

# **‘If most men are against us, can we call ourselves feminists?’<sup>1</sup>: young people’s views of feminism—east and west<sup>2</sup>**

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## **Introduction**

Based on a ten-nation study funded by the Australian Research Council, this paper suggests the value of studies which compare feminisms of the ‘east’ and ‘west’, and of the ways young people (in this case) respond to the discourses of gender equity and women’s development in their countries. I argue that there are clear gender differences in each sample, women in general being much more supportive of feminism than men,

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but also using different vocabularies or justifications for supporting the women's movement. In particular, I focus on the different use of notions of gender equality, gender difference and national development feminism in the different samples. While some gender differences are a feature of almost every national sample, it is less easy to divide the samples into 'west' and 'east', either in terms of their support for feminism or their justifications for supporting or opposing the women's movement. The results challenge a simple claim that western feminism favours the discourse of gender equality in its liberal variant and combative opposition to men in its radical variant, while Asian women's movements endorse gender difference and compatibility, or men and women working together, for example under the banner of national development feminism.

Following a discussion of Basu's criticism of three tendencies in cross-national studies, the paper summarises the results from my study before exploring the different meanings of terms such as 'equality', 'difference' and 'national development'. The paper concludes by suggesting that the 'transnational turn', going beyond western feminist discourses to question western feminist assumptions, suggests that the western feminist impasse between 'equality' and 'difference' is not such a strong feature in the vocabularies of young people in a number of the Asian samples in my study.

### **'International' feminisms?**

With the increasing privatization and corporatization of public life, it has become much harder to discern such a women's movement [vibrant, transnational] from the United States (although women's movements are thriving around the world) (Mohanty 2003, 221).

In *The Challenge of Local Feminisms*, Amrita Basu (1995, 1) suggested three 'tendencies' in the 'vast literature on women's movements'. The first is a bifurcation between scholars of the west and the east. Studies that focus on 'Western Europe and the United States and ignore women's movements in the postcolonial world' are contrasted with 'studies of women in the non-Western world' which 'tend to be preoccupied with the problem of development'. As a result, women's movements in India or China, for example, are rarely brought to bear on an analysis of women's

movements in say the USA or Germany, a comparison which can throw light on the specificities of each (an exception is Gelb 2003).

The second tendency 'is to characterize women's movements as products of modernization or development', their success thus due to approximating the features of western nations rather than developing ones. Despite Mohanty's (1991) trenchant critique of this presumption that women's emancipation is only available as nations progress down the development path, western triumphalism has re-emerged with a vengeance, famously captured in Francis Fukuyama's (1992) 'end of history' thesis. It is propounded by writers who assert a happy compatibility between capitalism, democracy and women's advancement. In *Rising Tide*, the political theorists Inglehart and Norris (2003) use cross-national data sets to claim that women's status is enhanced as countries move from agricultural, authoritarian religious-fundamentalist regimes to post-industrial, democratic, secular (or Christian) liberal regimes<sup>3</sup>. Recent titles by feminists are readily co-opted into the triumphalist rhetoric when they claim *The World Split Open* (Rosen 2000), or that there will be *No Turning Back* (Freedman 2002) from the *Tidal Wave* (Evans 2003) of women's equality. Indeed, Estelle Freedman (2002, 1-2) bluntly asserts, 'In short, the market economies and democratic systems that now dominate the world create both the need for feminism and the means to sustain it'.

The third tendency noted by Basu (1995, 1) is to assume 'a commonality in the forms of women's oppression and activism worldwide'. Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Global*<sup>4</sup> is the example chosen by Basu because of 'its seminal importance in reflecting and shaping the dominant approach to women's movements in the West in the 1980s.

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<sup>3</sup> The authors support their claim that women in the Third World remain 'undeveloped' by measuring women's status with ethnocentric indicators, such as involvement in paid work rather than involvement in the subsistence economy or control of land and its resources, or in terms of women's access to divorce rather than to inheritance rights. Inglehart and Norris use the stock-in-trade of economists measuring women's status, for example the United Nations' GDI (Gender Development Index) and GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure). Saskia Wieringa (1999, 25) argues for the need to go beyond measures of income, education and workforce participation to embrace women's access to human rights, for example in the incidence of gender-based violence; women's access to sexual and identity politics such as tolerance for transgender practices; and comparisons of how men and women use their time differently, particularly in relation to available leisure time (Wieringa 1999, 30,27,33-34).

<sup>4</sup> Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful*, published in 1970 and in print until 2001, was succeeded by *Sisterhood is Global*, published in 1984, still in print and 'still the only text that proclaims itself as the anthology of the international women's movement' (Mohanty 2003, 110).

Morgan eschews the development model for a focus on grassroots activism: ‘Women share a “common world view,” Morgan repeatedly asserts, as a result of “a common condition”’ (Basu 1995, 1,2). As Basu (1995, 3) puts it, Morgan’s ‘oppressed majority’ perspective combines a ‘magnitude of suffering’ ‘with the magnitude of women’, universalising women through the suffering they all share.

In comparing women’s movements in a number of countries from ‘east’ and ‘west’, my project seeks to avoid the various pitfalls identified by Basu. Particularism studies only one women’s movement and tends, thus, to treat it as utterly unique. Dualism assumes a distinction between west and ‘the rest’, studying only movements in one or other category. Universalism presumes all national movements are roughly the same (Ray and Korteweg 1999, 48<sup>5</sup>). My project responds to Sang’s (2003, 8-9) call for a ‘transnationalist turn’ (although she is speaking of gay and lesbian studies), in which western feminists look elsewhere for inspiration, particularly given that our own movements appear quiescent and as we ponder the shoals of gender equality/sameness and difference. Rather than imagining a one-way imperial flow in the discussions that constitute international feminism, cross-national studies allow the empire to strike back, encouraging western feminists to question the limitations of possessive individualism or of human rights discourse.

