

Holding Up Half the Sky? Are Chinese women given equal rights in political participation?

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《Abstract》

In the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, women were promised equal rights with men in "all spheres of life," including political participation, career opportunities, family building, as well as social freedom. The late Chinese leader Mao Zedong also envisioned a China in which women would hold up "half the sky." Sixty years after the declaration of Chinese women's liberation from patriarchal burden, the continuous effort to promote gender equality has yielded rather a disappointing result in politics: twenty-one percent of female representation in National People's Congress (NPC) in 2008. Furthermore, the country report on the state of women in urban local government released by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in 2001 suggested that Chinese women's participation in political affairs is low and "unequal opportunities still exists". This paper draws on statistical data from Chinese government and related studies, in hope to conceive and understand the factors causing gender disproportion in today's China politics.

The first part of this paper traces the introduction to Chinese women's liberation to the early 1940s. While many scholars have offered rich findings on gender bias in early Chinese Communist Party (CCP) system, the authors try to provide a condensed review of under which circumstances and to what extent were women given opportunities. The overture would be followed by available statistic reports of representation of Chinese women in politics today. To sketch out main impediments to women's full participation in politics, the authors wish to elaborate on the statistics by cross-referencing them with a qualitative study based on various social report, documents, and academic work. In the last part the authors locate and conclude the possible reasons—political ideology, political institution, and/or patriarchal social system—that hinder Chinese women from further advancement in political participation.

Keywords: political participation; gender politics; China

Introduction

In ancient Chinese culture, women without talents were valued. Chinese women, like women in other parts of the world, used to be discriminated against in participating in public affairs and roamed mainly in the domestic area. The founding of People's Republic of China promised Chinese women a different outlook on life—an opportunity to take part in the building of a new China in equal positions as men. As the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) restored power in 1949, women were ushered into emancipation age. Chairman Mao's policy had tremendous and elongate influence on all aspects of Chinese women, including literacy rates, career paths, family role, and most of all, participation in government and political affairs.

The framework of this study was inspired by Stanley Rosen's "Women and Political Participation in China" published in 1995.¹ In his work, Rosen examined the role of Chinese women in post-1949 China, addressing the share of female politician leaders in the state and party divisions. He further links the female political participation to major historical events such as Cultural Revolution and the Reform Period. In this study, the authors attempt to expand on his argument with latter scholarly studies and elaborate on how, under what circumstances, top women politicians became visible in elite politics. The methodology includes a scrutiny of studies done on the subject of Chinese female politicians after Rosen and an up-to-date flow chart indicating the change of female elites in the political arena, paying particular attention to National People Congress (NPC), Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPCC), Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC) and Politburo.²

The subjects of study are female politicians that appeared in NPC, CPCC, CCCPC and Politburo over the span of 60 years. The reasons for choosing these institutions are threefold. First, lack of systematic statistics on other political institutions. Second, the significant and symbolic meaning of these power centers. Whereas NPC is taken for the national congress, CPCC, though without actual power, often serves as the "retirement home" for politicians. CCCPC is the highest authority within the Communist Party and is endowed with the power to appoint members of the Politburo, a group of 20 some leaders have control over government policies. Third, about 60% of female politicians in high ranked positions are based in the central authoritative departments, while 40% are in local government sectors.³ Given the limited space, the authors give their focus on female leaders in the central political institutions.

In this paper, the female elites are defined as those who held post in relevant political

¹ Stanley, Rosen, "Women and Political Participation in China", *Pacific Affairs* 68 (1995): 315-341.

² In this paper, NPC, CPCC, and CCCPC are used as abbreviation form of the institution titles.

³ 沈殿忠、趙子祥，1995年，〈〈中國政壇女性分析〉〉，瀋陽：遼寧人民，頁131。

institutions. And thus, female political participation is narrowly defined as female elite with political and managerial authority and not the general level of female who participate in political activities such as voting or petition. It is with special note that though provincial governmental branches are not the focus of this paper, their presence should not be neglected, as countryside women constitute much greater part of China population. The meaning of elite alters with time and is not always the equivalent of education level or expertise in certain fields since different political leaders with different regime agendas have resulted in various criteria in the process of elite selection.

