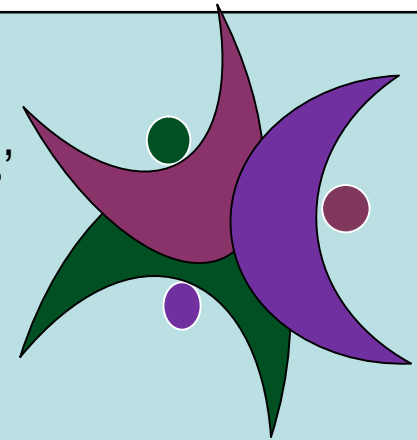


Researching with a Transformative Agenda: The Challenge of Producing Knowledge for Action

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A Symposium on
**Interrogating gendered power structures:
developing a transformative research framework
for women's empowerment in Muslim contexts**

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Background

- Working with a transformative research framework, research in WEMC is not just to produce knowledge but to implement knowledge for action
- My research among Muslim women in Guangzhou failed to realize the goal of engagement in action
- This presentation focuses on:
 - how a transformative agenda informs my research analysis
 - reflections on the contradictions of researching with a transformative agenda without engaging participants in action
 - implications for action research

Biography of the Research in Guangzhou, China

Phase	Activities
<p>Inception May – Dec, 2006</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searched for research collaborator • Identified research participants and target audiences • Pilot fieldwork
<p>Fieldwork July – Nov, 2007</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews and focus groups with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local Muslim women leaders - Female Muslim migrant workers
<p>Output Dec 2007- Dec 2008</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference presentations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Agency without Contestation: Case Studies of Successful Muslim Women in the Hui Community in Guangzhou, China” (Chiu and Lo 2007) - “Temporary Migration, Empowerment and Disempowerment: Case Studies of Hui Migrant Women in Guangzhou, China” (Chiu 2008)

Mix of WEMC Research Approaches

Classic, knowledge-driven model	Research before communication; appropriate for politically sensitive contexts
Problem-solving, policy-driven model	Focus on specific policy targets; researching how to bring about changes
Interactive model	Research impact happening through 'sustained interactivity' between researchers and policy makers
Enlightenment model	Research impact happening through gradual sedimentation of insight, theories, concepts and perspectives
Political model	Research findings used as ammunition in adversarial systems of decision making

Source: WEMC Secretariat 2007: 19-20

Approaches Adopted for the Research In Guangzhou, China

Enlightenment Model	Research questions and analyses informed by WEMC Research Framework (Wee and Shaheed 2008)
Classic, Knowledge-driven Model	Research for knowledge production; No engagement in action to empower women

Enlightenment Model Applied (I)

Study Successful Muslim Women in the Hui Community
in Guangzhou through the Lens of Empowerment
(Chiu and Lo 2007)

Research Focus

- the extent Muslim Hui women in Guangzhou have access to and control over resources
- the disempowerment forces that put restrictions on women accessing and controlling resources
- women's initiatives to challenge the disempowerment forces



