

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CHINESE ELITE POLITICS

by

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Abstract:

Women's participation in politics is an important requirement for gender equality. China's economic reform has brought massive improvements in the social and economic sectors of the country. However, the regime's monopoly of power, political culture and economic reasons in combination with other socio-cultural factors has resulted to continuous domination of women in China's political life. This study has employed a secondary research approach in combination with a reasonable data quantity covering 1977 to 2013 on the presence of women in selected top political institutions. The study finds out that women are under-represented across the political board but worst in top government (elite) and party institutions. This means that, at the state level, politics remains a domain for men and there exist a stern masculine monopoly over party institutions also. Where women are genuinely found, such as the parliament, their presence only serves as a source of meeting an important global or domestic requirement in the interest of the Chinese Communist Party than a true sense of gender equality or exercise of an equal right (between men and women) in determining the affairs of their society.

Key words: China; Women; Elite politics/institutions; Political participation; Chinese Communist Party



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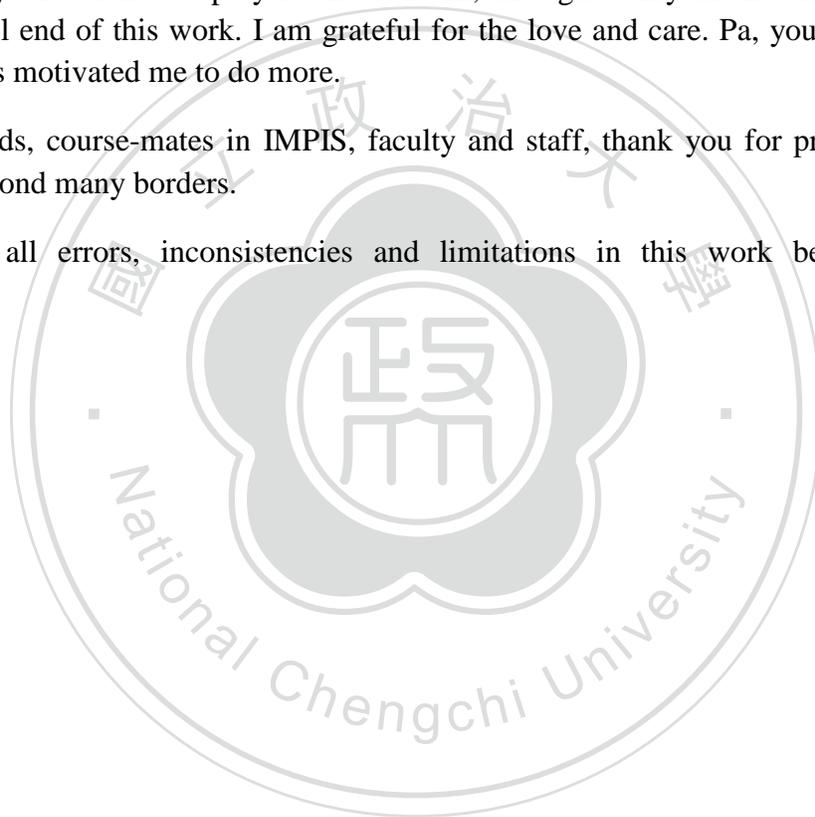
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I declare that all errors, inconsistencies and limitations in this work bear my personal responsibility.



Dedication:

To Grandma



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACWF	All China Women's Federation
BD	Beijing Declaration
BPA	Beijing Platform for Action
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCCCP/CC	Central Committee of the of the Communist Party of China
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
FWCW	Fourth World Conference on Women
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NPC	National People's Congress
PB	Politburo
PBSC	Politburo Standing Committee
PRC	People's Republic of China
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNIFEM	United Nations
UN WOMEN	UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women; also United Nations Fund for Women
WB	World Bank or the The Bank