The first part of the study is contributed to the reconstruction of a socio-political environment in which Chinese women were emancipated. Special interest is given to the propagandization of the concept “emancipation” in the CCP system. The second part looks at the statistical data of Chinese female elite and the possible implications. The authors look into the proportion of Chinese female political elite in present politics and examine the result of China’s half-decade long effort in promoting development of high-ranked female politicians. Preliminary study shows that Chinese woman’s participation in governmental decision-making positions is far from “equal”. The female elite members, though composing 21% of the NPC, are hardly seen in the Politburo, the core institution of Chinese government. On the general, dissatisfactory as glass ceiling phenomenon still exists. More serious accusation even suggests that women are used merely to “create the illusion of equality”¹. In the last section, conclusive remarks of the influential factors that hinder female elite from obtaining their “equal” rights in governmental decision making arena are proposed.

Historical review of women’s emancipation in China

Like elsewhere in the world, China before modernization was influenced by traditional gender stereotyping ideology that hindered women from participating in public affairs. Because the shaping of women’s role in society is deeply rooted in the Confucius thinking and ways of life, traditional gender bias concepts are prevalent, thus creating a premature and unfriendly socio-atmosphere for female leadership and participation in politics. Old Chinese idioms exhibit some of the inequalities in gender roles: male are superior than female(女不如男), male serve as dominate roles and female subordinate roles(男主女從), men are breadwinners and women are homemakers(男主外女主內), and women should not interfere with politics(女不干政).² The typical traditional Chinese women were depicted as inferior, subordinate, secondary, and domestic.

Two political incidents in modern China, however, challenged traditional gender expectations. The prelude of modern Chinese women’s emancipation can be traced back to Taiping Rebellion, a civil

¹ Rosen, 330.

² 童吉渝、楊琮瑛，〈婦女參政與發展—對培養選拔女幹部政策執行的分析〉，〈〈半個世紀的婦女發展—中國婦女五十年理論研討會論文集〉〉，當代中國出版社，2001。

war in China dated from 1850 to 1864. In rebellious response to the corruptive ruling Qing dynasty, the leader Hong Xiuquan prompted a revolt that was based on heterodox Christianity. He, claiming to be the son of God, called for various social reforms, among which abolition of foot binding and liberation of women from Confucianism doctrines were emphasized. Although it was noted that a large number of female served in the Taiping Heavenly Army, the female participants were mostly peasants who rose against autocracy, feudal system and harsh living, rather than the shackles of gender restrictions.

Between Taiping Rebellion and the Revolution of 1911, only few female intellectuals participated in the overthrowing of Qing dynasty, and the majority of women was still fundamentally subordinate and played only a marginal role in the society.¹ The May Fourth Movement of 1919, also called the New Culture Movement, marked “the first meaningful women’s movement in Chinese history.”² The movement, initiated in response to protest the decision made by the Paris Peace Conference, turned into a patriotic forum for Chinese intellectuals who advertised the building of a stronger modern China. Female intellectuals, for the first time in history, went on an organized political demonstration. Though the protest was not an immediate success, female were seen to gradually take up public affairs.

Since its establishment in 1921, the early CCP had addressed to and adopted women’s liberation as one of their top politic agenda not only because the socialist theory fundamentally values equality in male-female relationship, but also to gain support from Chinese women in revolutionary work. Yet, between 1921 and May of 1925, only about 100 women were registered in CCP.³ Still, CCP attempted to mobilize the greater Chinese women by targeting their campaign at female issues such as the practice of freedom of marriage and of equal pay in labor work.⁴

With the triumph over the Nationalists in 1949, under Mao’s guidance, CCP legitimized gender equality. NPC passed the constitution that supported gender equality in 1954. As stipulated in Article 48 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China promulgated in 1954, “Women in the People’s Republic of China enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life, political, economic, cultural and social, and family life. The state protects the rights and interests of women, applies the principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women alike and trains and selects cadres from among women.” Shortly after, in 1950, Mao again called upon “genuine equality” between men and women.

In order to build a great socialist society it is of the utmost importance to arouse the broad masses of women to join in productive activity. Men and women must receive equal pay for

¹ Jinghao Zhou, “Keys to Women’s Liberation in Communist China: An Historical Overview.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 5 (2003): 68.

² Zhou, 69.