‘Post-feminist neo-liberalism’, as Rosi Braidotti (2005, 171) calls it, combines smug postfeminism with the arrogant ethnocentrism of US foreign policy. In this formulation, the United States is the overwhelmingly dominant force in so-called ‘international’ or ‘global’ feminism<sup>6</sup>, the hub from which feminism flows out along the spokes to the benighted women ground down on the rim<sup>7</sup>. ‘White supremacy’ assumes that ‘women

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<sup>5</sup> The authors note only four comparative studies that avoid these three problems, including Jayawardena’s (1986) significantly titled *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Freedman’s (2002) ‘international history’ of feminism is found largely in the first 87 pages, with the remaining 260 pages of text being very US focused. ‘Women in development’, the first international aid approach which took account of the needs of women, is described by Irene Tinker as, ‘we wanted to take the second wave [of feminism] to the rest of the world’ (in Ramamurthy 2000, 243).

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Debra Liebowitz, Drew University, USA, for this image, which she uses in her teaching to model her students’ understanding of ‘international feminism’. The women on the rim are ground down by internal oppression, but never oppressed by US foreign policy or US economic relations (comment made at the National Women’s Studies Association Conference, held from 13 to 17 University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, 13-17 June).

who are non-Western, non-Christian, mostly not white and alien to the Enlightenment tradition' 'need to be targeted for special emancipatory social actions or even more belligerent forms of enforced "liberation"'. Post September 11, so-called rights and democracy are delivered abroad at gunpoint by the only remaining world superpower. American foreign policy combines 'historical amnesia', forgetting 'the sense of common connection to other women', with profound ethnocentrism (Braidotti 2005, 171).

In fact, it could be claimed that women's movement activism is more vibrant in many Asian nations than it is in the west, where even feminists now worry about what the media has claimed for a long time: that feminism is 'dead' (Pozner 2003, 31). In Australia, Anne Summers (2003, 6-7) deplores the fact that 'we have stopped even having the national conversation about women's entitlements and women's rights'. 'We' refers both to the government and a once robust women's movement now tamed by consumerism and liberal individualism into commodity feminism, do-it-yourself feminism and self-help feminism (see also Segal 1999, 1 for Britain and Epstein 2001 for the USA). In the Anglophone west, women are encouraged to express their 'equality' and 'liberation' through capitalist forms, such as consumer spending (Skeggs 1995, 478; Wolf 1993, 29; Bail 1996).

By contrast, Asian legislatures have established equal opportunities laws and commissions (e.g. Ng and Ng 2002, 7 for Hong Kong; Gelb 2003 for Japan) and introduced legislation to prevent domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape (the first such example in an Asian country being Malaysia in 1994 (Foley 2003, 142-5). Korea has the goal of being number thirty in the world in the UN's women's human rights index by 2008<sup>8</sup>. By contrast with the abhorrence of quota systems among western nations, in India 30 per cent quotas for women in local government bring one million women into elected seats with every nation-wide election (Kapadia 2002, 16). In Indonesia, the women's movement has burgeoned into a proliferation of NGOs taking a

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<sup>8</sup> Proudly announced by the President's wife, Kwon Yang-Suk, First Lady of Republic of Korea and conference patron, at the 9th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women, Asian Center for Women's Studies, Ewha Womans University, Seoul, 19-24 June 2005.

prominent role in protest and democratic transformation (Suryochondro 2000, 232,236). While women's studies departments in Anglophone universities close down or morph into cultural or gender studies, women's studies programs are 'one of the fastest developing academic fields in Asia', including an international project to strengthen women's studies across the region instituted at Ewha Women's University (Kim and Kang 2001, 113).

On the other hand, paeans to Asian women's emancipation should not be overdrawn, a 'backlash' against women's advancement being noted in India, Japan, Vietnam and China. In Japan, members of the dominant Liberal Democratic Party have assumed the task of dismantling gender equality legislation, and, along with others, call to replace Article 24 of the Constitution concerning gender equality with a clause asserting the importance of the family as the smallest unit of society (Hardacre 2005). As in the US, in India the dissatisfaction caused by widening income inequalities is channelled into religious fundamentalism, a resurgence of community politics and communitarian violence (Chaudhuri 2000, 276; Ganguly-Scrase 2000, 99) in which both Hindu and Muslim women participate (Kapadia 2002, 11,13). In 2003, the government proposed to rename women's studies centres as 'centres for women and family studies', believing them to be just another form of outreach rather than having a role in theory development and the critical evaluation of programs (John 2005, 58). In Korea, the Employment Equity Promotion Program to expand equal employment legislation into the private sector does not cover non-standard workers, those who are part-time, migrant and so on. This means that middle-class Korean women remain the major beneficiaries of feminism (Lee 2005). In China and Vietnam, economic reform has produced a steady decline in women's participation at all political and managerial levels, as well as growing female unemployment, wage disparity and discrimination against women in hiring and promotion. The Chinese Government urges women to 'return home' to their nurturing functions, which eases the pressures of unemployment as state enterprises collapse in the face of global competition (Zhang 2005 for China; see Pettus 2003, 127,129 for Vietnam).

Some Asian women also assert a complacent postfeminism, a claim that gender equality has been achieved and feminism is no longer needed. Middle-class Singaporean and Hong Kong women claim they are more liberated than their western sisters, and so do not require gender equality machinery (Lee 2003b, 93; Owen 2002, 88<sup>9</sup>). In 2002, the Indian University Grants Commission took a postfeminist stance when it proposed the establishment of women's studies centres in rural areas because 'urban gender equality has already been ensured' (in John 2005, 58). This is akin to the claim made by Australian Prime Minister, John Howard: 'we are in the post-feminist stage of the debate...of course women are as good as men' (Summers 2003, 21). Meanwhile his government has gutted the gender-equity machinery painstakingly erected by femocrats over thirty years (see Bulbeck 2005).