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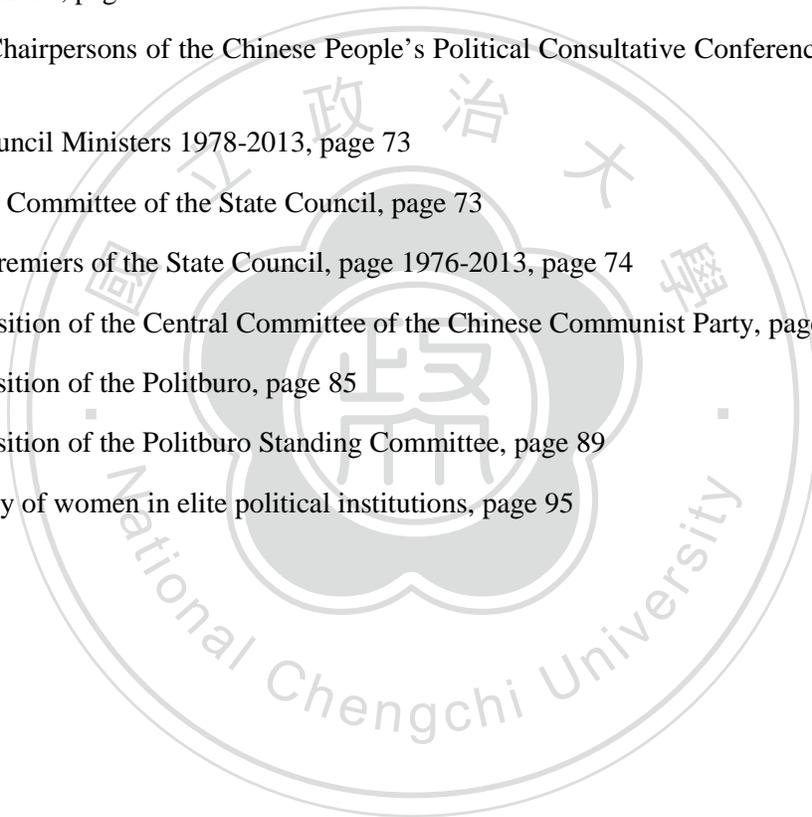
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, there is a serious gender-gap in politics.¹ Feminist Katherine MacKinnon says “the state is male” in its totality by character, composition, action and even philosophy. Haney (1996) shares the same view that even though there is difference among the various Feminist schools about the location of masculinity within the state, there is general agreement that governments carry male “interests” and are modeled after traits associated with masculinity than femininity. In addition, the state in many countries of the world, new or old; civilized or a lack of it; developed or developing are dominated by men.

Disparity² in political participation is a deeply entrenched challenge that results to inequality between men and women as rightful competitors to determine how their societies are governed (Markham, 2012; United Nations Women, 2011; Lawson 2008). The United Nations Women assert that: “Women’s political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy. [As] it facilitates women’s direct engagement in public decision-making and is a means of ensuring better accountability to women” (UN Women 2009, para. 1).

In addition, Markham (2013) also argues that there is increased evidence that women’s active participation in governance guarantees a heterogenous representation across party and

¹ Politics and political participation in the context of this research means women’s ability of fully utilize their inherent human right of being able to participate as occupiers of competitive and non-competitive political offices based on qualification and national laws without any form of gender-based discrimination.

² Around the world, voter registration is compulsory in more than half of the countries and they have legislations that prohibit gender discrimination in political participation but the lack of full and fair implementation of the law has resulted to various forms of discriminatory acts within the political sphere. See more details in Markham (2012).

minority lines and contributes immensely towards matters of peace and security. Furthermore, she adds that there is scholarly evidence that women's ability to freely and fairly participate in politics, especially, in top decision-making portfolios such as parliaments and ministries directly impact on positive budgeting on social sectors such as education, health, nutrition and infrastructure.

However, despite the fact that there are several international agreements such as the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979), Beijing Declaration (BD) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) (1995), and the Millennium Declaration (United Nations 2010) to provide equal rights and privileges for the full participation of women in politics and the fact that women make up nearly half of the global population, they still seriously lag behind men with regards to the full enjoyment of the right to political determination of their societies. In a recent publication of the World Economic Forum, it reports that the gender gap in global politics is at 21%, meaning an improvement of only nearly 2% between 2012 and 2013 (World Economic Forum 2013). The truth is that men keep dominating over women in all sectors of the political spectrum.

Even advanced democracies did not give women an enjoyment of political rights at the same age with men. The United States only granted suffrage rights to white women in 1920 (Banazak 2006) and Great Britain in 1928 (Scholastic n.d.); while France did it in 1944 (france.fr n.d.); after fierce struggles mostly led by feminist movements. Even New Zealand, the oldest country to provide universal suffrage to women only did so one hundred and twenty one years ago (New Zealand History online 2014). In the IPU (2012) global ranking, the US merely has 18.3% of its Lower House and 20% Upper House members as women and the UK has 22.6% in

the Lower House and 23.4% in the Upper House thus again showing the lack of parity even in the most advanced democracies.