³ Christina Gilmartin, “Gender in the Formation of a Communist Body Politic,” *Modern China* 19 (1993): 309.

⁴ Zhou, 69.

equal work in production. Genuine equality between the sexes can only be realized in the process of the socialist transformation of society as a whole.¹

Mao's vision of gender equality blended the idea of nation building, labor mobilization, and in the socialist ideal. Women's liberation in China, though belonging to a world trend, was special in that female liberation movement was embedded in the revolt against hierarchy and pushed through the communist and socialist policy. Many Chinese scholars to date still firmly believe that Chinese female liberation is in a class by itself and it is the "Communist way" that saved Chinese women from inequality.

When reviewed, female emancipation in China seemed to characterize itself as sub-discourse within political revolts and national interests. Yet the sexual equality issue was not particularly propagandized and made into law until the Chinese Communist take over China. CCP's effort in achieving and promoting gender equality was a milestone that could not be neglected. In the following section, the authors look into the outcome of CCP's effort by addressing to female elites' participation in top political institutions.

An overview of the change in proportion of female political elite

As political participation serves as an important indicator of female emancipation, the number of female delegates in important political institutions over the years is examined. The authors will concentrate on only the number of female politicians forming different terms of NPC, CPCC, CCCPC, and Politburo, taking them as the indicators for Chinese female politicians with decision making power.²

Figure 1 shows the proportion of male and female delegates in the NPC over the span of fifty and more years. 1975 marked the peak for female NPC members and have come to stabilize after that at about 21%, meaning one out of every five congress member today is a female. Though the number does not achieved the fifty percentage target, compared to the world average percentage of women in parliament 18.7%, the number is already very promising.³

¹ Introductory note to "Women Have Gone to the Labour Front" (1955), *The Socialist Upsurge in China's Countryside*, Chinese ed., Vol. I.

² 李慧英，2006年，〈婦女與參政〉，收錄於王金玲主編，〈中國婦女發展報告〉，北京市：社會科學文獻，頁252。

³ Regionally speaking, the average for Nordic countries is 42.0%, the highest, and the average for Asian countries is 18.7%. The lowest female participation rate is in Arab States, 10.1%. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

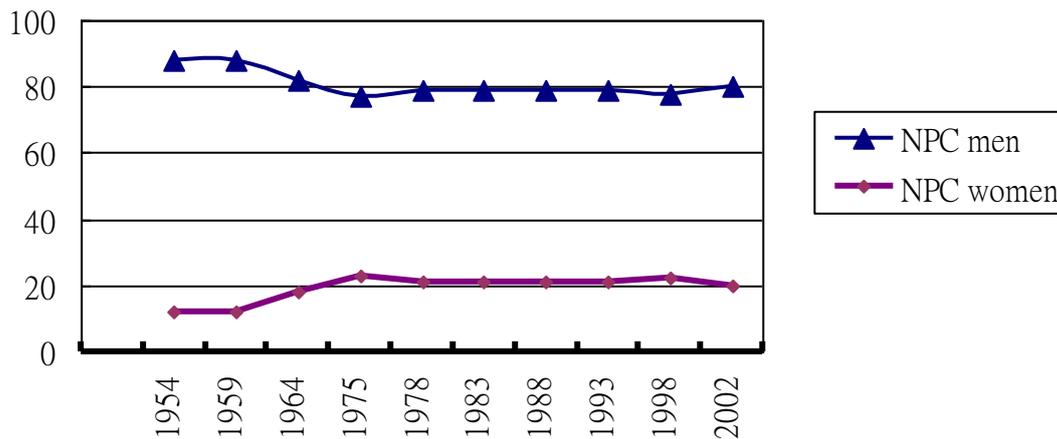


Figure 1. The proportion of male and female delegates in the NPC from 1954 to 2002. Source: 國家統計人口和社會科技統計司編《中國社會中的女人和男人—事實和數據(2004)》，中國統計出版社，2004。

Although NPC is the highest state body and the single one legislative house in China that makes important national level political decisions, Su questions the accuracy in of taking NPC as the site for political contestation. NPC, accused of being a powerless “rubber-stamp” legislature, cannot precisely reflect power distribution. With its delegate members amounting to 3000, the power is diluted and individuals are only ceremonial actors in play.¹ Though this is the most often cited statistical information by the Chinese government in official documents, the authors go beyond to examine other political institutions and their gender distribution. In Figure 2, a comparison is made between the proportion of female delegates of NPC, CPCC, and CCCPC.

