

# Asia, Gender and Scholarship Under Processes of Re-regionalization

Tani E. Barlow

タニ・E・バーロウ教授は、1985年、カリフォルニア大学デーヴィス校で中国の小説家、丁玲の研究で歴史学の博士号を取得。その後ミズーリ大学コロンビア校をへて、1994年よりワシントン大学歴史学部で女性学担当の教授を勤めている。また、東アジア、ならびにアジア系ディアスポラの文化と政治の諸問題をあつかう学術雑誌 *positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* の主任編集者として活躍している。

近代中国におけるジェンダーの歴史、および東アジアの植民地的近代におけるジェンダーの比較研究を専門とし、*Gender Politics in Modern China* (1994)、*Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (1997) ほか多数の著書を執筆している。

バーロウ教授は2000年10月から2001年3月まで、ジェンダー研究センターに外国人客員教授として赴任した。本稿はその間行われたシンポジウム「アジアにおけるグローバル化とジェンダー」での基調報告をもとに作成され、ご寄稿いただいたものである。

It has been widely suggested throughout the Clinton Presidency by many attentive observers that its efforts in economic statecraft have been mainly directed at one particular geographical area: East and South-East Asia. Rothkopf suggests this was the main motive for the entire drive, saying: ‘Commercial diplomacy, however defined and practised, owes its development as much to the rise of Asia’s emerging economies as it does to any other factor.’ East and South-East Asia were of decisive importance if the United States ‘was to maintain its economic leadership.’

Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble: Washington’s Faustian Bid for World Dominance* (London: Verso Press, 1999), p. 78.

Policy changes within the PRC has led to regional economic growth, particularly in coastal China, through decentralisation, localisation, and the policy of the ‘open door’. The neighbouring economies of East Asia, faced with limits to their own economic growth and seeking to restructure, have not only traded with and invested in China’s new dynamic regions, but have moved enterprises and even whole industries to off-shore processing and production in the PRC. The result is *a new pattern of economic regionalism unlike earlier regionalisms experienced in China, and one whose impact on domestic politics and international*

*relations remains relatively undisussed. . . .* The primary concern of this book is the impact of the twin dynamics of China's new regionalism on its domestic politics and international relations. The first and domestic source of this dynamic is the policy changes of the 1980s . . . The second and external source of dynamics is the increased economic integration of different parts of China with different parts of East, South-East and Central Asia on its borders.

David S.G. Goodman and Gerald Segal, eds., "Introduction," and David Goodman, "The politics of regionalism: Economic development, conflict and negotiation," both in *China Deconstructs: politics, trade and regionalism*, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. xiii and 17 (my emphasis)

With billions of dollars in trade surpluses to recycle, China's secretive monetary agencies are becoming big buyers in the U.S. Treasury markets. This raises fears on Wall Street and among some U.S. trade experts about how Beijing will use its newfound heft. . . . some Washington trade experts fear China wants to gain clout in the tough talks over Beijing's joining the World Trade Organization. "Just as Japan gained significant leverage over the U. S. [as a lender], China feels it can, too," argues Greg Mastel of the Economic Strategy Institute, a Washington think tank. The U.S. treasury, though, welcomes Beijing's buying, figuring more buyers means Washington pays lower interest rates.

Mike McNamee, "Uncle Sam's Big Creditor: China," *Newsweek*, November 4, 1996.

There is almost no equation in the formulas for sustainable development and peace in which China will not be an important factor. The world has entered a period in which China's and the planet's fates are linked, and this period promises to be long and dangerous.

Peter C. Goldmark, Jr., "The President's Letter" The Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report, 1997.

Just recently two leading feminists have directly addressed globalization and gender in relation to the question of a re-regionalizing Asia. In her, "A feminist critique of modernity and Korean culture," Cho Han Haejoang situated South Korean "turbo capitalist" culture in relation to globalized capital ("transnational capital"). She argued that in a post-1997 Asia finance crisis world Korean intellectuals confronted the need to reformulate the basic discursive and social institutions situating them as subjects, starting from "nation," "state," and "family" and seguing into a debate over "class, gender and capital only after those notions are successfully deconstructed."<sup>1</sup> Li Xiaojiang, on the other hand, sought to show that as a normative process at work in the world, so-called "globalization" had originated elsewhere. Li argued that to understand Chinese women's status within "globalization" a researcher would need to grasp how earlier, successive waves of local development discourses had already primed gendered Chinese subjects to cathect into international discourses of globalization unfolding outside their purview<sup>2</sup>. Taking the lead from Cho and Li, I want to use this occasion to speculate about three related analytic questions. They are globalization as discourse, re-

regionalization and its relation to area studies (in my definition, academic work that attends to the particularities of a place), and the question of gender. To anticipate my conclusion, this presentation will suggest that gender remains a useful critical category. Yet to be put to best use it may be necessary to show how “gender” is embedded in discourses of globalization and international development. That being the case, the gender analytic may work critically as a window onto specific practices that, by mobilizing value creating subjects differentially, are actually extracting use value in the production and consumption dynamic of the globalized segment of the world economy.