In the words of MacKinnon (1989, 160):

Gender is a social system that divides power. It is therefore a political system. That is, over time, women have been economically exploited, relegated to domestic slavery, forced into motherhood, sexually objectified, physically abused, used in denigrating entertainment, deprived of a voice and authentic culture, and disenfranchised and excluded from public life. Women, by contrast with comparable men, have systematically been subjected to physical insecurity, targeted for sexual denigration and violation; depersonalized and denigrated; deprived of respect, credibility, and resources; and silenced—and denied public presence, voice, and representation of their interests.

In many countries, this is either demonstrated at the grassroots levels where men are traditionally looked upon as natural leaders. Also, at top-government levels, they (men) have better and more sustainable means of accessing opportunities that grant them political positions and institutions of politics such as parties, caucuses, political donors and sometimes the media than their female counterparts. Even close by proximity and in some cases, as active members, women still do not have equal voices and influences as men in those political organizations hence their ability of contesting and control of positions of power could be hindered (IPU 2011). This limits their full participation to run as public officials or to objectively determine those who will represent their interests. This is because equality in political organizations is important gateway to the realm of power. In *Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties*, the UNDP and NDI (2011, 1) thus note:

Without access to establish networks of influence and with very limited resources, few role models and mentors, and sometimes even limited family and community support, it is

understandable that women's participation in political parties has remained well below that of men.

This has resulted to a domination of male influence in political organizations at the disadvantage of women. The phenomenon is not exceptionally a characteristic of a single civilization or geographical affiliation. Around the world, from Yemen to Myanmar, Kenya to the Vietnam, women are yet to fully attain equality with men in all aspects of life (World Economic Forum 2013), however, there are varying contexts about this situation within different countries argue Bullough, et al. (2012).

When China surprised the world by introducing radical economic reforms shortly after the Mao era (Zheng, Guo and Zhao 2009; Fernandez n. d.), it has also taken an important status as a responsible global 'player' and sometimes serves as the 'spokesperson' for the developing world. However, its political life remains a topic of contest among many commentators, some of whom have argued that the country's economic advancement has little impact on its political system in general and the political status of women in particular (Tisdell 2009; Edwards 2007 & Li 2000).

Anyway, scholars like Zheng, Guo & Zhao (2009), Lee (2009) Ma (2009) and Rosen (1995) have argued that the reformation has indeed relaxed the regime's grip on certain social aspects or a stable decline of state control over society and an increased level of autonomy (Pei 2006). However, it must be noted that the regime still has immense control over the society and this is demonstrated in its sensitivity to information accessibility and how far dissident especially in political forms could be accepted. Prior to the reform, it could have been argued that the regime uses its communist ideology towards gender equality. It will be interesting to see if

economic opening, reform and growth have paved opportunities for women's greater engagement in the political process.

Cornway (2001, 231) defines political participation as behaviors of citizens that seek to influence the combination, mechanism, organization and election of government personnel and rules that govern them. With such a public assignment and obligation, all citizens deserve equal participation and contribution in the public life of their nations without barriers. In this research, I will examine if China's reform has a positive impact on the participation of women in politics since 1978. This study proposes that the current Chinese political system has not increased women's equal participation in top governance institutions. While it is generally assumed that the state will relax its grip on crucial matters such as political freedom, Su (2006) argues that the Chinese regime still consolidates political power to itself. In fact, one could boldly argue that political reformation and wide-based access to all levels of power is still a dream as long as the regime is run by the country's "elitist technocrats" in Beijing. In the words of Louise Edwards (2007, 383), "China is still an authoritarian, one party regime and the CCP is the overwhelming and dominant political force- all formal action is mediated, controlled and authorized by the CCP".

ORGANIZATION OF THE RESEARCH

In analyzing the cause of the hypothesized systematic isolation of women from the country's top political institutions (herein also called elite politics), I will employ both qualitative and quantitative evidences to support the argument of this study. This way, qualitative findings from scholarly works will be supported by quantitative data that are officially published by the

government and or provided to the UN and its partners or other organizations, media reports and scholarly publications. Hence, the research chapters are outlined as follows:

Chapter one provides the research introduction (background, objectives, justifications and methodology) and a global and country-level overview of women's political situation.

Chapter two provides the literature review on the subject drawing on various scholarly works from gender politics, sociology to feminist work on the topic. This part looks at women's political position in contemporary China, discussing the traditional beliefs and practices, economic and political cultures that have shaped the position of women in politics.