CPCC, or Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, is a political advisory body that consists of about 2000 delegates. Its joint yearly meeting with NPC is often referred to as Lianghui (The Two Meetings). Before 1954, CPCC served as the legislature body after which was replaced by NPC. Some have related the present CPCC to the upper house, though the upper house is not an equivalent concept in the China context. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, abbreviated CCCPC, is the highest authority within the CCP. The Central Committee has about 300 members and nominally appoints the Politburo. It is an important body in that it contains the leading figures of the party, state, and army. Politburo is a group of 19 to 25 people who oversee not only CCP but also the whole country. It is the center of power and members are often referred to as the “state leader”.

¹ Fubing Su, “Gender Inequality in Chinese Politics: An Empirical Analysis of Provincial Elites,” *Politics & Gender* 2 (2006): 146.

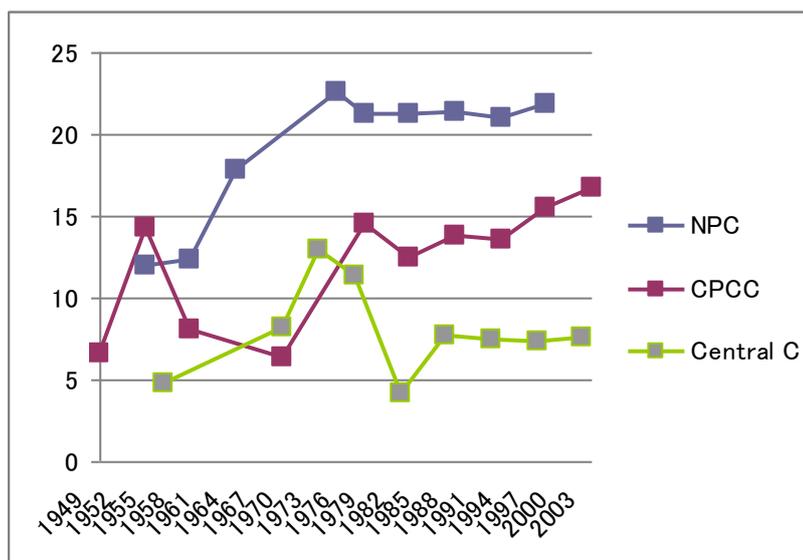


Figure 2. A comparison is made between the proportion of female delegates of NPC, CPCC, and Central Committee of Communist Party. Source: the United Nations Report on the State of Women in Urban Local Government People’s Republic of China p. 6, 中華全國婦女聯合會，中國人民政治協商會議全國委員會辦公廳 <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/htm/minglu/lijie.htm>, and 李慧英，頁 254。

We observe that the numbers of female delegates in these political institutions are not always on the steady increase or decrease. Fluctuations are shown in the earlier period of government building and the founding of CCP did not immediately guaranteed successful female political participation. The peak of each curve happened in the year 1973, 1975, 1978, a time period we came to know as the late or post-Cultural Revolution era. After the 1980s, the three curves level at an average of 21%, 13%, and 8% respectively. The following three tables show the exact number of female political participation for NPC, CPCC, and CCCPC.

Different terms and year of election	Female delegates (person) in NPC	Proportion of females (%)
1 st (1954)	147	12.0
2 nd (1959)	150	12.2
3 rd (1964)	542	17.8
4 th (1975)	653	22.6
5 th (1978)	742	21.2
6 th (1983)	632	21.2
7 th (1988)	634	21.3
8 th (1993)	626	21.0
9 th (1998)	650	21.8
10 th (2002)	604	20.24

Different terms and year of election	Female delegates (person) in CPCC	Proportion of females (%)
1 st (1949)	12	6.6
2 nd (1954)	83	14.3
3 rd (1959)	87	8.1
4 th (1969)	76	6.3
5 th (1978)	289	14.5
6 th (1983)	258	12.5
7 th (1988)	288	13.8
8 th (1993)	283	13.52
9 th (1998)	341	15.54