Adding weight to 'western triumphalist' claims concerning the 'end of history', statistics indicate many Asian women's improved education, increased engagement in paid employment, marriage delay (and even refusal: e.g. Williams 1998, 16 for Singapore, Hong Kong and Jakarta; Tantiwiranond and Ranjan 1996, 96 for Bangkok), more self-arranged marriages and neolocal nuclear residency (e.g. Brasted 2000, 200 for a number of Asian countries; Tantiwiranond and Ranjan, 1996, 96 for Thailand; Jones 2002, 226-227 for Indonesia). Such statistical changes are expressed in breathless discussions of modernisation in Asia. Louise Williams, the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Asia correspondent, claims of the Asian countries discussed in her book: 'what they all have in common is inevitable, far-reaching social change' (Williams 1998, 19), a shift in one generation to another from subsistence rice farmers to industrial workers, from feudal politicians to corporate business managers; and for women, access to contraception and paid work, as well as the outlawing of traditional practices such as polygamy (14). Indeed, there is growing academic interest in the 'new' middle classes of Asia, bustling aside the western imaginary's previous focus on village women as the

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<sup>9</sup> Eliza Lee (2003a, 7,16) suggests that 'economic individualism' has emerged with capitalist development in Hong Kong, a combination of 'utilitarian familism' and ongoing patriarchy. The state's role is primarily the material advancement of individuals and families while women continue to endorse the essential importance of marriage and motherhood. The latter role is supported by domestic help in middle-class families, allowing professional women to pursue their careers unencumbered (Lee 2003b, 94-95). On this point, Christina Ho (2005) found that Chinese and Hong Kong female migrants to Australia initially criticised Australia's 'conservative' gender norms, but then came to embrace them, saying that not staying home to care for one's children was unnatural.

embodiment of religious worth and tradition and the ‘electric girls’ of the free trade zones (e.g. see collections edited by Sen and Stivens 1998 and Munshi 2001). Like their ‘can-do’ sisters in the west (Harris 2004), the new urban female middle class of Asia are professional workers and avid consumers of household white-goods and beauty products (Stivens 1998, 92-3 for Malaysia; Sen 1998, 47,35-6 for Indonesia).

On the other hand, in most Asian countries most women are still villagers (e.g. Stivens 1998, 96 for Malaysia; Hooper 1998, 168 for China; Cook 1998, 259 for Thailand). Furthermore, ‘the dominant national discourses of “development”, “globalisation”, and “modernization”’ (Roces and Edwards 2000, 2) are not always realised in the same mode as in the west, Vervoorn noting ‘unprecedented rates of industrialization and economic growth, demographic transition, multilateral treaties and regional cooperation, *and a shared resistance to Western dominance*’ (Vervoorn 2003, 4, italics mine). Commentators thus speak of ‘other modernities’ (Rofel 1999), ‘flexible citizenship’ (Ong 1999, 1-3,6), ‘flexibility of identity’ (Kelsky 2001, 12) and ‘divergent modernities’ (Stivens in Roces and Edwards 2000, 1).

My research explores how young people in different nations understand their own particular ‘other modernities’. I aim to present a more complex picture than is painted when the focus is on only one nation’s feminism, or only one ‘type’ of women’s movement (so-called ‘developed’ or ‘developing’) or assumes an undifferentiated ‘global feminism’. Even so, my focus on ‘national’ women’s movements contains its own dangers. Women’s movements spill beyond national borders, and have done so since the middle of the nineteenth century (Desai 2002, 25). With the advent of the United Nations and the retreat of national governments from humanitarian commitments, International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs) have grown in prominence, contributing to the ‘transnational feminist counter-public’ (Mackie 2001, 189; see also Roces and Edwards 2000, 7). Some of these border crossings occur among my respondents, revealing that there are no unified national discourses in relation to feminism and the women’s movement.



**Methods and summary of results**

The findings derive from a survey of largely young middle-class urban dwellers in ten countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Due to the funding constraints imposed by the Australian Research Council grant, eight of the national samples are tiny (see Table 1 below). In each country I secured a local researcher who, when necessary, translated the survey instrument, a questionnaire, into the local language and translated the comments back into English for me (in the Anglophone samples, a handful of Japanese respondents, the Indian university and one Delhi and the Mumbai high school class, respondents completed their questionnaires in English).

I asked local researchers to administer the questionnaire during a school or university class set-aside for this purpose, with a researcher on hand to answer questions. Besides an opening section on identity (completing 'I am ...' ten times) and a concluding section on socio-economic data, there were two major sections, one on gender issues and one on the women's movement. Gender issues covered role reversal, sharing housework, abortion rights, same sex sexual relations, nudity/pornography, gender equality (most of these questions were adapted from Pilcher 1998). The section on the women's movement, which is the subject of analysis in this article, sought respondents' self-identification as feminists, their image of feminists and what they felt the women's movement had achieved for women and men in their country (adapted from the Time-CNN survey reported in Bellafante 1998). Respondents were asked to express a level of agreement with each item on a four point scale: 'strongly agree', 'agree more than disagree', 'disagree more than agree', and 'strongly disagree', with a fifth option of 'no opinion/don't know', and to make any comments they wished. Clearly the questionnaire was informed by western understandings of feminism and women's issues, while nuances were lost in translation. Even so, this is a rare cross-national study of young people's attitudes to the women's movement.

**Table 1: Sources of young respondents at school or university by gender (numbers in brackets)**

Source	Female	Male	High school	University	Per cent of total
Australia	65% (511)	35% (279)	84% (664)	16% (127)	46.4% (791)
#(South Australia)	66% (295)	34% (149)	80% (357)	19% (85)	26.2% (444)
(Western Australia)	57% (145)	43% (111)	84% (216)	16% (41)	15.0% (256)
(New South Wales)	79% (71)	21% (19)	99% (91)	1% (1)	5.3% (91)
USA	63% (59)	37% (33)	10% (9)	90% (86)	5.5% (95)
USA (Portland)	66% (31)	34% (16)	18% (9)	81% (39)	2.8% (48)
(Santa Monica)	62% (28)	38% (17)	0% (0)	100% (47)	2.7% (47)
Canada (Winnipeg)	50% (21)	50% (22)	49% (21)	51% (22)	2.5% (43)
India	61% (79)	39% (50)	60% (79)	40% (52)	7.6% (131)
(Mumbai)	72% (44)	28% (17)	48% (30)	52% (32)	3.6% (62)
(New Delhi)	52% (35)	48% (33)	71% (49)	29% (20)	4.0% (69)
Vietnam (Hanoi)	58% (33)	42% (24)	15% (9)	85% (51)	3.4% (60)
Rep. of Korea (Seoul)	52% (31)	48% (29)	50% (30)	50% (30)	3.5% (60)
China (Beijing)	51% (25)	49% (24)	49% (24)	51% (25)	2.9% (49)
#Thailand	50% (61)	50% (61)	49% (40)	51% (42)	7.2% (123)
(Bangkok)	50% (30)	50% (30)	50% (20)	50% (20)	3.5% (60)
(Chiang Mai)	50% (31)	50% (31)	48% (20)	52% (22)	3.7% (63)
Indonesia (Yogyakarta)	66% (37)	34% (19)	49% (29)	51% (30)	3.3% (59)
Japan (Tokyo)	66% (197)	34% (100)	27% (138)	73% (163)	17.5% (301)
TOTAL	62% (1055)	38% (641)	61% (1043)	37% (628)	100% (1711)

Notes: Due to some respondents failing to indicate their sex, gender and source sub-totals are not always the same and gender sub-totals do not sum to total respondents.