Chapter three is divided into two sections. The first one gives an overview of the impact of the reform on the social and economic standing of women. The second part explores the effects of the CEDAW and FWCW on China as the two most important gender equality tools the country accepted and or contributed to, within the period under review.

Chapters four and five look at selected elite institutions with regards to women's access and their participation since China's reform³. Therefore, chapter four looks at organizations of the state or those not exclusive to the party alone. The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the State Council and the National Peoples' Congress (NPC) are examined in this chapter.

Chapter five provides an analysis of three key institutions of the party. The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCCCP), the Politburo (PB) and the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) are examined. In addition to the descriptive analysis, both chapters

³ This approach is adapted from Rosen's 1995 work.

provide gender disaggregated data about their composition. The data begins in 1977/8 and ends in 2012/3 except otherwise stated⁴.

The concluding chapter (six) deals with the findings, recommendations and implications of the study.

METHODOLOGY

This research is methodologically qualitative. The study entirely depends on scholarly works on Chinese politics hence it takes a secondary-source approach. In addition, the researcher will mostly rely on works from the perspectives of feminist scholars, gender politics and a rights based-approach. Despite its qualitative nature, the study will constitute some relevant quantitative data as discussed above. The use of modern historical incidents in China, national policy instruments, available case studies, development commitments and indicators will constitute the content. Indices and rankings developed by the United Nations Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the World Economic Forum are important for my analysis.

RESEARCH JUSTIFICATIONS AND QUESTIONS

Since China's reform, there has emerged alongside a rich scholarly engagement on its economic and social impact on the people. Political impact and changes are also discussed but largely on the general state-society relations, Howell (2006) says efforts are also made to engender the situation in order to place women as a central part of both theoretical and practical analysis. Anyway, most of these works center on village women's political participation

⁴ It should be noted that China's political institutions are changed at different periods. While state institutions usually conduct changes in early months around the spring season, the CCP usually holds its congresses few months before. As will be seen later, this has a direct bearing on the composition of state institutions as party leaders are recruited for key state positions.

especially after the introduction of village elections in the 1980s such as the works of (Wang & Dai 2010; Howell 2006; Su 2006). Other scholars such as Zeng (2014), Guo and Zhao (2010), Rosen (1995), devote their studies to understand politics at the top level. This study takes from this end with a broader and more exhaustive approach thus I present four justifications for its scholarly relevance.

Firstly, it will contribute to fill a gap by focusing on elite politics and providing an extensive analysis of some of the most important political institutions of the party-state and their relation with women. Secondly, it will be an interesting analysis of how global social movements on women's issues will impact China since it opened its doors to the international community for the past three decades. Third, the work will also analyze if the two most important actions of international commitment- the ratification of the CEDAW and the hosting of the Fourth World Conference on Women is for political recognition rather than well-intentioned empowerment of Chinese women. Finally, it will be relevant to discuss the potential impact on the gendered distribution of authority as the country perhaps poses for greater reforms.

Furthermore, this research will answer the following questions: has China provided an expected room of political participation on the basis of gender equality since the beginning of its reforms in 1978? Are there frameworks that support genuine institutional arrangements for gender-related demands in the "new" China? How greater international opening will continue to affect both government and women regarding the demand for more political rights and positions in the country's elite institutions?

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Firstly, this project has a short time span to meet the researcher's graduate work schedule. Secondly, the researcher lacks language competency of handling resources that are written in Chinese hence only English Language scripts or translated versions of Chinese works (which may risk important alterations) will be highly relied on. In addition, it is also important to note that interaction with civil society organizations, women's study centers in universities or government bureaus such as the ACWF working directly with women could be an additional experience; this however is a missed opportunity as I lack the relevant network with these organizations. Finally, even if this were possible, the researcher has no guarantee of accessing a visa of visit to China with ease considering political relations between China and my country of nationality. These challenges could exclude certain facts and personal experience in relation to the subject within the local context, among others.

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL STATUS FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

In a review by Runyan (2014, 2), she says that throughout history, all political systems, and even "modern liberal capitalist systems" are involved in citizen subordination based on sexuality, gender, race and class yet they systematically do not hold themselves guilty. This is a serious challenge that is reinforced by existing patriarchal and other factors despite there are enough evidences that women perform as effective as men when offered the same opportunities in political offices. From the global south to the north, this phenomenon is a living reality hence only few countries can boldly identify themselves to have championed initiatives that ended such a deeply embedded political norm. Although this is a challenge into the twenty first Century, one can boldly argue that the problem of political inequality is perhaps as old as the institution and

practice of politics itself which has almost always been labeled as a game of men. Be it in democratic United States or in communist Cuba, there is not a single political entity that has broken all chains of political inequality hanged on the necks of their citizens based on social constructs.