Different terms and year of election	Female delegates (person) in CCCPC	Proportion of females (%)
8 th (1956)	8	4.7
9 th (1969)	23	8.2
10 th (1973)	41	12.9
11 th (1977)	38	11.4
12 th (1982)	14	4.1
13 th (1987)	22	7.7
14 th (1992)	24	7.5
15 th (1997)	25	7.3
16 th (2002)	27	7.6

Table 1: Number of female delegates in NPC in different terms¹

Table 2: Number of female delegates in CPCC in different terms²

Table 3: Number of female delegates in CCCPC in different terms¹

¹ Source: the United Nations Report on the State of Women in Urban Local Government People’s Republic of China p. 6.

² Source: 中華全國婦女聯合會，中國人民政治協商會議全國委員會辦公廳 <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/htm/minglu/lijie.htm>

Similar trend is observed in the Politburo, the center of power in China government: female delegate members are few and their presence mostly matches the Cultural Revolution period. Since the founding of the CCP in 1921, only four women have been full members of the Politburo. The former three female members—Jiang Qing, the wife of Mao Zedong, Ye Qun, the wife of Lin Biao, and Deng Yingchao, the wife of Zhou Enlai—were elected during or shortly after the Cultural Revolution period. Rosen linked the success of these female members to their prestigious political status enjoyed by their husbands.² The other female member, Liu Yandong, was not promoted until twenty years later.³ The number of female participants in the Politburo, as compared with those in the NPC and CPCC, is amazingly low.

Different terms and year of election	Female Standing Committee members (person)	Proportion of female standing committee members (%)	Total members (person)
8 th (1956)	0	0	17
9 th (1969)	2	10.5	19
10 th (1973)	1	4.8	21
11 th (1977)	0	0	26
12 th (1982)	1	4	25
13 th (1987)	0	0	14
14 th (1992)	0	0	20
15 th (1997)	0	0	22
16 th (2002)	0	0	24
17 th (2007)	1	4	25

According to the above statistics, despite the overwhelming emphasis on gender equality done by CCP, Chinese female political participation was not fully realized. The proportion of female elite does not even amount to one fourth of the total, not to say half. Though it would be convenient to attribute gender inequality in politics to traditions of the past, the authors believe that the fluctuation of female elite revealed more variables in play. The following section discusses the attributing factors for this phenomenon.

¹ 李慧英，頁 254。

² Rosen, 315-341.

³ Liu Yandong is one of the less female comrades who participated in political activities during the Revolution. See 沈殿忠、趙子祥，1995 年，<<中國政壇女性分析>>，瀋陽：遼寧人民，頁 127。

CCP as a patriarchal system

Scholars discussed the less than satisfactory results of low female leadership in politics. Chinese scholars have concluded a few major reasons for this phenomenon: unfriendly socio-environment toward female politicians in Chinese society, low willingness for women to take part in political activities, and lack of personnel training available for female elite.¹ The first two reasons are less satisfactory as they only portray the gender inequality image rather than explaining it. The last reason suggests that the government and the party fall short of corresponding measures for helping women into politics.

Christina Gilmartin, however, incline toward the argument that CCP is a patriarchal party that insincerely promoted gender equality. In “Gender in the Formation of a Communist Body Politics”, she argued that CCP is a political organization that produced and enforced patriarchal gender system, or gender hierarchy, by framing the Chinese women’s emancipation discourse in the nationalist ideology. Though CCP promoted gender equality, only men are endowed with authentic power in politics. It’s disappointing that “most male Communists...retained some traditional expectations of gender roles despite their support for the cause of women’s emancipation”.² This argument sarcastically implies CCP framework as the largest impediment for Chinese women in political participation.

The hypothesis that the CCP is a patriarchal political body offers an explanation, perhaps a more comprehensive understanding, to why female elite politicians are rarely visible. From 1949, the establishment of a new China that advertised women’s liberation, to 1959, just before pre-revolution era, female standing delegates of NPC and CPCC only accounts for 5-7% of the total standing delegate members. To make it worse, no woman was entitled a position in the core of real decision-making, or the standing committee of the Politburo.

