unit and people's representative congresses. Despite a degree of decentralisation and local autonomy, the overall position of women in the political power structure of Vietnam and China is declining.(25) Of the numbers of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the highest organ of state power in China, women made up 16 or 12 per cent of the 135 members, while 24 or 9.7 per cent of the 280 Standing Committee members of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference is made up of women representatives of the Communist Party, democratic parties and mass organisations which represents a slight decline over previous decades.(26) At local levels, village elections to local people's representative congresses and use of electoral methods in cadre appointment has resulted in a decline in the numbers of women's representatives in village and township committees.(27) Current discussions on political participation within China have pointed out that 'competitive elections' far from enabling women who seek to enter the political arena have actually hindered them:

'The promotion of local autonomy though political decentralisation and the reopening of elections has facilitated against 'a stipulated portion' of women cadres and the emphasis on 'ability' in cadre selection has provided a gender neutral and convincing justification for the rejection of women candidates'.(28)

In view of the decline, the Women Federation in China, a long-established channel for cadre recruitment for women, has trained women to be cadres and large numbers of Women's Federation cadres have been transferred to party-state administration. In both countries this trend is quite discernible and has meant that the number of women increase but that they often still focus on women work without playing a major part in wider political issues. In one survey 71 or 70 per cent of the 98 women who are members of party committees at township level in Hunan province are directors of township women's federation organisations.(29)

The deterioration of Vietnamese and Chinese women's electoral fortunes coincides with the gradual disappearance from public life of the 'grand old women' of the revolution. Both trends reduce women's political authority and the legitimacy of their claim to leadership positions in the national government. This decline in female political participation has been reported and discussed in China and is largely thought to be due to a number of factors which are relevant not only to female participation in China but also to Vietnam where there is also a notable decline but less apparent discussion.

(a) State Sponsorship: First of all it is widely acknowledged that, while previously a strong state presence facilitated women's participation in the political arena and provided a powerful support for the integration of women in China's national and local leadership strata, it also reinforced women's political dependence on the state as a source of support and legitimacy. The withdrawal of the state in the reform years in both countries has therefore not only undermined the previous foundation of women's political participation in party-state organisations, but it has also generated some debate both about (i) whether listing women's participation in formal political structures is a very meaningful measure of women's empowerment and (ii) the nature of the new challenges women face without this type of imposed-quota support given the new criteria for cadre management and leadership deployed in both countries.(30)

(b) New Criteria: There is a growing awareness that the emphasis on individual 'ability' has penalised women, who because of their lesser education and experience and because of domestic labour and child care responsibilities, are far less likely to be able to compete on an equal basis. It is reported that the emphasis on individual qualifications rather than on gender equality or merit has provided a gender neutral and convincing justification for the replacement of women and permitted continuing discrimination against women in politics.(31) While it is also true to say that there has been a tendency for women as well as men to avoid or retreat from politics due to previous revolutionary scars and a new interest in economic activities, women have retained an interest in the politics of workplace and, increasingly in both China and Vietnam, in some of the new political organisations, mostly non-government organisations, which are contributing to other forms of political participation.

(c) Status Indicators: The growth in the number of new organisations less formally tied into the political system in both countries has offered an alternative channel for political participation. Despite the semi-government status of most of these organisations in China and Vietnam, there is some argument that this type of political participation reflects a growing consciousness of female empowerment via self-defined and direct participation and action. Advocates of these new forms of empowerment argue that too much attention has been paid to old forms of formal representation or participation in government, party and national peoples congresses which, with their fixed committee quotas or proportions of women stipulated by the party state, were tokenistic and did not constitute a real form of political participation. Hence they argued the decline of women in mainstream political systems is not an important criterion of political participation and does not mean that women's status has actually deteriorated for 'what they have lost is a position they never gained'.(32)

(d) New Political Channels: Surveys in China have shown that women managers and intellectuals are particularly attracted by the opportunities to express ideas and opinions and are as likely to be members of non-government organisations as members of government organisations.(33) In two cities, Shenyang and Nantong, recent surveys have shown that there are 655 non-government organisations of which 54 per cent are academic and professional organisations, 18 per cent trade and production organisations, 11 per cent culture, health and leisure organisations, 10 per cent friendship organisations and 2 per cent new socio-economic groups, 2 per cent religious, 2 per cent social welfare and public office organisations and 1 per cent are issue-oriented organisations.(34) Their members included educated, professional and retired women who had more free time and included almost no other categories of women. Women in the youngest age groups, women above the age of 45 years and women in professional, managerial and white collar occupations are more likely than others to join these non-government organisations which suggests that these new organisations still leave most women with no political association or channel for political participation. More generally and informally too, in both China and Vietnamese societies, politics and business not only constitute the two most significant channels to power and prestige during reform, but they are also areas in which it is most difficult for women to operate effectively given patterns of male networking from which women are effectively excluded.

In sum the combined effects of low levels or lack of women's participation in formal and informal leadership roles, local government and political and business in both China and Vietnam are several.

(a) First, it means that at the macro-level women have little impact or representation in the planning of development strategies and that they have little power to alter existing policies or to have new policies adopted so as to protect and further women's interests.

(b) Second, at the micro-level, many women have very little control over the allocation of their own labour, this being in the hands of male heads of families and male leaders in the local economy and government.

(c) Third, the lack of women in politics combined with the negative image of politically-active women reinforces notions that politics and business as 'outside work' are more male than female spheres of activity makes it difficult for women to attain positions of leadership in politics and the economy as enterprise managers even in industries where the labour is predominantly female.