# 4 Australian, 20 (Bangkok) and 21 (Chiang Mai) vocational student respondents not shown in the table.

The results discussed in this paper relate to five statements, the first three concerning feminism and the latter two the women's movement:

1. Feminism today is relevant to me personally.
2. Feminists share my values
3. I would call myself a feminist
4. The women's movement has achieved good things for women of my country.
5. The women's movement has achieved good things for men of my country.

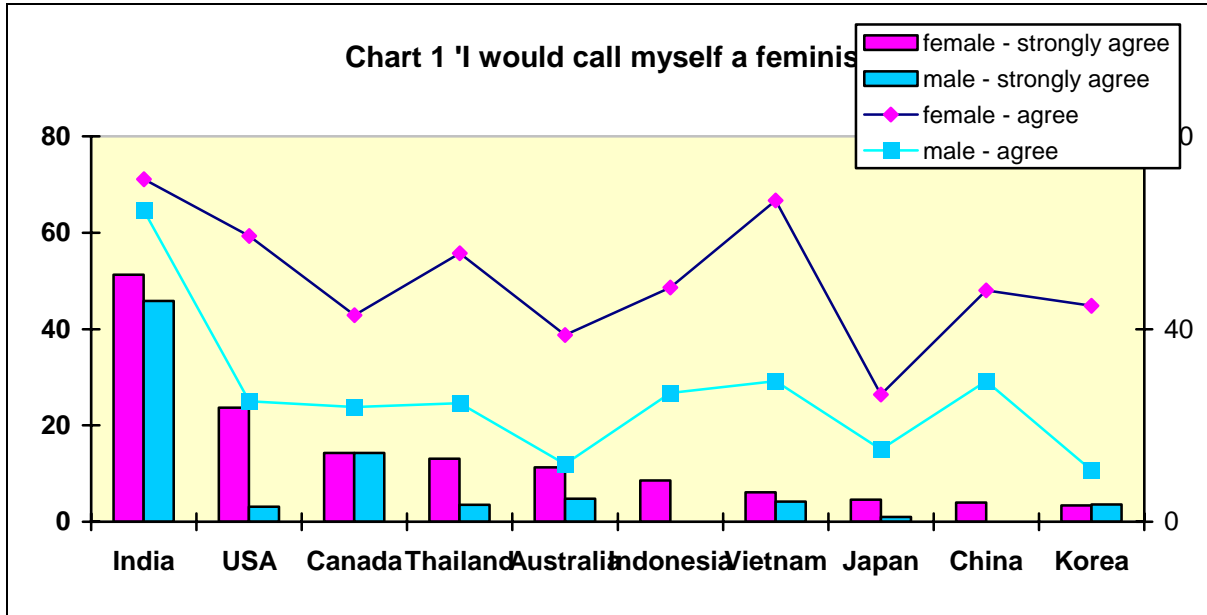
I first discuss attachment to feminism (using question 3 above as representative of the general pattern) and the women's movement (using question 4 above as representative of the general pattern) across the samples, before moving on to a comparison of the 'vocabularies' or reasons offered for approving or disapproving of feminism.

*Attachment to feminism and the women's movement*

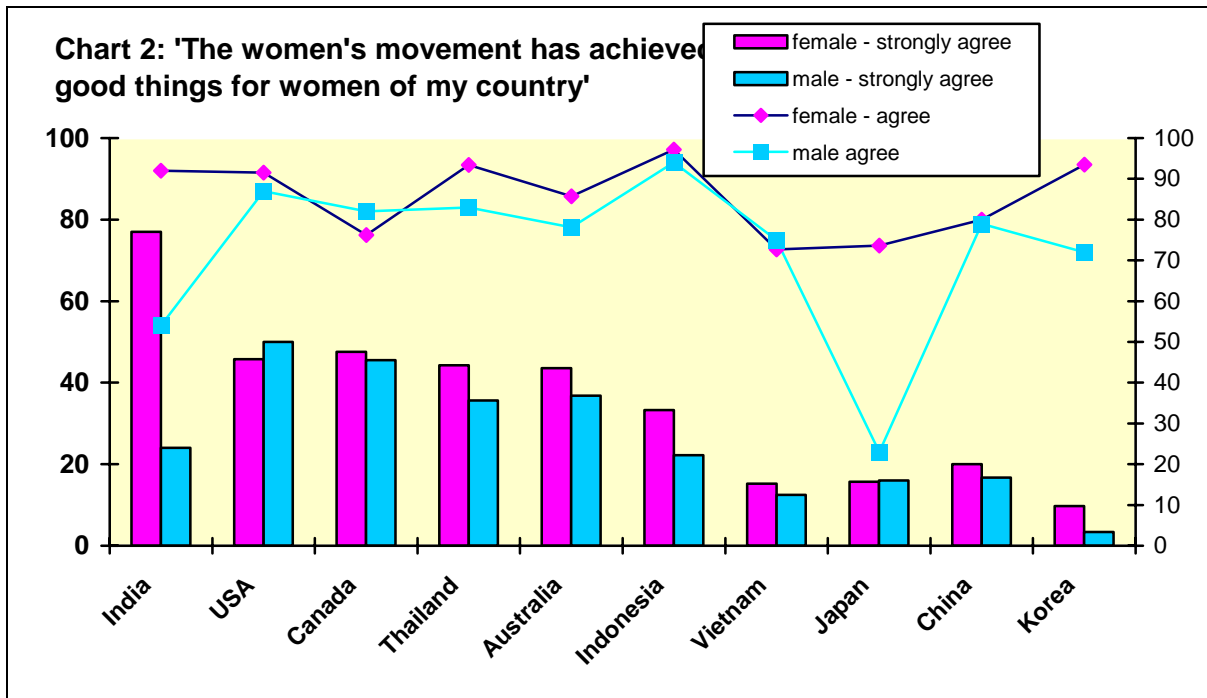
Results for question 3 and question 5 are shown in Charts 1 and 2 below. Some of the results are unsurprising, for example females' greater willingness to self-identify as a feminist and greater support for the women's movement by contrast with males (although note that gender difference in support for the women's movement is lower than in self-defining as a feminist). On the other hand, the level of support may come as a surprise to some commentators: at the agree level (which sums 'agree strongly' and 'agree more than disagree'), more than 40 per cent of females in every sample, apart from the Japanese, self-define as feminists. In most samples, around 80 per cent or more agree that the women's movement has achieved good things for women of their country (Chart 2). Again, it is no surprise that 'feminism' appears to be a more negative concept than 'women's movement', although some Australian respondents' comments suggest that this result is partly due to the safe location of the achievements of the women's movement's—and therefore of the need for feminism—in the past:

[N]o, I wouldn't call myself a Feminist, I mean I think that we (women) have come a long way since the early 1900s and before. I am quite happy with where women stand now (female, high school student, Adelaide).

More surprising is the lack of evidence to suggest that 'feminism' is a western-inflected concept and therefore rejected by the women of Asia. Thus the percentage of young people who agree strongly with the statement 'I would call myself a feminist' is greatest for the Indian sample (about half). Vietnamese and Thai females are more likely to self-define as feminist than are the Canadian and Australian samples (at the agree level). The Japanese sample is the least supportive of feminism, the Japanese males also rejecting the value of the women's movement for Japanese women.



Note for Chart 1: The bar columns indicate the percentage of respondents who agree strongly with the statement 'I would call myself a feminist'. The lines indicate the percentage of respondents who agree with the statement ('agree strongly' plus 'agree more than disagree').



Note for Chart 2: The bar columns indicate the percentage of respondents who agree strongly with the statement 'I would call myself a feminist'. The lines indicate the percentage of respondents who agree with the statement ('agree strongly' plus 'agree more than disagree').

*Gender vocabularies in supporting or rejecting feminism*

As noted above, there was space for respondents to make comments in relation to each statement. I classified these in terms of ‘gender vocabularies’ (adapted from Pilcher 1998, 129-130) or the discourses by which young people understand gender issues. Five gender vocabularies were significant for the feminism and women’s movement questions (see Chart 3 below): feminist, equality/fairness, rights, development/progress and traditionalist. These are ordered in Chart 3 from most to least supportive of feminism or the women’s movement.

**Chart 3: Gender vocabularies used to discuss feminism and the women’s movement**

Feminist	Women have come a long way, better than it was, ‘gradual’ change; approves the gains of the women’s movement for men or women; identifies feminist issues such as childcare support, domestic violence, rigid masculinities; uses terms developed by feminism such as ‘oppression’, ‘harassment’, ‘discrimination’; identifies the needs of women as collective group
Equality, fairness	Supports equality between the genders, or equal opportunities, using terms such as equality or fairness
Rights	Women’s (and men’s) rights or choice, e.g. to vote, work, an education
Development, progress	Women’s movement contributes to national development or social progress; gender equality is a mark of modern society (sometimes used to oppose a change in gender relations)
obligation, responsibilities to others,	A duty to protect, support others, e.g. men to support family, parents their children; obligations of citizens to their country (sometimes used to assert gendered division of roles in which women are subordinated)
Traditionalist	Men should be in dominant, have superior position in society; men and women have different roles or positions in society, because of religion, biology or psychology; feminism is too radical, has gone too far; hostility or indifference to feminism

Charts 4 to 6 below show the use of gender vocabularies in comments made in response to all five questions itemised above. In relation to the deployment of gender vocabularies, again there is no clear-cut dualism between western and Asian discourses. Chart 4 reveals that all the female samples primarily used a feminist vocabulary to endorse the women’s movement: hence a cluster of ♀s, representing comments in relation to the two women’s movement questions (questions 4 and 5) in the first column (representing the use of the feminist vocabulary). One female sample only, the US, also used the feminist vocabulary to endorse feminism (♀ in the first column). The males were more evenly split, four indicating support for the women’s movement via a feminist vocabulary (♀s in the second column for the USA, Korean, Vietnamese and

Chinese samples) and four indicating their opposition to the women’s movement via a traditionalist vocabulary (⊖s in the last column for the Canadian, Australian, Japanese and Thai samples). The Canadian males (who were in many ways more ‘pro-feminist’ than the Canadian females—e.g. see the agree result in Chart 2) were the only male group to use a feminist vocabulary to endorse feminism. Much more commonly, both females and males used a traditionalist vocabulary to oppose feminism (this can be seen by the clustering of ♀s in the last two columns).

**Chart 4: Major deployment of gender vocabularies in relation to feminism and the women’s movement by gender**

	feminist		Equality/ rights		National development		Duty/oblign t		traditionalis t	
	Females	Males	Fem	Males	Females	Males	Fem	Males	Fem	Male s
<b>USA</b>	⊖ ♀	⊖								♀
<b>Canada</b>	⊖	♀							♀	⊖
<b>Australia</b>	⊖								♀	⊖ ♀
<b>Japan</b>	⊖								♀	⊖ ♀
<b>Korea</b>	⊖	⊖							♀	♀
<b>Thailand</b>	⊖		♀							⊖ ♀
<b>Vietnam</b>	⊖	⊖	♀					♀		
<b>China</b>	⊖	⊖							♀	♀
<b>India</b>	⊖		♀	♀ (rights)		⊖				
<b>Indonesia</b>	⊖		♀	♀		⊖				

Legend ♀ denotes the major vocabulary used by sub-sample to comment on answers to feminist questions (questions 1-3 above)