Gilmartin argued that despite CCP’s continuous effort in promoting gender equality gender discrepancy gap still exist in contemporary CCP.³ Nevertheless, according to statistics, there was a promising time for female political participation that is not to be forgotten. This period bring to question the insufficiency of the theory CCP as a sole patriarchal body since female elite seemed to flourish and thrive under certain socio-political context.

¹ 葉忠海主編，2000年，<<中國女領導人才成長和開發研究>>，上海：上海科技，頁232-238。

² Gilmartin, 317.

³ Gilmartin, 299-329.

Cultural Revolution period

The period in which female were highly visible in the political arena coheres with the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a period of widespread social and political upheaval in the People's Republic of China between 1966 and 1976.¹ During the period, Mao mobilized masses, mostly workers, peasants, and cadres, to rebel against intellectuals whom were suspected of betraying Mao. The period, which generally thought of as a decade of destruction and chaos, ended when Mao died in 1976.

This period witnessed the high tide for female politician at the top of the political system so far in the history of People's Republic of China. Though women became more visible, the ten years of Cultural Revolution was commented by Chinese scholars as taking an "unhealthy turn" in the bumpy road of gender equality in politics.² "...[during the revolution]some were promoted to the leadership positions in the party, in central and local governments, as well as in the government head office. But these people ... will eventually fail"³ This statement not only negates the "breakthrough" concept in female participation proposed by Rosen, it hinted that rise was merely an illusion in times of chaos.

Probably the best-known female politician in the Cultural Revolution is Jiang Qing, who came to be called Madame Mao. Before marrying Mao in 1939, Jiang Qing worked as a moderately successful actress under the name Lan Ping. She was under-educated and despised for her promiscuous behavior. Their marriage plan was not immediately approved by the party who had concerns about Jiang Qing and Mao's married status. Only when Jiang Qing agreed to limited herself to the role of housewife and refrain from political activity was she officially accepted as the third wife of Mao. She began as Mao's personal secretary and moved her way up the Film Section of the CCP Propaganda Department in the 1950s, becoming more and more politically active. She remained the most powerful politician in the Cultural Revolution period until the death of Mao, and later became the most controversial female in politics. Removed from power after serving two terms of the Politburo, she was also sentenced to life imprisonment.

With a marriage to Chairman Mao and a "pardon" from important male party members who held doubts about her capability in politics Jiang Qing obtained her access to the Politburo. The Cultural Revolution was a period in which loyalty criteria was highly emphasized in elite recruitment. Jiang Qing openly exhibited her support and fidelity for Chairman Mao till her suicide. "I was Chairman Mao's dog, whomever he told me to bite, I bit." Less information is found on Ye Qun, the

¹ Although Mao officially declared the Cultural Revolution ended in 1969, the power struggles and political instability between 1969 and the arrest of the Gang of Four in 1976 are now also widely regarded as part of the Revolution.

² 葉忠海，頁 222。

³ 沈殿忠、趙子祥，頁 137。

other women on the 9th term of Politburo, aside from her marriage to Lin Biao, Mao's comrade-in-arms and designated successor before his conspiracy to overthrow Mao was discovered. In attempt to flee, Ye Qun and Lin Biao died in a plane crash in 1971, leaving Jiang Qing the only one female on the Politburo.

When Jiang Qing and Ye Qun were in the Politburo, the number of female delegates in three other political institutions was simultaneously on the increase. Rather than adopting an optimistic explanation that the phenomenon was the result of female elite's awakening to power, we should take into consideration the peculiarity of Cultural Revolution. During the "chaotic" period, Jiang Qing pushed for women's political involvement in the Party Congress and in the 1970s, the central authorities organized training campaigns for female cadres.¹ The Party's mandated official quotas and "top-down measures" were the political forces that improved the position of women. In fact, some Chinese women even complained that women were "compelled" to enter politics and were in fact lukewarm toward the participation.²

In the late 70s and early 80s the number began to drop again. Be it the cause of Jiang Qing's negative image after imprisonment or the cease of female elite training plans, the ten years of revolution was only a spark in dark. If we see the revolutionary period as a trial period for gender equality in high rank positions, the trend obviously did not persist. Coming back to Rosen's remark on the Cultural Revolution as a "breakthrough" for women, the authors favor to see the time as a "test of tolerance" for female elite in the political arena: it attested that Chinese women could indeed be accepted as leaders of a nation. Were it not for the end of Cultural Revolution, female political participation rate would probably go higher up.