There are however those who argue that the numbers and participation of individual women in political positions are less important in China and Vietnam because of the presence of powerful women's organisations which can collectively represent and defend the needs of women.

4.3 Women's Organisations

The Women's Federation in China and the Women's Union in Vietnam had long concerned themselves with the role and status of women albeit with varying degrees of success. From their very beginnings the Chinese and Vietnamese Communist Parties had nurtured separate organisations for women in line with their early recognition of the special oppression of women and of the importance of gaining women's support first for the revolutionary cause and then the revolutionary government. Although in theory both organisations were charged with fostering women's rights, interests and needs, in practice each government required that these organisations fulfil twin goals to act as a mass organisation soliciting support for the party and government and as a separate pressure group acting in defence of women's interests. In practice too, the twin goals were not always mutually supportive and, in later revolutionary years in both countries, their relationship with party and government directly affected the scope of the activities, the methods of work and the priorities of the women's organisations. Although they had a place in policy formulation and policy implementation, they frequently limited their priorities to publicising and eliciting support among women for national policies on the assumption that these would automatically benefit women and, only subsequently, did they draw out some of the likely policy repercussions for women. Although too their representatives often had a place in the hierarchical committee structure of government and party during the revolution, they were often marginalised politically and operated within a very bland prescription.

On the eve of reform it is probably fair to conclude that, as mass organisations created by governments, the Women's Federation and Women's Union were more effective in soliciting women's support for government policies than with getting them changed to take account of women's needs and this was especially so when those needs did not appear to contribute directly to the prior goals of promoting revolution or production. However two factors proved to be of importance in both countries during reform years. The first was that these gender-specific organisations constituted nation-wide networks of women organised via representatives and congresses from national level, provincial and municipal levels to county and district, township urban neighbourhood and village levels which could be activated at any time. Secondly the Women's Federation and Union themselves, in the process of fostering their own activities and the activities of other women's groups during reform, became semi- or non- government organisations defining and supporting anew women's interests and needs during reform years.

A. China

In China, for example, the transformation of the Women's Federation from a mass to a gender-specific interest organisation can be documented by examining the platforms of four of its national congresses held since 1978. It is clear that, after 1978, there is a gradual increase in interest in women's rights in ensuing congresses with greater pleas that society should recognise women's rights to education, employment, property and person and it was these pleas which culminated in the publication of a Women's Law in 1992. At the **Fourth National**

Congress held in 1978 on the eve of reform, and the first for some twenty years, women were exhorted to unite and forward their interests by encouraging the Communist Party to make work among women an important component of its work and to criticise the Party when it neglected women's interests.(35) Simultaneously at the Congress, a member of the Communist Party also suggested to the Women's Federation that it should take more seriously its representation of women's special interests:

'The National Women's Federation and women's federations at provincial, municipal or autonomous regional level throughout the country should overcome the phenomenon of acting as a government organisation, forge close ties with the masses, gradually make themselves a mass organisation and become a better link between the Party and the masses of women.

Women's organisations should do a good job carrying out investigation and study at the basic level and among the masses. Women's federations at various levels should be concerned about women's weal and woe and listen to their voices in order to really become a mouthpiece of the women's masses, an important representative of their interests and the home of women'. (36)

The President of the National Women's Federation also urged women to speak out and assert their needs regardless of the consequences:

'In handling problems of immediate concern to women we should not fear giving offence or taking some risks, we must dare speak and be good at speaking in support of women'.(37)

It seemed that the Women's Federation had the support of the government to speak out in favour of women's interests although there was also evidence of a continuing tension between its dual tasks to both act as a separate pressure group in defence of women's interests and as a mechanism for soliciting support for the Party and government. Indeed the single most important theme of the following the 1978 Congress was still that the new line of the Party was to be the fundamental line of the women's movement and that the central task of the Party was also the central task of the women's movement.(38) As the Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee stated two years later in 1980:

'all the organisations of the Women's Federation should bring into full play the role of women in working independently under the leadership of the Party, and according to the Party's line, principles and policies and give full play to women's merits on the basis of their specific characteristics.'(my emphasis)(39)

The main assumption underlying such a pronouncement was that the Women's Federation fully represented both the interests of the Party and of women and that these were assumed to be one and the same. It is as if a bargain had been struck: in return for supporting women's rights, the government expected the support of the Women's Federation for all its general policies. So women were encouraged by their own organisations to support the responsibility system, expand domestic sidelines, undertake outwork, work in the co-operative and service sectors of the economy, take out single-child family certificates and abolish the betrothal gift and dowry as if these Party policies could only be of benefit to women. However these benefits were to be increasingly questioned as the Women's Federation was charged by the government with

investigating many of the more obvious forms of discrimination.

In contrast to the 1978 Congress speeches at the **Fifth National Congress of Women in 1983** primarily emphasised the role of the Women's Federation in defending and protecting women and their interests rather than primarily soliciting support for Party and government policies.(40) In her report on the work of the Women's Federation since the previous Congress, its President

emphasised the gender-specific demands of the Women's Federation and the necessity to strengthen its own organisation which would enable it to make and meet these demands. She called for the rights and interests of women and children to be protected:

'What demands attention is that remnant feudal ideas of regarding men as superior to women and traditional prejudices against women have re-emerged in recent years. For example, some localities and units have placed unreasonable demands and restrictions in recruiting or promoting women and women cadres. Some areas and units bluntly refuse to admit needed and qualified women; some neglect the labour protection of women in productive work. Parents interfering in their children's freedom of marriage, arranging marriage for money, marrying in order to extort money and other similar cases have become fairly commonplace.