### **Discourse and practices of “globalization”**

What might prove a useful way for a feminist to think about “globalization” in relation to the gender question? As Li Xiaojiang had noticed, the debate on globalization began in the early Clinton era. According to Peter Gowan, Clinton policy makers looking for a way to justify the use of economic instruments against emergent, competitive regional blocs or regional markets (what they called BEMs or Big Emerging Markets located primarily in Asia), hit on the term “globalization.” From the perspective of U.S. policy makers and their allies, the globalized economy should resemble a wheel with a hub (the United States) and spokes (bilaterally established economic relations of exchange and indebtedness with specific nation states). Any competing hub or economic region such as a Japan-centered, intra-Asian bloc would complicate the Clinton agenda of U.S. dominance in the international sector of world capitalism. Consequently, the Clinton globalization doctrine rested U.S. hegemony on the centrality of the dollar and of the Wall Street stock market. Throughout the nineties this policy of economic globalization forwarded the U.S. “neo-liberal” posture established in the seventies when Nixon abrogated the Bretton Woods pact shifting international finance from the gold to the dollar standard. Clinton’s Washington Consensus forwarded the Nixon doctrine of globalization into the nineties. My point in raising this issue is to suggest that globalization is not a spontaneously occurring economic incident, but, rather is a “state-policy-dependent phenomenon.”<sup>3</sup>

Provisionally, then let me accept two current theses: (1) that Clinton policy was made by agents, who though conditioned by events did possess clear objectives, and (2) that these agents or policy makers understood “globalization” to be both a policy of economic statecraft and a description of the “new economy.”<sup>4</sup> Given these theses, it is not unreasonable to suppose further that U.S. economic foreign policy actually precluded any period of economic tutelage structuring Western-Eastern European relations and instead administered the “Shock Treatment” policy. This both routed development through Washington rather than Moscow, Berlin, or Paris, and eventually has devastated Eastern Europe and de-industrialized Russia. But also and directly to my point, Clinton policy seemed vigorously focused on disrupting the emergence of an Asia Pacific trading bloc or economic region. Where Clinton policy recognized the possibility of regional economic blocs forming multilaterally and without reference to the United States and its financial instruments (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, large donor organizations like Ford and so on) it acted in a

hostile fashion.

In her article “From ‘Modernization’ to ‘Globalization’: Where are Chinese Women,” Li Xiaojiang notes in passing that the discourse of globalization had barely begun to surface in 1992 during her visit to Boston. In extricating the exogenous ideology — globalization as it has unfolded in Chinese policy and critical circles — from what she claims was an earlier, indigenous discourse of “getting onto track” (*jiegui*), Li raises a good point. There were in China preexisting ideological conditions that belie the presumption of U.S. globalization advocates, that all nations including China were or ought to develop similarly. Indeed, Li makes the point that actually among endogenous policy makers, government strategists and in academic venues where a U.S.-style globalization theory (*quanqiuhua lilun*) is currently being considered, Chinese theorists have actually introjected nationalist content because of preexisting, localized understanding of what globalization means. Li’s own position on the relation of globalization — Chinese style and gender need not concern us here.<sup>5</sup> The point is that since “globalization” is theory and practice, a policy originating in the specific political formation of the Clinton era, globalization elsewhere in specific regions is best grasped not as naturalized process, but as always mediated through local ideological formations. Accepting this proviso would mean that any time “globalization” is raised as a central concern the question of what sort of ideological and institutional mediation is implied must also be raised.

The outlines of the debate over globalization in the People’s Republic of China are clear enough. Like all of us, Chinese intellectuals have also engaged in a strong, albeit at times muted, debate over globalization. Some of the more contentious discussion has focused on China’s accession to the WTO and the nation’s relationship to Washington and the Washington consensus. A debate on whether or not “globalization” was a natural economic stage or a largely rhetorical and ideological formation broke out in the journal of opinion *Dushu* in the late nineties. Essays like Wan Junren’s “Another Face of Globalization” engaged the question of WTO through evaluations of Anglo-American critical opinion on economic policy questions.<sup>6</sup> Certainly the best known and most contentious of these disputes, however, erupted in 2000 when the editors of *Dushu* became embroiled in a damaging debate over whether the journal itself was biased in favor of criticism of globalization and neo-liberalism.<sup>7</sup>