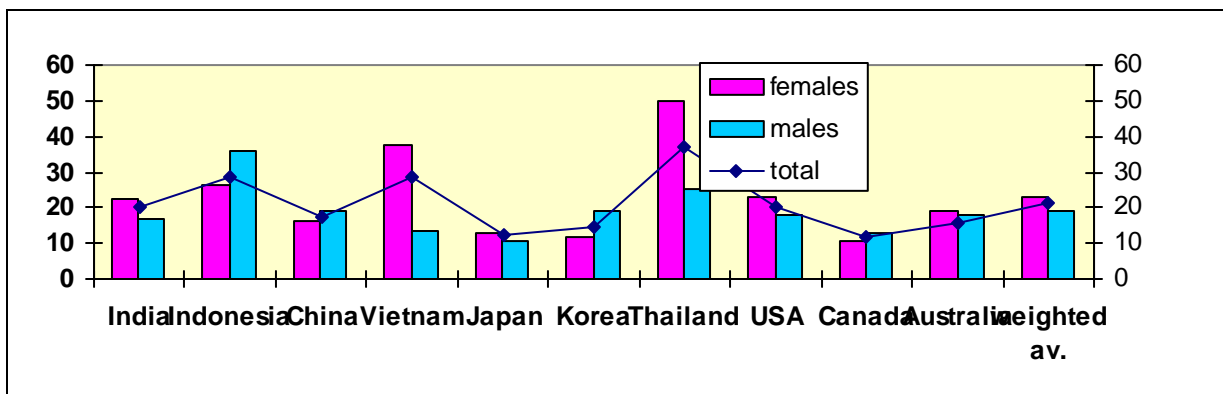
⊖ denotes the major vocabulary used by the sub-sample to comment on answers to women’s movement questions (questions 4 and 5 above)

These patterns express the fact that about half the male samples rejected the women’s movement AND feminism, using a traditionalist vocabulary. Half the female samples also rejected feminism (but not the women’s movement): as too radical, going too far in reverse discrimination against men and so on. Male respondents in particular described radical ‘femi-nazis’ as akin to ‘racists’. They rejected feminists as ‘pathetic’,

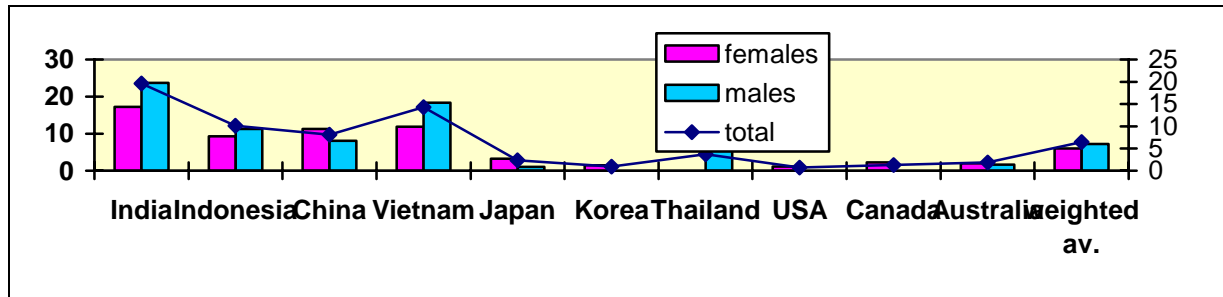
‘ridiculous’, ‘angry’, ‘bra-burning’, ‘militant’, ‘man-hating’, ‘extremist bitches’, ‘a scourge on society’. By contrast, all female samples and half the male samples endorsed the women’s movement rather than rejecting it, the surprising point being that they did so with the feminist vocabulary. Respondents usually approved the gains made by feminism, asserting that women had ‘come a long way’, and some respondents suggested that there was still much ground to cover.

As opposed to commentators who claim that ‘equality’ and ‘rights’ are ‘western’ inventions imposed on Asian countries, Chart 4 suggests that the Thai, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Indian female samples were most likely to use the equality vocabulary to discuss feminism, the Indonesian males also using this vocabulary and the Indian males focusing on the rights vocabulary. Indeed, the Thai and Vietnamese female samples were the most enthusiastic in their use of the equality vocabulary, as shown in Chart 5. Chart 4 reveals that the Indian and Indonesian males preferred the national development vocabulary to endorse the women’s movement. This is also shown in Chart 6, which shows that the national development vocabulary is most often deployed by the Indian, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Chinese samples. Furthermore, and apart from the Chinese sample, males find the national development vocabulary more comfortable than the female respondents.

**Chart 5: Equality vocabulary** (Percentage of respondents by sex and national sample using this vocabulary)



**Chart 6: National Development Vocabulary** (Percentage of respondents by sex and national sample using this vocabulary)



Thus the charts reveal interesting gender differences in the use of vocabularies, the females favouring the feminist over the traditionalist vocabulary, and the equality over the national development vocabulary. The next section explores why this might be so, via a more detailed discussion of respondents' comments. This section also explores the apparently different understanding of 'equality' and 'difference' among respondents in the different samples, suggesting one way in which western feminists and women can take a 'transnational turn', interrogate our own understandings of 'equality' (sameness) and difference (which we often take to mean inferiority).

### Vocabularies of gender activism

[Feminism is] relevant to all humans whether they know it or not (female, high school student, Portland)

I am a strong believer of 'Girl Power' (female, high school student, Sydney)

men in general are chauvinistic pigs and men in India all the more worse and since India is a male dominated society/culture women have equal opportunities and rights only on paper (female, university student, Mumbai)

National development vocabularies link the advancement of women to the progress of the nation, due to the historical involvement of women in anti-colonial struggles, as in India and Indonesia, and/or women's engagement in revolutionary struggles to introduce communism, as in Vietnam and China. Thus Nguyen Thi Dinh (1984, 729), president of the Vietnam Women's Union, in her contribution to Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Global*, states 'The history of Vietnamese women is closely linked with



the thousand-year history of the construction and defence of the country'. Charts 4 and 6 suggest that national development feminism incorporates men into feminist goals, at least rhetorically. Male, and fewer female, respondents echoed their governments' claims concerning women's contributions to liberation or economic development:

In practice, Vietnamese women are good in any invasion, wars, and, at the moment, in the renovation (male, university student, Hanoi)

Feminists help Indonesia develop/progress (male, school student, Yogyakarta).