What is intolerable is the fact that some ugly phenomenon that had been wiped out long ago in new China have begun to recur. Criminal acts of drowning female infants, insulting women, persecuting mothers who gave birth to girls, and selling and harming women and children have occurred frequently. In some areas these have reached serious proportions.

We women must unite with others in society and resolutely struggle against all acts harming women and children and vigorously help the public security and judicial organs crack down on these criminal activities...and firmly protect the legitimate rights and interests of women and children.'(41)

The main task of the Women's Federation in 1983 was defined as closely associating itself with women's interests in order that it might investigate, study and solve these problems. Although there were no apparent conflicts between the two bodies voiced at the Congress, there were still some limits to the legitimacy of the Women's Federation's voice on many broader political and economic issues. Similarly at the Sixth National Congress in 1988, both representatives of the state and of the Women's Federation stressed that the legitimate rights of women were still far from universally recognised.(42) The President of the Women's Federation called on the whole of society to adopt a more civilised and progressive attitude towards women and fight against sex discrimination in new joint efforts to safeguard women's equality with men in political, economic and cultural fields as well as in their social and family lives. Likewise the President of China also stressed that 'the government and the whole of society should show more concern for women and better safeguard their interests and condemn sex discrimination and maltreatment of women'.(43) He reminded the delegates that for various historical reasons, prejudice against women still existed and maltreatment and abuse of children and women happened frequently and that this type of 'behaviours are intolerable and those who encroach on the rights of women and children should be punished'.

This shift towards open and direct support for the rights of women and concern for their physical well-being protection was the result of certain features of reform which had demanded a response. For China my own view is that the turning point came following the reports of a sharp increase in female infanticide when the government charged the Women's Federation in the early 1980s to investigate the scale of the problem of female infanticide on

the grounds that 'it would be a gross dereliction of duty if they should let this problem take its own course and not concern themselves with it'.(44) The Women's Federation took this new responsibility seriously and in turn it was this special responsibility which precipitated a change in the role of the Women's Federation in China. Although again there are not the materials readily available enabling a similar course to be charted for the Women's Union in Vietnam there is sufficient evidence(45) to suggest that it along with the Women's Federation in China has adopted a wider role which embraced (a) practical responses to the increasingly visible discrimination against women generated by the reforms, (b) new research and policy interests, (c) nurturing new non-government organisations for women and (d) some redefinition and mainstreaming of women's organisations and platforms.

(a) Practical Responses

The emergence of a number of problems during the reform years which have already been outlined in this paper caused both the Women's Federation and Women's Union to take a number of practical steps in support of women's interests.

- (i) The decline in political representation and participation compelled the Women's Federation and Women's Union to take active steps in supporting women's political participation by both training women to take part in local and national political bodies and themselves lobbying for women's interests within the party and government.
- (ii) Both women's organisations have embarked on training programmes of self-improvement for women by emphasising that the quality of women must be improved through practical literacy, training and recruiting programmes.
- (iii) In the urban areas the reluctance of employers to recruit and retain women caused the Women's Federation and Union to lobby for reductions in discrimination and in China to for shifts in the way maternity benefits were resourced from enterprise to city wide social security funds so that by 1990 many cities and counties had a fund helping to reduce the exclusion of women from the workplace.
- (iv) Once the difficulties of rural women in undertaking agriculture and moving from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations became evident, the women's organisation in each country sponsored literacy and training classes and looked for ways to make available credit, materials and markets available to enable women to establish or expand their courtyard or household economies.
- (v) In cases of public and domestic violence both organisations have proved to be important agents in providing concrete help in countering particular instances of discrimination and abuse of women, in lobbying for legislation and in providing legal support to take offenders to court.

(b) Research and Policy Interests

The second means by which the Women's Federation and Women's Union have supported the definition and implementation of women's needs and interests is by undertaking and fostering research into gender issues. The increasing awareness and investigation of women's separate problems and needs in living and work during the early years of reform in both China and Vietnam led not only to new policy and practical interests in women's experience and rights but also generated new research by both women's organisations and the revived social sciences

which have sponsored and/or conducted several major investigations of women in each country. In China in 1990, for example, and for the first time since 1949, there was a nationwide survey of women and the results of this Chinese Women's Social Status Survey have provided useful information both to researchers and policy makers. In more specialised and localised studies social scientists in each country have highlighted problems in female education, employment and violence against women which have all led to either policy or practical responses. However the most important repercussion of this new interest in research in both countries has been the establishment of more academic but policy-linked women's studies which were first fostered by, but also outgrew, the official women's organisations.

In each country, although more widely in China, many centres for women's research and status have been established, new data has been collected on women's experience in education, employment, marriage and the family and women's attitudes and expectations have been analysed as part of a more general practical and conceptual concern with gender relations in rapidly changing societies.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The official women's organisations both played a critical role in nurturing women's studies by arranging conferences, workshops, providing sponsorship and giving protective support in troubled times and there are now several women's studies centres and groups in each country which as non-government organisations are allied to, but independent of, the official women's organisation. In each country the United Nations Fourth Conference of Women held in Beijing in 1995 was influential in establishing and fostering an array of government and non-government organisations, in redefining the role of the Women's Federation and Women's Union as semi- or even non-government organisations and establishing new co-ordinating, monitoring and mainstream bodies to advance the cause of women.