Knowing where, under what conditions, and to what ends the ideology and the practices of globalization have unfolded can help to denaturalize what remains otherwise a mysterious, ahistorical, seemingly inevitable process.<sup>8</sup> The portrait of mediated, yet shared economic processes that emerges when the term of globalization is strictly disciplined in this way, in my view, can enlarge the critical potential of the category of gender. Li Xiaojiang may be implying something similar. When globalization is uninflected and the analytic term gender is applied to it, the resulting “theory” cannot explain why overwhelming numbers of female workers in China opt to ruin their health, sojourn among strangers, risk reputation and so on to labour on Shenzhen’s assembly lines. As Li points out, “[f]rom one perspective, the macroscopic, globalized, a perspective of reflexivity on ‘modernization’ and capitalism, we see what is patently Capital’s accelerating exploitation of women

in the developing countries. From the other indigenous perspective, we must squarely face the fact that women's lives and status in 'modernization' and 'globalization' has improved for the better, though simultaneous, absolute impoverishment may (compared to the West) have occurred, individuals may actually have (compared to the West) greater comparative affluence." This includes, she suggests, the "choice" of women to prostitute themselves in sexual labor.

The question of national formation in late capital, which I had raised in an earlier essay stresses the degree to which the economic trajectory of reform in the PRC is not accidental, is not simply reactive, and is not the simple effect of globalized capital. I noted there that in mainstream U.S. economic theory during the nineties Chinese reforms (resisting the forces of global capital, retaining state control over direct foreign investment, refusing money convertibility and so on) were considered either simply reactive or even eccentric or threatening economic behaviour. When rather than presuming states should be helpless against global capital — core tenants of neo-liberal theory and the aura of globalization construed as a natural process — we presume that policy makers intend outcomes, a relation opens between globalization and regions that is open ended. Questions arising as a consequence include, "What is 'Asia' in regional terms? What is China in regional terms? Is the region of "Asia" with China in it a stable place? What constitutes region? What are processes of re-regionalization? And what relation does areal scholarship, defined as formal, academic research about place, have to do with these processes of re-regionalization?"<sup>9</sup>

### **Re-regionalization and Area Studies**

It may be useful to develop the concept of re-regionalization in several directions. First, re-regionalization denotes the emergence of new economic macroregions. Assuming neoliberal globalization theory has an analogous place in the Asia Pacific region as "modernization theory" did during the Cold War, informal American empire, changes ongoing since the seventies in commercial, trade, production, banking, criminal and labour migration routes among "Asian" states represents re-regionalization in a crude macroeconomic sense. Much scholarship seems to concur that the central event in the reshaping of the Asia Pacific as an economic macroregion was the Chinese policy of opening to the world economy and its shift from planned to semi-market driven development. Tracing the perimeter of the economic macroregion is the job of what economists Masahisa Fujia and Dapeng Hu refer to as economic geography.<sup>10</sup> It is also the self-appointed work of World Bank economists, development communities, Clinton era strategists and other policy minded projects.

But, second, less economically, the debate over what David Goodman calls the "politics of regionalism" and Richard Higgott, the "political economy of regionalisation," involves speculative thinking about the social, political parameters of regional political economies.<sup>11</sup> Philip F. Kelly and Kris Olds, for instance, argue that "perhaps more than any other world region, the boundaries of the Asia-Pacific are indeterminate and open to contestation and social construction," and that conceptual vagueness is analytically valuable for area studies scholarship.<sup>12</sup> Many areal studies are preoccupied

with political re-regionalization. These are comprised of “evolutionary economics,” concerned with how actors, such as policy makers, who are constrained in politically defined regions act to survive within and change regional political structures, and “regional development studies,” which focus on economic prognostication in policy formulation. Included in this domain would also be the recent work of urban geographer, Saskia Sassen, who raises the issue of economic forces and their impact on sovereignty through the concept of “territorial organization.”<sup>13</sup>

In a series of prescient publications beginning in the early middle nineties, David Goodman and his scholarly collaborators in Australia (now re-regionalised as an Asian nation) speculated about the degree and kind of economic development in Asia. They have fixed for the most part on how the internal re-regionalization of the People’s Republic of China affects and is affected by globalization and neoliberalization of intra and international political economy or domestic and international economic re-regionalization. Goodman argues explicitly that scholarship cannot ignore the vital powers of the China’s political or state structure and its flexible conventions of statecraft and policy. So when questions of re-regionalization occur as such in a political context Goodman sees two dynamics in play. As he puts it,

The twin dynamics of China’s new regionalism on its domestic politics and international relations . . . [are] domestic politics and international relations.