After the Cultural Revolution came the reformation period that opened China to the outside world. Under the guidance of Den Xiaoping, major efforts were made in economic system and political system in order to modernize China. In this period, politicians with education were valued, for they are able to offer their expertise in the modernization agenda.³ China's shift in political goal influenced the politician elected: though loyalty screening is necessary, educational credentials and occupational competence has become another criterion in the selection of elites. Scholars gave explanations why the reform in China caused damage to female political participation: women were less educated and less adaptable to changes in regime agenda.

The ultimate goal of Reform was to introduce China to the world and the world to China. Thus, China became much more involved in international politics and presented itself as the giant of the East. It would be appropriate then, to put China in the global gender equality promotion context in

¹ Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia. Ed. Kazuki Iwanaga "Gender and Rural Governance in China" p.57 Jude Howell.

² Rosen, 332.

³ Yanji Bian, Xiaoling Shu, and John R. Logan. "Communist Party Membership and Regime Dynamics in China." *Social Forces* 79 (2001): 812.

explaining the flat curves that came after the 1980s.¹

Law enforcement and quota-filling

Coming back to Figure 2, we see that the proportion of female delegates in various institutions has only begun to stabilize in the recent 20 to 30 years. Though the founding of People's Republic of China showed political enthusiasm in the liberation of women, and the Cultural Revolution did offer a forum for female delegates, their dream in realizing gender equality was not fully exhibited in law and regulations until recently. In the "Report on the State of Women in Urban Local Government, People's Republic of China", it traced China's active role in promoting gender equality in politics in the 1980s. It praised China's early presence and partnership in the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, an international venue held by the United Nations. Before the 1980s, very little tangible achievement in promoting women's rights was found except for those in Communist pamphlets and posters.

Zhou explains that it was only after the Reform Movement that, under the urge to modernize, China government pick up its pace toward promoting gender equality. She further criticized that "it is a misconception that CCP has been devoted to Chinese women's liberation from its inception of the CCP to the present."²

After 1980, China government showed effort in adopting UN target by formulating gender equality laws that regulates the number of women participants in the congress institution. Article 10 of the Law of the People's Republic of China Concerning the Guarantee of the Rights and Interests of Women in 1992 specifically states that "among deputies to the National People's Congress and local people's congresses at various levels, there shall be an appropriate number of women deputies, and the proportion thereof shall be raised gradually."³ In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing pushed for more gender equality agreement in the higher political arena. The State Council of the People's Republic of China structured the Program for the Development of Chinese Women (1995-2000) with the target of enhancing women's participation in governmental decision-making bodies: Make efforts to ensure that there is more than one woman in the leading bodies of governments at all levels and that women are represented in the leading bodies of more than half of the ministries and commissions under the State Council and in the leading bodies of more than half of the government departments at the provincial and prefecture levels.⁴ Over the years, as specific measures by government have been taken in stipulating female proportion in decision-making

¹ Zhou, 70.

² Zhou, 72

³ All-China Women's Federation <http://www.women.org.cn/english/english/laws/02.htm>

⁴ All-China Women's Federation http://www.womenofchina.cn/Policies_Laws/Policies/1458.jsp

bodies, Chinese women are guaranteed more positions in the political leadership circle.

The policy is met with both success and setback. Many criticized that the “more than one woman in the leading bodies of governments at all levels” quota-filling policy has obstructed female career development and restrained women to the deputy role. CCP limited not only female political participation but further selected which female delegates and what position (mainly deputy to chief) to allot.¹ Other women politicians took up leadership role in the women’s program, such as All China Women’s Federation or departments that dealt with youth and health affairs or other minor government sections.² It is with skepticism that we see only one female in the Politburo today: does her symbolic presence exclude other equally competent female elite from entering the center of power?

Conclusion

According to statistics from National Bureau of Statistics of China, the population of Chinese women consists about 48.50% of the total population in 2007.³ The statistics satisfied the literal meaning of “half the sky”. Nevertheless, women’s performance in high-ranked political organs is not “half” gratifying. Examining Chinese women’s status in politics from the path of history, the authors find many factors come to shape and the gender inequality phenomenon. Due to the limitation of time and space, this paper focused specifically on the female political elite in decision-making circle. The restriction and shortcoming of this study framework is not to be seen as ignorance or a take-part-for-all reading of other Chinese women and their situations. Rather, the authors wish to contribute this work as a compressed review of Chinese female politicians. Hopefully, this study would invite more interest and works into the socio-political research of female political participation.