(c) 'Non-government' Organisations

In each country the preparatory activities for the UN Conference included numerous seminars, publications, research initiatives and practical programmes many of which were undertaken by new women's societies, professional women's associations and networks first established to facilitate participation in Conference events. Many Chinese organisations were granted permission to sponsor seminars at the NGO Forum on women in the fields of education, health, the environment, industry, the family, human rights and violence. Each of these seminars involved groups of women meeting, sponsoring social investigations and writing papers for a series of pre-forum seminars to which women throughout the country were invited to contribute. Many of these seminars attracted funding for international participants and more Chinese women than ever before attended preparatory and other meetings abroad. In preparation many academic journals had special issues on women and an unprecedented number of books on women were published and international exchanges generated an interest in issues such as domestic violence and sexual harassment. These activities had the longer term implication in that they led to the establishment in both countries of Women's Research Centres, Women's Museums and professional and other women's associations which, again in both countries, have fostered discussion and debate about gender issues and provided an alternative platform to the official women's organisations for the expression of ideas and opinions about women's issues which have continued to exist alongside but independent of the longer-established official women's federation and women's union. In turn the establishment of

these alternative associations have fostered changes within the official women's organisations themselves each of which has begun to refer to itself as a non-government organisation.

The existence of alternative women's unofficial organisations provided an impetus for change within the longer-established official organisations: not only do they both now pay more attention to women's interests but, as a result of the UN Conference and the establishment of other groups, they have either had to rework their mandate or become sidelined. They both chose the former and thus have attempted to redefine themselves so that, instead of representing themselves as government mass organisations, they have now shifted their stance to become 'non-government' women's organisations. This change in self-representation was partly a response to an international agency determination to fund only 'non-government' women's organisations prior to the UN Conference and Non-government Forum and partly because the activism of the new women's studies associations opened new spaces both inside and outside of the official body channels which the official organisations both fostered and had to take advantage of if they were to remain in the lead. Despite some internal restructuring of each official organisation which has enabled them to take more initiative in responding to practical problems of female discrimination and to establish their own research offices to conduct research, identify problems, formulate solutions and recommend policies, these organisations can be more accurately described as semi-government rather than non-government organisations.

(d) Mainstreaming Women's Organisations

In each country in the lead up to and as a result of the UN Conference there has been an attempt to mainstream gender issues and monitor UN Platforms for the Advancement of Women.

In Vietnam the National Committee for the Advancement of Vietnamese Women was established in 1993 to operate in co-ordination with ministries, branches and agencies concerned to promote women's activities.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The Committee comprised sixteen members representing ministries and concerned agencies of the government and mass organisations such as the Women's Union, Youth Union and the Peasants Union. Its aim was to regularly monitor of ministries, branches and localities on their implementation of laws and policies relating to women and their activities for the advancement of women. The Committee is also in charge of disseminating and guiding ministries and agencies and local authorities in the implementation of a new government-approved **National Development Strategy to the year 2000 for the Advancement of Women**. The national plan which has eleven specific objectives to ensure women's rights to respect of their persons and to participating in all society's activities on an equal footing with men. Central to the plan is the creation of favourable conditions for women to improve their living conditions by the generation of more jobs and higher incomes, access to health care, education and training and their participation in decision making and management. Ministries, government offices and other organisations are charged with integrating the action plan in their own yearly plans of action so as to increase their attention to women. The Committee has organised many conferences, seminars, training workshops on gender issues for ministries and agencies so that they will apply 'gender approaches' in their planning, project and programme design. Sub-committees on the

advancement of women have been set up in in forty-five ministries and agencies at the central level and almost all of the 61 provinces and cities throughout the country and has set up co-operative ties with government and non-government organisations at home and abroad.(48)

In China the creation of a Commission for Women's and Children's Work Committee at the highest administrative level in 1990 was an important symbol of the new importance attached to decreasing discrimination against women and a recognition that such problems could not alone be solved by 'such mass organisations as women's federations since the issues related to politics, economics, culture and other fields which should be dealt with by the whole society'.(49) This Women's and Children's Committee is attached to the State Council while most provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government also set up special organisations for women and children. Its central committee, consisting of representatives from all the leading ministries and relevant organisations, was to have as their main task that of 'coordinating issues relating to women and children that should be settled jointly by the governments and units concerned.' The establishment of this coordinating agency marked an important step in an administrative system characterised by strongly demarcated vertical lines of authority and responsibility which had made any cooperation between government departments difficult. At first its work mostly involved researching for and drawing up regulations to protect women from abduction and prostitution and for formulating laws to protect women's rights and subsequently to aid in the publicisation of this legislation. However in 1995 the Chinese government too approved and supported a new **National Program for the Development of China's Women** which defines major objectives for the development of Chinese women until the end of the century.(50) Its main targets reiterate support for women's participation in decision-making and management of state and social affairs including references to their political rights and participation in production and education, further improvements to their health, equality within the family and legal protection. Although its implementation is the main responsibility of the National Women's and Children's Work Committee, it is also a designated responsibility of governments and relevant departments at all levels. In both countries the new national programs for the advancement or development of women are important documents re-emphasising and providing reference points for monitoring and analysis of female roles and status in the years to come.