The first and domestic source of this dynamism is the policy changes of the 1980s that have encouraged localised economic growth and the development of localised comparative advantage. The second and external source of dynamism is the increased economic integration of different parts of China with different parts of East, Southeast and Central Asia on its borders. In East Asia, specifically Taiwan and Hong Kong, these dynamics were of course additionally driven by the somewhat sudden late 1980s needs of those economies to restructure.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, the new or re-regionalized political economy that supports the People’s Republic stabilizes itself through contradictory movements in Goodman’s conception, as political elements of the nation, such as provinces and major cities, enter into dynamic, independent relations with extra-national economies without circuiting through the PRC’s political center. This analysis conceives “region” as a widely heterogeneous field that is structured in relation to a nation’s center, though in the conception of Goodman and his colleagues, the center may not always be the state.<sup>15</sup>

Thirdly, as my argument has implied all along, re-regionization is occurring at the level of scholarship. We already know that political economy cannot be extricated from discursivity understood technologically as a means of visualizing, materializing and consequently of differentially racializing, gendering, classing and sexualizing laboring bodies.<sup>16</sup> Another way of saying this is that scholarship is the means through which spatial categories like regions are situated. Political re-regionalization is a matter of mapping, or the spatialization of writing. I mean something broader than the professional area studies practice of information gathering in the service of policy formulation, such as World Bank reports. I include in this category social science and humanist

projects, which find scholars in effect fixing and enframing educated public opinion, media, or popular national sentiment in an ideological fashion. It is not that such scholarship is merely discursive, but rather that discursivity in scholarship works within presuppositions and theoretical constraints that are conditioned and centered by forces lying outside the terrain of the merely academic.<sup>17</sup>

Re-regionalizing area studies (which in the United States covers all professional studies of places outside of Euro-North America), scholarship has focused in the last decade on the space or region renamed variously as “Asia Pacific,” “Asia-Pacific,” or increasingly less commonly the “Pacific Rim.”<sup>18</sup> In the “new metropolises” that form the skeleton of this newly regionalized space — Singapore, Hong Kong, Seoul, Jakarta, Tokyo, Taipei, Bangkok, Sydney, etc. — neoliberal economic policy and inflowing, liberalized capital are said to be conditioning national and racial, ethnic, gender codes and forms of citizenship. Two characteristics have been particularly highlighted in recent area research on the Asia Pacific region. First, a shift is alleged to be occurring in these urban nodes toward social differential based on life style distinctions, and commodified performative, consumerism. Second, research stresses the degree to which inter-Asian competition within established notions of good taste further consolidates Asia Pacific as a regional entity. As Michael Pinches notes in his study of a significant trans-regional group he calls the “new rich,” “Asia’s” heightened global status has seen these new rich engaging in chauvinist forms of consumption that are intended to signify relative national economic standing and relational status in the region.<sup>19</sup> According to Pinches such a cultural focus does not preclude examination of structural forces that account for the emergence or character of consumers. However, focus on life style practices “draw[s] attention to the cultural arena as crucial to an understanding of these new and powerful layers of people in Asia.”<sup>20</sup> Akhil Gupta, Inderpal Grewal and Aiwha Ong, make a similar point in their special issue of the journal *positions* on “Asian Transnationalities.” The effect of signifying cultural systems on re-regionalization practices is reinforced in Aiwha Ong’s analytic of flexible citizenship in her recent volume *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* which proposed the emergence of ethnicized or “Chinese capital” and consequently of an imaginary region called Asia Pacific and populated with overseas Chinese.<sup>21</sup> In other words, scholarly projects that track regionalization through cultural flows (cultural studies), media forms (mass communications studies), distinctive local organization of daily life practices or social spaces (anthropology and ethnology), are not neatly reducible to economic macroregional studies but contribute to the ways that “region” is conceptualized.<sup>22</sup>

### **Gender as a category**

Where in this unsettled process of re-regionalization is it best to situate the gender analytic then? How would feminist work in the context of re-regionalization best use the gender analytic? How would gender remain a useful critical category in the processes I have provisionally defined as globalization in a strictly discursive sense? In what ways has the term “gender” itself become

embedded in neoliberal discourses of globalization and international development? Are there ways that the gender analytic obscures these processes, seeming artificially to stabilize the processes themselves? How then would gender work critically as a window onto the specific practices that in mobilising creative subjects differentially, are actually extracting use value in the production and consumption dynamic of the globalized segment of the world economy?