The women's movement has enhanced the cohesion among Chinese women, which is significant to the rise and decline of the nation (male, high school student, Beijing).

A country can only progress when both the forces work together' (female, school student, Mumbai).

As this last comment suggests, and a particular feature of the Indian respondents, linked to a commitment to national development feminism is a sense that women and men can and should work together to achieve their goals, that this is indeed the definition of feminists:

Willing to help all women to give them their rights (male, school student, Mumbai)

If I had made my contribution then the women in my village would have been in a much better social position (male, high school student, Delhi)

Human beings are not omnipotent, so there is always something beyond your reach. Don't exert yourself too much. Why not ask a man to do the things that you can't do (female, university student, Beijing)

If most men are against us, can we call ourselves feminists? (female, school student, Beijing)

If national development feminism suggests that men should contribute to the improvement of women's status, why was this vocabulary favoured more by men than women (as revealed in Chart 6)? Perhaps, like Titi Sumbung (1984, 322), in her contribution to *Sisterhood is Global* on Indonesia, women realise that the 'modernization process' has not distributed the rewards of development equally and attitudes need to be changed so women become 'equal partners with their menfolk'.

Furthermore, expressions of gender compatibility were also found among respondents in the Anglophone samples, particularly an argument that the women's movement was good for men as it increased their understanding of women's experiences and needs:

It has made them be more open-minded and they have now lost a few of their stereotypes (female, vocational student, Adelaide).

Elaborating on the notion of working together, perhaps, a number of the Japanese, Indonesian and Thai respondents asserted that the genders could be both equal and different at the same time, an almost impossible construction for western feminists to get our heads around:

The man has to take care of the woman because he is a gentleman (but it doesn't have to do with women being equal to men) (male, Chiang Mai, university student, male).

Women are weak—though they have equal rights (male, Chiang Mai, vocational college student)

While these male respondents claim women's weakness, females more often refer to male weakness:

Men know about women's power because women are not weak and take care of them (female, university student, Chiang Mai).

The presumed strength of Thai women, derived from their economic independence, was also claimed by Mallica Vajrathon (1984, 672) in her contribution to Morgan's *Sisterhood is Global*. Women talk about men 'as though they were all fragile beings, behaving like children, needing to be looked after and cared for'. However, unlike the respondent just quoted, Vajrathon (1984, 573,674) is aware that women's requirement to 'be pleasing' imposes a double workload and makes Thai women unwilling 'to engage in confrontation with the male establishment and structure'.

Japanese and Indonesian respondents also readily combined equality and difference:

'Same value' means different treatment between men and women. Considering this difference, society treats women as 'equal' to men (female, high school student, Tokyo)

God created men and women as equal. They may have different missions but none the less they are equal (female, high school student, Yogyakarta).

As western feminists have elaborated at length, difference is often translated into inferiority. This is hinted at by the two Japanese female respondents who condemned feminists who make ‘ridiculous statements’ about equality (female, university student, Tokyo) or ‘simply cry for equality’ when ‘it is natural that men and women are different’ (female, high school student, Tokyo). Little wonder, then, that one respondent suggested:

I feel that the idea of treating women as inferior to men still remains deeply rooted in Japanese society (female, university student, Tokyo).

Anglophone respondents, by contrast, have difficulty bringing equality and difference into the same equation. Western feminists have thus tended to quit the field for essentialists who view the sexes as preformed categories, whether the differences are determined biologically, socially or psychologically (Connell 2000, 18). Instead of aligning equality and difference, Anglophone feminists note the contradiction between wanting to be like the boys (in terms of equal pay) but still wanting to be liked by the boys (in personal relations), by contrasting feminism and femininity. However, such combinations appeared less contradictory to some of my Anglophone respondents:

I get by using my femininity to my advantage but I like that this can't hurt my chances of doing whatever I choose (female, university student, Santa Monica).

I think awareness of women's talents and capabilities is a good thing but not at the expense of losing being feminine ... where are the manly men? Good they are more sensitive, but not at the expense of losing their masculinity (female, university student, Winnipeg).

Similarly, several young Indian women, akin to Ananya Jahanara Kabir's (2005) identification of the artist Nilima Sheik as a ‘feminine feminist’, described themselves as ‘a female who is a feminist’, and combined this with being a respectful ‘daughter of my parent’, ‘a good dancer’ or a desire to become an ‘air hostess’, seeing no contradiction in these identities. An Indonesian respondent described herself as:

A tomboy, more comfortable with male friends than female friends, ... in favour of equal rights, against women's exploitation, against male violence, feminine (female, university student, Yogyakarta).

Other Indonesian respondents claimed that women must be ‘assertive’ and ‘wise’ but also ‘nonjudgemental’, ‘patient’, ‘gentle’ and ‘accommodating to society’.

A Japanese female averred:

I insist on a woman's rights but not everything should be equal with men. I want to enjoy dressing up. I think a brassiere is necessary and pretty. Extreme feminists give up the pleasures of women (female, high school student, Tokyo).

It is tempting to interpret comments concerning gender complementarity—each 'taking care' of the other—as the naïve statements of those who do not really understand equality as a legal or formal concept. In the west, difference discourses are often uncomfortably resonant with conservative religious discourses. Furthermore, the lower participation rates of women in management in Japan and the persistence of domestic violence in Asian countries give us pause. Soon Chan Park's (1984) justification for women's heroic subservience to the goal of national emancipation in Korea contrasts starkly with Green's (1984, 706) US contribution to *Sisterhood is Global*, calling for the nation to make good to US women its promise of 'a country founded on principles of equality, democratic freedom, and respect for diversity of belief and action'.

The Australian and other Anglophone respondents rarely phrased the benefits of the women's movement in terms of national development or progress. Such has rarely been the rhetoric offered by feminists themselves, while the individualistic nature of our identity constructions and citizenship engagements preclude such discourses. As one Australian respondent put it, 'if you want some thing bad enough you can achieve any thing you want' (female, high school student, Sydney). Among the Australian comments which saw the women's movements as of national benefit were those who mentioned 'good for business' which will 'make a difference in the world/Australia', a rhetoric deployed by femocrats to introduce Australia's affirmative action legislation (see Braithwaite 1998). Others were less specific concerning just how the women's movement 'made us the country we are today' (e.g. female, Catholic girls school, Adelaide), or the US respondent who simply wrote 'God bless the USA' as her comment on the women's movement.