5. Concluding Remarks

5.1 Opportunity and Vulnerability

During reform, as this paper suggests, women have both practically benefited from the new opportunities for new forms and types of employment and rising standards of living which are increasingly apparent in large parts of both countries and the renewed attention given to women's issues at all levels of society both within and outside of the government. There are many improvements in the working and domestic lives of which women in these two countries

are genuinely appreciative. Simultaneously however, as this paper also suggests, women have been penalised by shortfalls in government funding especially at lower levels and changes in types and forms of employment with certain categories of rural and urban women increasingly at risk from continuing reform. It was admitted in Women of China China that while many women were 'joyously grasping their opportunities, hundreds of thousands of other women feel that challenge and crises are inevitable'.(51)

A. Rural Women

In rural regions the well-being of women is primarily dependent on regional location, the labour and material resources of the household of which they are members and the distribution of resources and rewards within that household.

Generally peasant women have shared in the increased income and standards of living of the majority of rural households and even in the poorest regions of China and Vietnam, but inter-regional and intra-regional differentials remain important determinants of the income and welfare. In China for example at the outset of the reforms the government anticipated that only 30 per cent to 40 per cent of peasant households would be enriched, 40 per cent to 50 per cent would achieve considerable improvements while 15 per cent to 20 per cent of peasant households with little or no labour power, no technical specialities and no planning or business acumen would continue to encounter difficulties in meeting basic needs.(52) In Vietnam there are a high proportion of peasant households which are very poor, have surplus labour and are not yet benefiting from new inputs, activities and markets.(53) One of the characteristics of the countryside in both countries, then, has been the rising differentials between rich and poor regions and rich and poor peasant households and there is some indication that poverty within rural villages may be gender-related with some categories of rural women particularly at risk.

(a) Women in poor health or who are otherwise incapacitated and without full labour power: poor health is one of the most common causes of poverty in rural villages in both countries due not just to the loss of income-earning capacities, but also to the costs of medical treatment which are one of the most common causes of indebtedness in the countryside.

(b) Female-headed households or women who are to all intents and purposes the head of their household due to absence or incapacity of their male counterpart are probably at a disadvantage. In China it is unclear what proportion of households are female-headed or to what extent female-headed and operated households suffer the discrimination so common in other agricultural societies. Peasant households where the men are absent through migration are commonly referred to as 'half-side families' which are for all practical purposes female-headed and operated but they are rarely counted or their needs especially discussed. However on one occasion my field work in one of the southwest provinces it was estimated that a high proportion, 23 per cent, of the total households and 2.02 million households out of the 3.3 million or 61 per cent of poorer households were female-managed in that the men were either absent or labour-weak. They were not considered to be unduly disadvantaged in terms of inputs, information and markets as due to the heavier demands on female labour. In Vietnam it

is more openly admitted and documented that as many as 20 per cent of households are made up of lone women and their children.(54)(See Table 16) They have been shown to be particularly disadvantaged in terms of labour intensity, access to resources and in getting their children educated. (55)

(c) Elderly women without the normal family support and living on their own and without labour power are vulnerable for there is only an elementary system of social security operating in rural regions of both countries. Despite some minimal welfare programmes guaranteeing basic needs and relief, the increasing importance of the household economy means that those without such household support are increasingly likely to be at risk especially in poor regions.

(d) The girl child is particularly at risk in rural areas both before and after birth and is likely to be disadvantaged in receiving health and education during childhood.

Indeed in both countries poverty remains one of the most important factors affecting rural women's employment, well-being and welfare both in poor under-developed regions and in poor labour-short households in better developed rural regions.

B. Urban Women

As for rural working women, urban working women have both benefited from the reforms and new opportunities for employment and rising standards of living. They have also been penalised by many of the changes in the relocation and reorganisation of work which means longer hours and harder work for most women. As in the countryside it is unclear how far poverty is gender-related but in the cities and towns there are a number of categories of women who are especially vulnerable as a result of the economic reforms.

(a) Women on low, fixed or declining incomes or pensions including members and retired members of professions in both countries have been increasingly unable to meet the rising costs of basic needs and many are already working longer hours or undertaking second jobs.

(b) Women who have been laid off from state-owned enterprises, although privileged in the past, have now to find not only new employment but also access to a range of social and economic services formerly provided by the enterprises. As their numbers increase it is likely to be more difficult for the Vietnamese and Chinese governments to find alternative employment in the urban economy for the large numbers of women newly unemployed.

(c) Women entrepreneurs are also threatened by rising costs and inflation and many have reported their difficulties in gaining access to raw materials, credit, technology and markets. Many of their enterprises remain insecure, marginal and earn only a small daily subsistence incomes despite long hours of work.

(d) In many family-based enterprises women workers have become de facto family employees of the male head of the household with all the attendant disadvantages deriving

from the structure of familial authority reproduced in production.

(e) **Large numbers of migrant women** have moved to the cities and better-off regions in search of employment often to be recruited into short-term contract work in enterprises or domestic employment where conditions of work are such that they have been found to be at risk from a number of physical, emotional and sexual hazards. Many who leave their jobs and have no other means of support turn to prostitution.

(f) Again too as in rural regions, **elderly lone women** without pensions or family support and with only minimal forms of social support or security are especially at risk.