At the end of the Cold War, state formations like China's that had frozen protocols of female citizenship (*i.e.*, the ideal typical female subject cast in nationalist terms) de-institutionalised statist notions of women's liberation. Among transnational capital, labor and cultural flows and among policy elites in Asia and in the regimes of transnational corporations, there was concurrently a scaling back of modernization policies based on state welfare logics.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the more flexible concept of "gender"—in Chinese "social gender" (*shehui xingbie*), to distinguish it from anatomical, sexual bimorphism—moved gradually to centre stage in policy and theory circles internationally. Gender, like all ideological terms (*e.g.*, civil society), is part political policy and part analytic category. Conceptually, as we know, gender has been accepted into common academic usage in the U.S. through the work of Esther Boserup, Natalie Davis, Joan Scott, Judith Butler, Lata Mani and many others. In the People's Republic, the concept has disseminated through a Ford Foundation policy which local collaborators like Du Fangqin and Wang Zheng developed with Marion Burros, and through the translation projects, joint publications and annual in-country seminars held by the U.S.-based Chinese Society for Women's Studies (CSWS), and specific scholars and academic units in the PRC.<sup>24</sup> The projects of CSWS are wholly consistent with, indeed exemplify, the political reformulation of gender in policy terms under regimes of ideological globalization. Reformulation of the analytic concept of "gender" mediated through international civil society organisations is part of the new post-Cold War, global ideology and governance system disseminated through the United Nations, its quasi-official NGO system, and associated donor and civil society organizations.<sup>25</sup>

Now a primary agent of globalization at the ideological level, the post-Cold War United Nations institutionalises, through its information gathering and peacekeeping missions, a vision of global governance that is equal parts localist, environmentalist, human rightist, and quite explicitly neoliberal in its economic posture. Globalized United Nations ideology holds that its surveillance and global monitoring will end regional anarchy and curtail the alleged anarchism of rogue states, which is why its emphasis on policy making studies has taken such a disciplinary form.<sup>26</sup> As part of the internationalisation of the gender concept through its disciplinary and policy making processes, then, the United Nations and related civil society organisations have mainstreamed the term if not the practice of "gender equality." The United Nations Decade for Women, 1975-1985 and Conferences on Women, including the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference and the "Platform for Action" that emerged out of it, mark the accession of gender as policy into global circulation. These political events and the World Bank's Policy Research Report (2000) on gender and development stabilize the view that gender means "an important axis of inequality." Because it is construed to be an "axis of inequality," remedies to gender inequality appear to lie in civil and juridical action. Indeed, because

U.S. advocates often blame non-Western *states* (like China) for gendered inequality, gender is said to represent an interstate development index, capable of forcing perceived noncompliant nations to redress the relative poverty and the social vulnerability of female citizens by extending civil rights and due process to them.<sup>27</sup> “Gender policy” then is one aspect of the international human rights law movement. It offers to build a body of international law capable of instituting the rights of all women beyond the individual states where they reside. Contemporary gender policy publicises the concept and theory of gender and consolidates its universality.

The limitations of this conceptualisation is not only that it tends to overlook the fact that law for all its universality can only be administered through the state form, but also, as I will argue shortly, that it restricts gender to an overly simple formula. Naihua Zhang makes this point implicitly in important paper analysing NGO discourse within the institutional matrix of the ongoing Chinese women’s movement. As she points out, the U.N. pattern of promoting women’s human rights through the NGO system poses special problems in the People’s Republic. In 1995 when the All China Women’s Federation (ACWF) confronted the task of hosting the United Nations Fourth Women’s Conference in Beijing/Huairuo, a debate began about whether or not a bureaucratic unit with very strong ties to the state (the ACWF is semi-autonomous mass organization charged by the state charter with representing the interests of women citizens) could legitimately be called an NGO. By U.N. standards, Zhang argues, the ACWF might not qualify because of that organization’s links to the party-state. But by its own lights and within the governance system of the PRC, the Federation is indeed a grass roots organization established for and by women. Zhang argues that if the U.N. “essentialist” notion of what constitutes an NGO is strictly observed then there are no NGOs in China. But if “NGO” is locally defined and presented as such to the United Nations governing bodies, then not only is the strictly globalized norm defining NGOs “de-essentialised,” the contradictions that the ACWF itself faces—both autonomously for Chinese women but only in relation to the state—are brought to fruitful discussion *within* China.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, there may be another avenue, other than Zhang’s reliance on what I would classify as a localist strategy.<sup>29</sup> The problem for Zhang and others, who seek to widen the applicability of univeralized notions of women’s human rights and to measure gender equality strictly in juridical terms as an “axis of inequality,” is that gender will remain a *political* concern, with assumed political remedies. Let me give a concrete example of what I mean. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), initially ECAFE or the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, established in 1947, is a “regional think tank” for “spreading the growth momentum from its more dynamic member countries to the rest of the region.” In other words ESCAP is itself a re-regionalization project. ESCAP has undertaken a series of projects for the two year period of 2000–2001, including the following: (1) Regional Economic Cooperation, Development Research and Policy Analysis, (2) Social Development, Environment and Natural Resources Development, (3) Transport, Communications, Tourism and (4) Infrastructure Development. The project as a whole conceives of the need to “coordinate the ESCAP-wide activities related to gender

so that a gender perspective is properly integrated into the mainstream of all areas of work of ESCAP.” In actual fact, gender is ghettoized in one project called “Social Development.”