Of course, western nations have their own versions of national development, with feminists implicated in racialised nationalism in settler colonies such as Australia, the USA and Canada, but we don't call it national development feminism. This means that

most of the time feminism is seen as more combative in relation to the state than in countries with an official women's movement (e.g. see Vickers 2006). However, where Morgan's 1984 Anglophone contributors rejected their patriarchal, militaristic and racist states<sup>10</sup>, such trenchant radicalism has been muted by the rise of neo-liberalism. As Ueno Chizuko (2004) argues, in her comparison of US integrationist and Japanese segregationist feminists, US feminists applaud the equal participation of women in the United States army (the main mechanism by which disadvantaged people can secure public service jobs and entitlements—as recruits), while Japanese feminists maintain a segregationist position, both in terms of front-line fighting and hard-line equality in the workforce. US feminist organization NOW (National Organisation of Women) argued that women be included in the military fighting in Vietnam (Ueno 2004, 167) and on the front during the 1991 Iraq war. The world has witnessed white women participating in the humiliation of prisoners of war at Abu-Graib prison in Iraq (Enloe 2005). One US respondent echoed this position:

I feel when it comes to equal job opportunity women are more or less treated equally but as seen in the recent war on Iraq, men more or less dominated the scene. Why aren't women out there on the front line? In that aspect, women aren't treated equally (female, university student, Portland).

## Conclusion

Women are treated terribly in many Muslim countries (male, high school student, Adelaide).

There are still ethnic groups which are not allowing young or older females the right of freedom ...[the women's movement] helps those whose families are culturally still against women's rights (female, high school student, Sydney).

Feminism is unique to 'western cultures' (female, vocational student, Adelaide).

As noted above, Jill Vickers (2002, 248) suggests that western feminist discussion of national development feminism often assumes that national development feminists are 'co-opted' while western feminisms are not influenced by wider national programs and ideologies. Feminist nationalism is something 'they' have, while western feminisms are seen as anti-capitalist and therefore anti-state. Vickers finds otherwise in her cross-national comparative study of the sort that Basu recommends, a study which compares

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<sup>10</sup> See Green's (1984, 711) critique of 'militarism, pacifism, the nuclear-arms race, and Western and multinational corporate imperialism', and, for Australia, Dowse and Giles' (1984, 66,67) condemnation of the militaristic 'patriarchal state' and its 'racism and sexism that forged Australian patriotism'.

so called 'developed' and 'developing' nations, but does not find them all the same, nor does Vickers suggest that 'developing' nations' feminism is a more primitive version of the 'developed' nations' achievements in gender equality. Vickers concludes that most feminists in the dominant majorities in western nations also practised 'national development feminism', looked to 'their' nation-state for 'rights, welfare programmes, prosperity and security' (Vickers 2006, 89). In return for white women's early incorporation into White Australia as citizen mothers, they were expected to produce babies for the new nation and exercise a civilising influence on Indigenous women and Asian-background women, women who were denied the same citizenship rights, such as suffrage and maternity allowances, or even being allowed to keep their children. Similarly, white Anglophone women in Canada between 1880 and 1920 were exhorted to contribute to the task of assimilating immigrants, Francophones and First Nations people (Vickers 2006, 98). The comments that introduce this section reflect the implication of the Australian women's movement in Australian nation-building, easily asserting the advanced status of Anglo-Australian women by comparison with benighted 'others', thus mobilising Braidotti's 'post-feminist neo-liberalism'.

However, Vickers (2006:98-101) *does* suggest that difference-based feminisms fit more snugly with most nation-building projects, whether these be white Anglophone women in Canada or *feministas* in the Philippines (who resisted two colonial regimes, the Japanese occupation and an internal dictatorship). Difference feminisms express the value of communalism and focus on women's socially different but equally valued gender roles, primarily as sustainers of social solidarity through family, kin, community and nation. This is echoed in the strongest support for feminism among my Indian sample, linked to a nationalist development vocabulary with a particular focus on men and women working together. By contrast, modernist or equality feminism is often more combative. In its focus on individual rights for women, it can reject the family as an oppressive institution or put women at odds with men (Vickers 2006:101). Within this framework it is harder to align feminist and nationalist goals, although it can be done, as the femocrat experience in Australia and Canada, and to a lesser extent the USA, reveals. In the 1970s and the 1980s, national progress was associated with a better deal for women and a more inclusive state, expressed also in a formalised commitment to

multiculturalism. Indeed, two Australian respondents deployed the femocrats' national development rhetoric in noting that affirmative action legislation was good for business. However, more commonly, the combative nature of equality feminism was rejected in the predominant use of the traditionalist vocabulary by young Australian and US men, who saw feminists as too 'aggressive' and 'anti-male'. However, the pro-feminist Canadian male sample suggests that western liberal feminism can be 'sold' to men in the west.

While national development vocabularies encourage the participation and support of men in a way that the more assertive western feminist vocabularies do not, national development or official feminism limits men's and women's participation to nationally prescribed activities, for example excluding aspects of bodily autonomy such as the freedom to express different sexualities or choose among the complete range of reproductive strategies. In showing less enthusiasm for this vocabulary, it appears that the young Asian women in my research perceived the potential for vocabularies of duty to be turned against them, to *require* their self-sacrificing engagement in revolution and economic growth, often without men's reciprocal commitment to family labour.

The 'transnational turn' offered in this paper, not only challenges western respondents' belief in their greater advancement towards gender equity, but also suggests that individualization framed around consumerism has its limits for women's freedom and opportunities. This is revealed in the translation of western feminisms into commodity feminism, or in NOW's demand for an equal right to kill other women and men. The celebration of gender difference in Japan, Korea and Thailand highlights the ways in which western feminism has been straitjacketed by a version of liberal feminism, allowing women either to be like men and demand equal treatment or to be different from men and condemned to inferiority. Would a different set of possibilities open up if western feminists, like some of the Asian respondents quoted above, had a vocabulary that enabled us to demand difference at the same time as we asserted equality, proclaiming an equal worth that did not collapse into subordination even as we pursue different, possibly even gender-differentiated, projects?

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