5.2 Practice, Theory and Organisation

As this paper illustrates much of the attention given in China and Vietnam to the roles and status of women has centred around a series of practical problems and the continuing discrimination experienced by women in their working and domestic lives which have aroused new responses by both the governments and women's organisations. Additionally there has been some attention given to the study of women's history and developing and understanding problems at a more theoretical level. Although there is still much more attention given to women's rather than gender issues, there is the beginnings of a more explicit interest in gender relations. However there

are a number of theoretical gender issues which have direct practical implications which have not yet received the attention they deserve. These include the emphasis on gender difference and complementariness which pervades current perceptions of gender relations in both countries which, though an understandable reaction against the gender 'blindness' or 'sameness' of the revolution, exacerbates the rigidity of the sexual division of labour and the unsubstitutability of boys for girl children. In the future such questions are only likely to be studied by women's organisations, centres and associations as they continue their interest in practical and theoretical issues.

Within new women's organisations and studies there is much debate among women themselves about the definition, responsibilities and effectiveness of the various women's organisations in solving some of the practical and theoretical problems. Seemingly women are very much divided between those who think that the most productive strategy is to work within official organisations and those who think the initiative in challenging conventional norms and values has passed to the new or non-government organisations such as women's studies, research, professional or welfare associations, women's hotlines or counselling centres. The situation in each country is somewhat fluid with both old and new institutions feeling their way into new roles and into uncharted times.

(a) **The fragility of new women's organisations** is evident in a number of ways. For instance the very notion 'non-government' is still new in these societies and there is some suspicion of their activities, objectives and influence with restrictive government rules and regulations which have limited their expansion and not been conducive to grassroots initiatives.

(b) Nationally **the official women's organisations** continue to play an uneasy role as either semi-government or non-government organisations roles. At local levels, although there are provisions for women's representatives and congresses, field studies do show that the degree of activism in villages and urban neighbourhoods varies greatly according to the levels of education, degrees of commitment and the connections of local women's representatives with upper administrative levels.(56) The majority of villages have women's representatives who range from those who are committed, authoritative and imaginative to those who are poorly qualified, have little status or authority and are often not included in village decision-making.

(c) More generally and at all levels the effectiveness of women's organisations as advocates of women's interests has been severely constrained by a **lack of resources** and they often have to rely on other government ministries and departments who themselves are also short of funds at local levels.(57)

However it is probably fair to conclude that during the reform era the women's organisations in both China and Vietnam have been more active in protecting the public interest of women than at any time in the past and perhaps their improved performance, together with the proliferation of new non-government centres and groups, provide grounds for some optimism that there will be further redefinitions and changes in gender relations in these two transitional societies.

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Table 1. Sex Ratio at Birth: China, 1970-1989

Year	SRB	Year	SRB	Year	SRB
1970	105.9	1977	106.7	1984	108.5
1971	105.2	1978	105.9	1985	111.4
1972	107.0	1979	105.8	1986	112.3
1973	106.3	1980	107.4	1987	111.0
1974	106.6	1981	107.1	1988	108.1
1975	106.4	1982	107.2	1989	113.9
1976	107.4	1983	107.9		

Sources: 1. 1970-1988 from SFPC (1990).

2. 1989 from SSB (1991).

Quoted in Gu Baochang and Li Yongping 'Sex Ratio at Birth and Son Preference in China', paper presented for the UNFPA Symposium on "Issues Related to Sex Preference for Children in the Rapidly Changing Demographic Dynamics in Asia" held in Seoul, Korea, 21-24 November 1994.

Table 2. Sex Ratio at Birth by Parity: China, 1981-1989

Year	Parity of Women				
	1	2	3	4	5+
1981	105.1	106.7	111.3	106.5	114.1
1982	106.6	105.2	109.4	112.9	109.9
1983	107.8	107.2	109.5	104.7	112.1
1984	102.5	113.3	113.0	115.3	127.3
1985	106.6	115.9	114.1	126.9	117.3
1986	105.4	116.9	123.1	125.3	123.5
1987	106.8	112.8	118.9	118.6	124.6
1988	101.5	114.5	117.1	123.1	108.7
1989	105.2	121.0	124.3	131.7	129.8

Sources: 1. 1970-1988 from SFPC (1990).

2. 1989 from SSB (1991).

Quoted in Gu Baochang and Li Yongping 'Sex Ratio at Birth and Son Preference in China', paper presented for the UNFPA Symposium on "Issues Related to Sex Preference for Children in the Rapidly Changing Demographic Dynamics in Asia" held in Seoul, Korea, 21-24 November 1994.

Table 3. Estimated Contribution of the Underreporting of Female Births to the Increase in the Reported Sex Ratio at birth: China, 1983-1990

Year (1)	Reported SRB (2)	Excess over 106 (3)	Estimated SRB (4)	(2) - (4) = (5)	(5) / (3) = (6)
1988 2 Per-thousand Fertility Survey					
1983	107.7	1.7	106.2	1.5	88.2%
1984	108.3	2.3	106.5	1.8	78.3%
1985	111.2	5.2	107.8	3.4	65.4%
1986	112.1	6.1	108.8	3.3	54.1%
1.1987 - 6.88	110.0	4.0	107.0	3.0	75%
1990 Census 10 % Computer Tabulation					
1989	113.8	7.8	109.8	4.0	51.3%
1990 Census 1 % Sample Data Tape					
1/1989- 6/90	115.4	9.4	111.4	4.0	42.6%

Source: Zeng Yi, Tu Ping, Gu Baochang, et al., 'Causes and Implications of the Recent Increase in the Reported Sex Ratio at Birth in China', *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1993 pp 283-302.