In practice, the “gender concept,” even within the project of “Social Development” is a passive signifier of relative deprivation. “Women” are classified along with other key target groups for “human resource development . . . disadvantaged and socially excluded groups . . . [of] the poor, youth, women, older persons and people with disabilities.” Women, in other words, and the “gender concept” in this sort of thinking are simply one among many other axes of inequality. Gender becomes a palliative concept that is alleged to enable the political “empower [ment of] women,” and the protection of “women’s rights as human rights through strengthened legal and institutional mechanism,” which will, in turn, promote “integrated means to combat violence against women, including women migrant workers, and trafficking in women and children.”<sup>30</sup> In this juridical and palliative form the gender concept cannot play a central role in other of ESCAP’s projects, such as economic and infrastructure development policies, where women produce and consume alongside men, children and other social groups. As a concept, in other words, it is conspicuously lacking in discussions about regional economic cooperation, such as the sex and tourist industries where in fact the labor of women and the sexual differentiation of labor are central to “successful development.”

I do not intend to disparage or make light of the important work being carried out under the auspices of the “gender concept” in the neoliberal discourse of United Nations and World Bank ideology.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, it strikes me that in the context of ongoing re-regionalization and in light of the unknown future that theories and practices of globalization place on the horizon, it might also be helpful to consider other, more interrogative and flexible ways to use the gender concept critically. In the essay “‘green blade in the act of being grazed;’ Late Capital, Flexible Bodies, Critical Intelligibility,” I argued that one step toward such a retooling of the gender concept would be the use of relational logics, reflexive historicity and critical reading of regional representational orders. I suggested that in considering relational logics, reflexive historical material and the ambiguous contexts of ongoing re-regionalization projects the subject of gendered analysis would have to remain prepredicative. That is, rather than situating the gender analytic in social forces and confronting a need to marshall data that test the universality of gender “as an axis of inequility,” I supported the view that ambiguous subjects will always appear in heterogenous regimes and demand historical, critical explanation. This is the difference between asking the question “are there NGOS in China?” rather than “how do I explain for this institution that is seeking to call itself an NGO?”

The instance I used in that paper was an ambiguous subject of “women in transition” that I noticed had emerged onto a transnational capitalist, pan-Asian, multinational cinema screen in the nineteen nineties. This subject of “women in transition,” I argued, was an ideological effect combining the following elements. (1) The newly regionalizing “Asia Pacific,” (2) a refiguring of Asian social relations of production at the intersection of socialist market reforms and worldly capital flows and (3) the unhappy ghost of the older hope that women’s liberation and gender equity would emerge through women’s productive labor in the public sphere. I concluded that the ambiguous

signifier, “women in transition,” considered in light of national formation in late capital, bodies in political economy, and the competing claims on enlightened thinking or feminism, could not be fully comprehended in neoliberal, feminist scholarly frameworks and that another approach should be sought.<sup>32</sup> In the language of this paper there is in the heterogeneous regime of Asia Pacific a disjuncture between gender and globalization.

Another avenue for this conceptual disjuncture of globalization and gender is a retooling of the gender concept through political economy. Priti Ramamurthy has recently commented in her history of the dialectic between feminism and development studies, that the analytic of “gender” has proved enormously useful in the last thirty years.<sup>33</sup> The problem for “gender” in discussions about global social-economic change, however, is that the concept’s creativity of the eighties and nineties appear to have been exhausted. Martha Nussbaum’s recent polemical attack on Judith Butler is a symptom of this exhaustion. Nussbaum’s most telling criticism is not so much of Butler’s work per se but is a version of a question that many critics outside the United States have raised, what does the concept of gender as social norm do for thinking about simple social and economic exploitation?<sup>34</sup> In Ramamurthy’s call to reknit the relation of feminism and development studies, gender as a conceptual resource does not play a role. Absorbed into juridical arguments and policy categories, the critical usefulness of gender is abrogated, because Ramamurthy makes clear, gender remarks on difference rather than on the nature of difference or the worldly roots of differentiation. That is the conceptual weakness of simple social constructivism as Judith Butler herself pointed out many years ago.