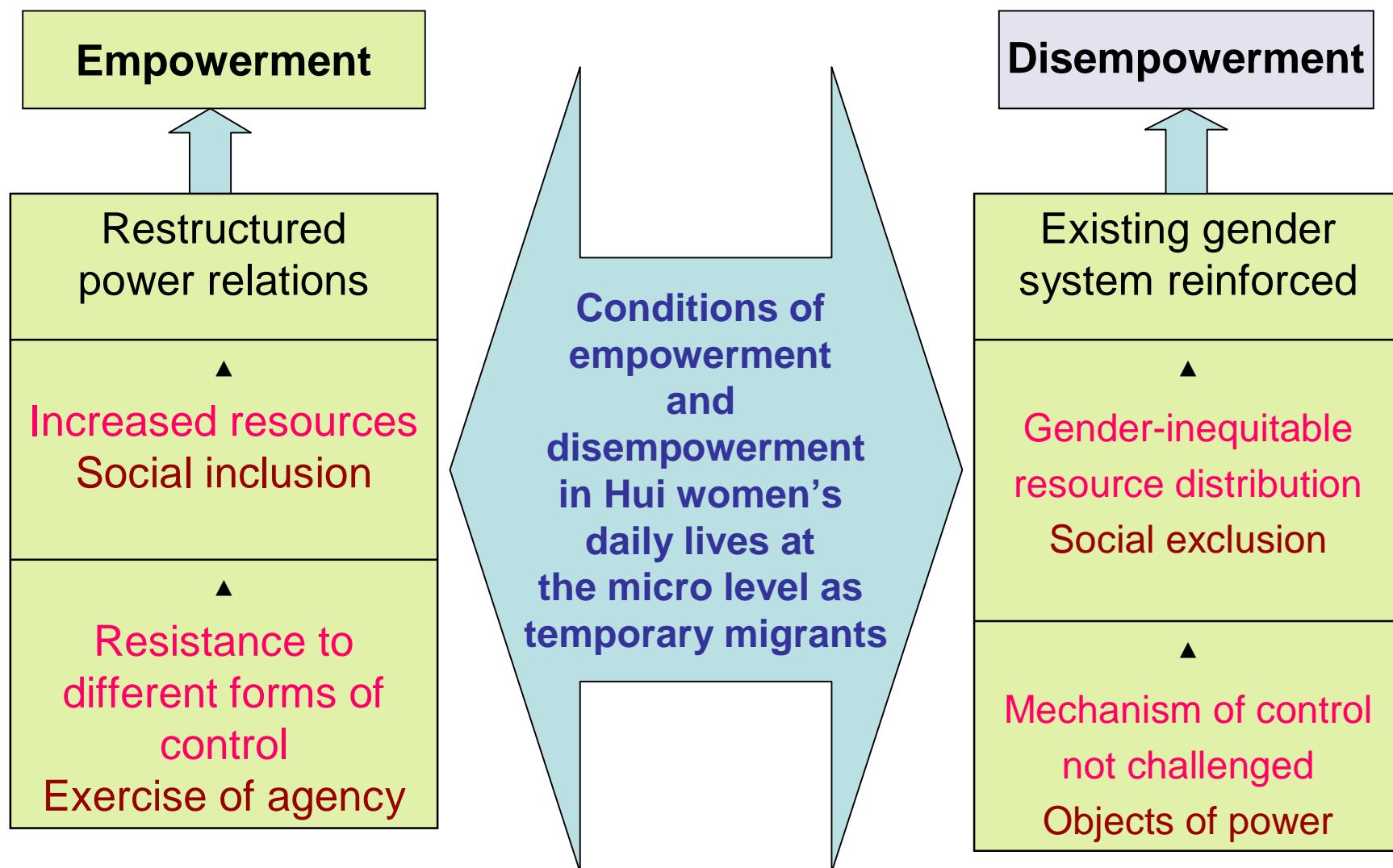
Conclusion:

Agency without Contestation

- there was only shift in these women's individual capacity which could not be regarded as initiatives for empowerment
- these women had not engaged in contestations of power relations, and hence there was no transformation of disempowering forces to their collective advantage

Enlightenment Model Applied (II)

Analytical Model of the Study on Hui Migrant Women in Guangzhou
(Chiu 2008)



Enlightenment Model Applied (III)

Hui Migrant Women: Conditions of Empowerment and Disempowerment

Varied conditions for empowerment and disempowerment were produced for different women

Conditions for Empowerment

- Increase in power and resources (not in all cases)
- However, existing power relations were not restructured

Conditions of Disempowerment

- Gendered division of labour and resources distribution in the family
- Class and ethnic relations
- Patriarchal kinship ideology
- Social labeling and stigmatization
- Some women were objects of control

Contradictions between the Enlightenment Model and the Classic, Knowledge-driven Model

- Problematizing without problem-solving
- Needs for change not identified (by research participants)
- No “productive synthesis” (Hemment 2007:309) of knowledge and action

Challenges of Producing Knowledge for Action

Obstacles	Challenges
Political	Gatekeepers' warning: women's power, religion and ethnic minorities are three sensitive (read: restrictive) issues in China
Social	The researcher as an outsider Gaining access through gatekeepers
Personal	Time constraint of the researcher → no organic interactions with research participants

Implications for Action Research

Researcher Positionality	Transformative research is best undertaken by an insider of the community
Research Partnership	Collaboration with an already formed group that would buy into the transformative agenda
Research Strategy	Ethnography; Participant Observation
Research Ethics	Participants to identify the needs for change

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