Table 4. Comparison of Estimated Infant Mortality Rates by Sex and Residence: China, 1981 and 1989 (in per thousand)

Year	China		City		Town		County	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1981	38.88	36.87	25.05	25.85	24.27	22.60	41.41	39.37
1989	35.54	40.40	25.33	29.36	27.83	32.17	43.42	49.41

Source: Sun Fubin, Li Shuzhuo and Li Nan "A Study of the Under-reporting of Deaths in the 1990 Census", *Population Science of China*, No. 2, 1993, pp 20-25.

Table 5. Mortality Rates of Infants and Children in 1991 (per thousand)

Indicator	National	Urban	Rural
Infant mortality rate	31.42	14.02	37.53
Mortality rate for children below 5	34.19	17.26	40.61

Source: *China Population Today*, June 1993

Table 6. Information about delivery of births (%)

Location of birth	National	Urban	Rural
Hospital	30.66	91.60	25.67
Clinic/ township clinic	2.18	1.10	2.26
At home	66.37	7.15	71.23
Other places	0.74	0.15	0.79
Places unknown	0.05	0.00	0.05
Delivery with the midwifery of			
Medical worker	32.44	93.00	27.48
Country doctor	16.12	1.78	17.29
Paramedic	28.61	3.86	30.64
Others	22.51	1.32	24.24
Unknown	0.32	0.03	0.35

Source: *China Population Today*, June 1993

Table 7. Disease among female labourers, by age group in Vietnam

	16-25 yrs old	25-40 yrs	41-45 yrs
Internal diseases	25-35%	36.07%	44.65%
Gynecological disease	28.44%	57.42%	60.01%
Neurological disease	13.52%	27.52%	46.97%
Ophthalmological disease	49.41%	41.13%	77.23%
Teeth, jaw, face disease	33.87%	42.8%	59.44%
Ear, nose, throat disease	33.80%	32.75%	16.47%
Skin diseases	11.75%	11.72%	13.88%
Data from the group of researchers on biomedical labor 1987-1990.			
Source: Ha Phi Phuong Tien, "On the Problems of Health Protection for Female Labourers," in Barry, K, ed, <u>Vietnam's Women in Transition</u> , Macmillan, 1996, p. 202.			

Table 8. The ratio of female labourers suffering labour accidents in the agricultural co-operatives (Nam Hinh district), Vietnam

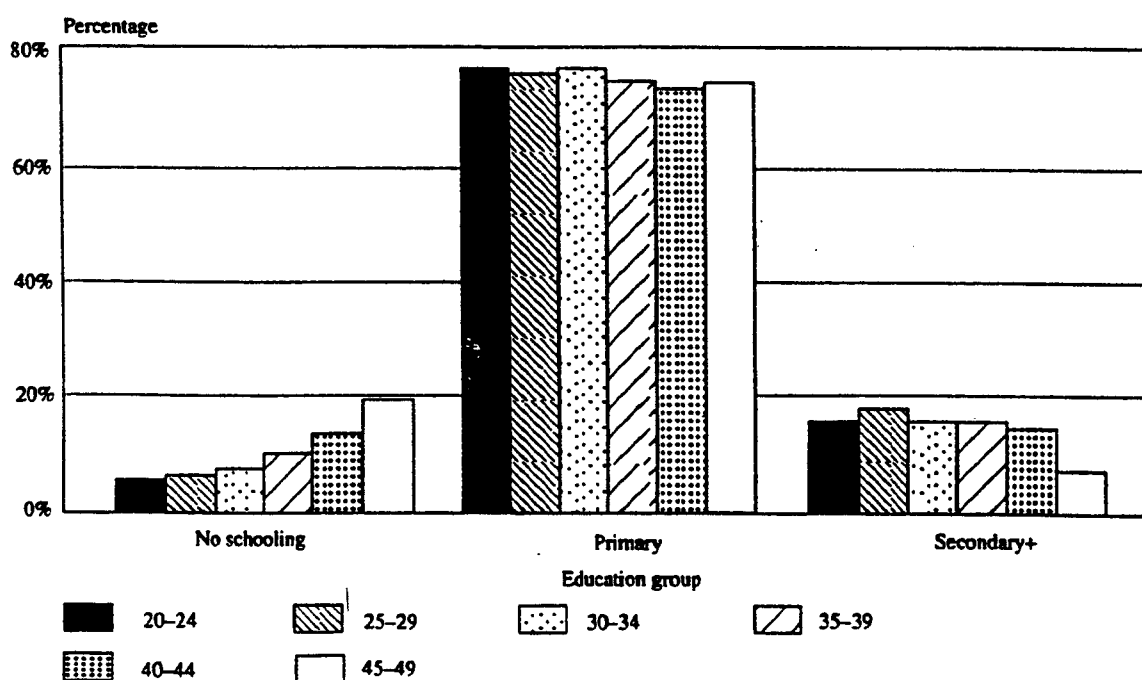
	Unit	1961	1970	1976	1986
The total number of victims	pers	40	108	170	238
% female	%	75.5	79.5	82	85
The number of fatalities	pers	--	2	3	5
% female	%	--	50	100	80
The number seriously injured	pers	--	3	6	10
% female	%	--	77	84	90
The disabled	pers	1	2	3	16
	%	100	100	67	87
The number of miscarriages	pers	18	60	105	150
Source: as above, p. 204					