While it would be too sarcastic to accuse the China government of failing to play the “emancipator” role, we set out with the assumption that gender in the political system is dynamic and multifaceted. The gender discrepancy in Chinese political elite is a reflective response to history, tradition, political system, and regime agenda.

In the 27 years of Mao’s ruling, the numbers of female elite appearing in important state organs soared. The Cultural Revolution witnessed the heyday of female leadership; the number is still unchallenged today. The appointed female elites, were supposedly wives or intimate family members

¹ 杜吉，2007年，〈婦女與參與政治與決策研究綜述〉，收錄於劉伯紅主編，〈中國婦女研究年鑑 2001-2005〉，北京市：社會科學文獻，頁 71。Some Chinese scholars refer to this phenomenon as “peak power defection” (尖端缺損)

² 葉忠海，頁 231-232。

³ Source: China Statistical Yearbook, 2008, National Bureau of Statistics of China. <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2008/indexeh.htm>

of a more powerful male figure. Chinese scholars were critical of the chaos brought on by the Cultural Revolution and suggestively condemned female elite like Jiang Qing from seizing political power. Studies show that the selection of Chinese political elite during the period is in strong relation to loyalty, a characteristic obtained through personal relations.

The ascending proportion of female elite came to a halt and dropped all together few years into the Reform period. This unfortunate happening, many feared, had to do with the change in regime agenda. The opening-up policy prioritized the building of a modern China and required more elite with education credentials, a feature that female elite from the Cultural Revolution lacked. But it was not long before the number of female power elites earned a fix share in politics.

In the 1980s, under the pressure to align with international society, China pushed for gender equality in top government divisions. The State Council in enhancing women's participation in governmental decision-making bodies, announced that "there be more than one woman in the leading bodies of governments at all levels". The measures taken by the government should guarantee women more position in the leadership circle. Nevertheless, the good-will stipulation is taken with caution. Women are often assigned to deputy position and government sectors that are deemed "less serious".

The effort of Chinese Communist Party to promote gender equality is appreciated by most Chinese women. Gu Xiulian, vice chairmen of standing committee of 10th National People's Congress of China and currently the chairman of All-China Women's Federation, talked about the distinguishing feature of Chinese women in Seminar on The Past 50 Years of China Women's Movement. She acknowledged the success of Chinese female emancipation policy and portrayed the new path laid forth for Chinese women:

Under the leadership of Chinese Communist Party and the guidance of Marxism, female liberation will be realized. The destiny of Chinese women is closely related to national destiny. With the support of government and society, women should, as a whole, participate in social economic building, politics, and cultural activities to strengthen their capacity. They should work with men hand in hand to protect the general rights of national citizen and preserve the rights of individual selves. Then gender equality would gradually actualize.¹

Gu recognized the existence of gender discrepancy but still hold faith for the Party. Other scholars, however, are more pessimistic toward the contribution of Chinese Communist Party. Gilmartin argues that the Party is a patriarchal organization that insincerely promoted gender equality. Her argument suggests that CCP is in fact not a successful promoter of female emancipation but a facade that created illusionary gender equality image.

¹ 顧秀蓮，〈有中國特色婦女發展道路的基本特徵〉，〈〈半個世紀的婦女發展—中國婦女五十年理論研討會論文集〉〉，當代中國出版社，2001。

Nevertheless, Chinese women's liberation owed much of its success to CCP. CCP was the first government in the history of China that legitimized female social status and promoted gender equality. Yet, in high organs of political power of the Communist state, women seemed less favorable and the law of gender equality less applied. China is not the only country in the world that suffers from gender inequality in politics; however, its proclamation of sex emancipation packaged in socialism theory naturally invited outsiders' rigid scrutiny. The status of Chinese women under Communist regime, when compared to that in pre-Communist era, has obviously improved. We, however, expect more achievements and hope that one day, Mao's dream of women holding half the sky would realize.

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