But in the midst of the global re-regionalization of Asia Pacific, the question has to be put. Is the gender analytic capable of critically addressing social practices for extracting use value in relations of sexually differentiated production and consumption in the globalized segment of the world economy? Cho Haejeong seems to suggest that it is. She argues implicitly that a deconstructive feminist critique of institutions which distinguish and discipline human subjects as women and men — the institutions of nation, state, family — are a ground clearing exercise. Once the ground is cleared a debate must occur on problems in political economy and on political tactics in social movement. Li Xiaojiang makes a similar point to the one I posed in my analysis of the reasons why the subject “women in transition” resists emancipation in labour, proves unemancipatable even when, a free agent, she raises her standard of living and that of her family through creative, autonomous labor. Nonetheless, the point each critic makes is that the recognition of gendered difference is itself a simple precondition to scholarship that will address the radical quality of these ongoing social and economic transformations. Perhaps such projects are underway already. Maybe in the work of Li and her colleagues there are viable feminist projects reworking the gender analytic. In this re-regionalizing area of “Asia” the need may be more acute to develop ways to reuse the gender analytic as a means of grasping how use value — our human creative labor, socially invested value, imaginary desires and all the material, erotic drives which sustain us through our everyday lives of work and social life — is extracted in processes of globalization, re-regionalization, marketization,

structural adjustment, and the general crisis.

## Notes

- 1 . Cho Han Haejoang, “A feminist critique of modernity and Korean culture,” in “Problematizing ‘Asia’,” in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1. 1 (April 2000), p. 66.
- 2 . Li Xiaojiang, “From ‘Modernization’ to ‘Globalization’: Where are Chinese Women,” (trans. Tani Barlow) in *Signs* Volume 26. No. 4 (Summer 2001): 1274 – 1278.
- 3 . Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble: Washington’s Faustian Bid for World Dominance* (London: Verso, 1999) p. 4.
- 4 . I am not ignoring the caution that Masahisa Fujita and Dipeng Hu forward in their essay, “Regional disparity in China, 1985-1994; the effects of globalization and economic liberalization,” to the effect that while “State policy is important,” still “overstating its role can be misleading.” *The Annals of Regional Science* 35 (2001): 3 – 37, p. 4.
- 5 . Li Xiaojiang’s position is that while the PRC has its own trajectory, its exploitation of female labor in the effort to reach global standards of economic development is both necessary and, from the point of view of indigenous women, preferable to previous, less exploitative, less explosively developmental state policies.
- 6 . Wan Junren’s, “Quanqiuhua de ling yimian,” *Dushu*, 1999. 7, pp. 3 – 10
- 7 . See He Guimei, “Wenhua meidi yu sixiangjie de fenhua: yi ‘dushu’ shijian” lunzheng wei hexin, “(Differentiating cultural media and the intellectual world: on the crux of the debates around the ‘Dushu’ incident”), (*positions*, forthcoming). He stresses the degree to which this violent attack on the *Dushu* editors was generated from within the intellectual world and was shaped by the internet.
- 8 . See Lisa Rofel, “Discrepant Modernities and their Discontents: A critique of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*,” *positions* 9. 3 (2001).
- 9 . See Tani E. Barlow, “Degree Zero of History,” in “Globalization and The Humanities.” A Special Issue of *Comparative Literature*. Volume. 53. No. 4 (Fall 2001): 404 – 425.
10. Op. Cit., “Regional disparity,” p. 30. See also Yehua Dennis Wei, *Regional Development in China: States. Globalization., and Inequality* (London: Routledge, 2000) for another interesting study of China as a macroregion.
11. My own position is closest to that of Richard Higgott, “The political economy of globalisation in East Asia: The salience of ‘region building,’” in *Globalisation and the Asia-Pacific: Contested Territories*, ed. Kris Olds, Peter Dicken, Philip F. Kelly, Lily Kong, and Henry Wai-chung Yeung (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 91 – 106.
12. Philip F. Kelly and Kris Olds, “Questions in a Crisis: the contested meanings of globalisation in the Asia-Pacific,” in *Globalisation and the Asia-Pacific*, ed. Kris Olds, et al. p. 2. Kelly and Olds argue for what they call “scales of analysis” as an alternative. Although I do not follow them in this concern and suggest that they have once again left out local ideological formations in their commitments to social science, their caution about region and regionalisation scholarship is exemplary.
13. See for instance Jan G. Lambooy, Ron A Boschman, “Evolutionary economics and regional policy” in *The Annals of Regional Science* 35 (pp. 113 – 131). Also Somik V. Lall, Serdar Yilmaz, “Regional economic convergence: Do policy instruments make a difference?” in *ARS* 35 (2001): 153 – 166. Later versions of this paper will address the academic standing of “regional science” as a subdiscipline. See Saskia Sassen, “Servicing the Global Economy: Reconfigured States and Private Agents” in Kelley and Olds, pp. 150 – 62.
14. Op. Cit. David Goodman, ed. *China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade and Regionalism*, eds. David S.G. Goodman and Gerald Segal (London: Routledge, 1995) p. 17.
15. See for instance Hans Hendrischke, “Provinces in Competition, Region, identity and cultural construction,” in Hendrischke and Feng Chongyi, eds., *The Political Economy of China’s Provinces: comparative and competitive advantage* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1 – 25. The distinction between the spatial notion of the center and the political