Table 9. Women's Education Status, 1990

Level	% of Graduates Female	% of Students Female	% increase over 1980
Post-Graduates	20	25	+13.0
Colleges and Universities	33	34	+10.3
Secondary Technical		43	+ 5.5
Secondary Normal		55	+29.0
Technical		38	
Ordinary Middle	42	43	+ 3.5
Junior Middle	43	44	
Senior Middle	39	39	
Secondary Vocational	44	39	+13.9
Primary Schools		47	+ 2.0
School Age Entrance Rota		96	+ 4.2

Source: The Report of the People's Republic of China on the Implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, Beijing, China, 1994

Figure 1. Educational attainment of women aged 20-49, by age group, 1989, Vietnam



Source: 1989 Census data, reported in *Vietnam Demographic and Health Survey, 1988*, Table B.5, p. 70 in Barry K. "Vietnam's Women in Transition, MacMillan 1996 p. 36

Table 10. Illiteracy and Semi-Literacy among Females, 1990

Age					
	15-24	25-34	35-44	45+	Total
Percentage of Population Illiterate	6	9	18	52	22
Percentage of Female Population Illiterate	9	15	29	72	32
Reduction in Percentage of Female Illiterates in Population over 1982	-9	-23	-21	-16	-17
Female Percentage of Illiterates	73	78	74	68	70
Source: The Report of the People's Republic of China on the Implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, Beijing, China, 1994					

Table 11. A. Levels of education in 1989, Vietnam

Occupational Level	Male	Female	Both sexes
Unskilled labour	88.1%	93.3%	90.9%
Skilled labour:			
with certification	3.7	.19	2.2
without certification	2.6	1.2	1.9
Middle technicians	3.1	3.3	3.2
College and university graduates	2.5	1.9	2.2
B. Female enrolment in universities, Vietnam			
1982-1983 1985-1986 1987-1988			
Total	Female	%	Total Female %
33,443	14,354	41	33,813 14,076 41 33,646 14,035 42
Source: Huang Thi Lich, 'The Vietnamese Woman in Scientific Creation,' in Barry, K, ed, Vietnam's Women in Transition, Macmillan 1996, p. 193.			

TABLE 12: EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN 1982 AND 1990 IN CHINA
(in 10,000)

	<u>1982</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>No. Increased</u>	<u>Rate of Increase</u>
No. of Employed Women	22784	29101	6317	28%
Professional/Technical	1012	1556	544	54%
Department/Organisation Leaders	84	130	46	55%
Clerical	166	289	123	74%
Commerce	432	909	477	110%
Service	551	801	250	45%
Farming	17566	21901	4335	19%
Factory	2953	3501	548	19%
Other	20	14	-6	-30%

Source: The Report of the People's Republic of China on the Implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, Beijing, China, 1994

TABLE 13: FEMALE EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION 1992, CHINA

<u>Form of Employment</u>	EMPLOYMENT POPULATION 1992		
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>% Female</u>
All Occupations	147919501	55855797	38
Farming, Forestry, Fishing	8179148	2906107	36
Industry, Mining	66214336	27413712	41
Geological	1000865	243903	24
Construction	10359421	2087009	20
Transportation, Communications	8188727	2027527	25
Commerce	19463842	8735789	45
Housing, Public Services	4397427	1993673	45
Health, Welfare	4209342	2268890	54
Education, Culture	2129680	4648748	39
Scientific, Technical	1592200	547423	34
Finance, Insurance	2229375	830945	37
Party, Government	9961138	2152073	22

Source: The Report of the People's Republic of China on the Implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, Beijing, China, 1994

**TABLE 14: EMPLOYMENT COMPOSITION OF CHINA'S WORKING WOMEN
1990**

<u>Form of Employment</u>	<u>% of Women in Occupation</u>
Professionals	5.35
Government, Party, Organisation Officials	0.45
Clerks	0.98
Commerce, Business	3.12
Service Personnel	2.75
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries	75.26
Industry, Transport	12.03
Other	0.05
Total	100.00

Source: The Report of the People's Republic of China on the Implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, Beijing, China, 1994

TABLE 15: DIVORCE PETITIONS AND REASONS FOR PETITIONS, VIETNAM, 1991

<i>Reasons for Petition</i>	<i>Number of Petitions in 1991</i>
1. Precocious marriage	1
2. Forced marriage	0
3. Concubinage	234
4. Marriage conflict, being beaten up, ill-treatment	4770
5. Adultery	238
6. Deception of beauty, money, position, age	2
7. Illness, infirmity, state of children	15
8. One of the parties sent to re-education camps or convicted	8
9. One of the parties residing abroad	0
10. One of the parties is missing or away for a long time	257
11. One of the parties is a foreigner who has left for home	0
12. Other grounds	164

Source: Thai Thi Ngoc Duc, 'Divorce and Its Impact on Women and Families,' in Barry, K, ed, Vietnam's Women in Transition, Macmillan, 1996, p. 79.

TABLE 16: PROPORTION OF UNMARRIED WOMEN WITH CHILDREN IN TWO VIETNAM COMMUNITIES, 1991.

Name	Unmarried women with children	With absent husband	Separated	Divorced	Widows	Proportion of husband absented families
Team of production Minh Dan (forestry)	21.1%	0	2.1%	2.1%	2.1%	27.6%
Minh Dan Agricultural co-operative	2.8%	0	0	0.5%	7.5%	10.8%

Data from the 1991 Survey by the Studies on Women Centre.

Source: Le Thi, 'Women, Marriage, and Gender Equality,' in Barry, K, ed, Vietnam's Women in Transition, Macmillan 1996, p. 69.

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