- notion of the state is also implied in Tschangho John Kim and Gerrit Knaap, "The spatial dispersion of economic activities and development trends in China: 1952 – 1985," *ARS* 35 (2001): 39 – 57.
16. See my "green blade in the act of being grazed": Late Capital, Flexible Bodies, Critical Intelligibility," *differences* 10. 3 (1998), p. 125. Elements of this discussion are repeated from that paper.
  17. Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: UCS, 1997).
  18. *What is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*, ed. Arif Dirlik (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1993).
  19. Pinches appears to mean by Asia the following regions and nations: Southeast Asia, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong, China, India and the Philippines. It is unclear from the volume's organization and his own analysis whether Japan fits into "Asia" or not. His example is Philippina maids as a status signifier in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Hong Kong in the nineties.
  20. Michel Pinches, ed., *Culture and Privilege in Capitalist Asia*, (London: Routledge, 1999).
  21. See Akhil Gupta, et al., ed., *positions*, 7. 3 (1999), Aiwha Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), and Stephanie Donald and Harriet Evans, ed., "Culture/China," *New Formations* Number 40 (Spring 2000).
  22. I will not treat here the problem posed by the United Nations recent admission of so-called Central Asian countries, into the region of Asia. cf <http://www.icarp.org/about.html>, and <http://www.unescap.org/>
  23. Richard Higgott, "The Political Economy of Globalisation in East Asia: The Salience of 'Region Building,'" in *Globalisation and the Asia-Pacific: Contested Territories*, ed. kris Olds, et. al. (London: Routledge, 1999).
  24. For documentation see Chinese Society for Women's Studies Newsletter, Number 2, October 21, 2000 <http://www.csws.org>
  25. As Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General has pointed out, "The United Nations once dealt only with Governments. By now we know that peace and prosperity cannot be achieved without partnerships involving Governments, international organizations, the business community and civil society. In today's world, we depend on each other." Cited on the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific web page, <http://www.unescap.org/> A good example of the close relation of transnational corporations and the United Nations civil society campaign is The Global Compact established in early 1999 to include "corporate citizens" in the ideological project of informal global governance. See <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/> My thanks to Prof. Ruri Ito for alerting me to these web resources.
  26. Francois Debrix, *Re-envisioning Peacekeeping: The United Nations and the Mobilization of Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 95. Unfortunately, he does not admit into his analysis the role that gender discourses play in the extension of United Nations ideology precisely through the discursive regime Debrix calls "disciplinary liberalism."
  27. See for instance *Women's Rights. Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Julie Peters and Andrea Wolper (London: Routledge, 1995).
  28. Zhang Naihua, "Searching for 'Authentic' NGOs: The NGO Discourse and Women's Organizations in China," (forthcoming, cited with permission of the author).
  29. See Barlow, "Teaching 'International Feminism' in a Global Frame," [タニ・E・バーロウ「地球規模の枠組みのなかで『国際的フェミニズム』を教える(上)」萩原弘子訳、『女性学研究』第9号(2001年3月): 30–56] ((下)は近刊予定)。
  30. Ibid., ESCAP web page.
  31. The terms of this discourse are contested, of course, particularly as the World Bank seeks to include in its discussions academics like myself. The recent Policy Research Report titled "Engendering Development: Enhancing Development Through Attention to Gender" solicited my participation along with a long list of others perceived to be "stakeholders." The discussion led to serious disputes over how "gender" should be defined. Several

contributors touched on the limitations posed by a purely juridical understanding of gender and the weakness of social constructivist notions of gender that are not mediated through poverty. See <http://www.worldbank.org/gender/prr/draft.html> for the resulting draft statement.

32. See *op. cit.*, “green blade,” p. 147.
33. Priti Ramamurthy, “Indexing alternatives: Feminist development studies and global political economy,” in *Feminist Theory* 1. 2 (2000): 239 – 256.
34. See Dr. Khandakar Qudrat-I Elahi, “Economic Development and Gender Equality: Engendering Two Development,” a letter to the [prr@lists.worldbank.org](mailto:prr@lists.worldbank.org) permission to cite by author.