As a result, women wear the burden of inequality in many societies. Women, according to UNICEF (2006) and UN Women (2008) tend to be more vulnerable to suffer from violence, discrimination and lesser representation than any other group in the world. Ranging from physical to political violence, women stand as the most affected victims with up to 35% of the female population experiencing some form of violence in their lives (UN Women 2013; WHO 2013). In addition, they are likely to suffer from poverty, have relatively lesser access to control national resources especially in the world's poorer regions and are mostly deprived of opportunities of schooling and improved health standards (United Nations Women 2011). In fact, the United Nations and several civil society organizations⁵ hold that women make the larger percentage of the approximate 1.5 billion people living under poverty around the world (Moghadam 2005; Chant 2006; UN Women 2000; Buvinic 1997). Even though the claim that 70% of all people living under poverty are women is a contested debate⁶ in the global development discourse, UNICEF (2006) has declared poverty having a feminine face⁷ hence its popularization of the saying, the “feminization of poverty”.

There is scholarly evidence that when women are voted and or entrusted with decision-making positions, women's interests, views, concerns and experiences are being better

⁵ Several civil society organizations that are engaged in the global fight against poverty such as Action Aid International, Oxfam, Catholic Relief Service, Concern Universal, Voluntary Service Overseas.

⁶ See UNDP 1995; DFID 2000; UNIFEM, 1995; ADB 2000 (cited in Chant 2007)

⁷ Fourth World Conference on Women (The Beijing Platform for Action Recommendations)

represented (Markham 2013; United Nations Women 2012; Coleman 2012; Dahlerup 2009; Lawless and Fox 2008; Edwards 2007; Dovi, 2002; Cornway 2001). As succinctly noted:

A central criterion in evaluating the health of democracy is the degree to which all citizens – men and women – are encouraged and willing to engage the political system and run for public office. More women in positions of political power confer a greater sense of political legitimacy to the government, simply by virtue of the fact that it better reflects the gender breakdown of the national population (Lawless and Fox 2008, 3).⁸

Similarly, in 2002, Susan Dovi provides a strong justification that “historically disadvantaged” groups which include minority tribal groups, races and women should be represented by members of those groups because it is through such representation that political institutions are legitimized, democratized and reflective of the needs of societies. However, in the UN Women’s first major publication on the global status of women, it reports that only 28% of all nations have reached or surpassed the 30% benchmark⁹ of women decision-makers as of 2011 (UN Women 2011). This might sound discouraging, but it is true that the last few years have in fact witnessed increased performance towards greater gender representation in the political sphere of many countries although at a much slower pace than desirable.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2013), women occupy only 21.4% of parliamentary seats in the world and are grossly under-represented at ‘high level’¹⁰ politics (United Nations Women 2011). This means that almost 80% of all parliamentary positions in the world are held by men. Out of the 45, 944 global parliamentarians recorded by the IPU in 2013, only 9, 608 are women. In Single or Lower Houses, women are 8, 204 out of the 38, 694

⁸http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2008/5/women%20lawless%20fox/05_women_lawless_fox.pdf

⁹Fourth World Conference on Women (The Beijing Platform for Action Recommendations)

¹⁰The term “high level” politics is often used to loosely describe top government organizations or positions especially at national or central levels such as ministers, parliamentarians, presidents, premiers and vice premiers.

parliamentarians (21.8%) while there are 1,404 women (19.4%) out of the 7,250 in Upper Houses or Senates around the world. On a regional level, the Asian region ranks quite lowly with regards to women in top political institutions as it is better than only the Arab and Pacific regions with 18.2% of all parliamentary positions held by women. In addition, Markham indicates that since 1950, only 80 women became leaders of their states excluding those with ceremonial duties through monarchs and other customary practices. Even with such an insignificant figure, most of the women ascend their positions through familial connections or “political dynasties” and as of 2012, only 10% of the world’s heads of state were women, meaning 20 women out of 193 (Markham 2013).

This is a serious human rights issue, an ethical subject as well test on equality and justice. Several factors are extended to explain the cause of this challenge. Cultural orthodoxies, religious practices, social norms, imbalance educational opportunities, and economic inequality are part of the several reasons why women are mostly sidelined from their country’s political domain. There is yet a country, reported by the World Economic Forum (2013), Markham (2013) and Yu and Liu (2010), in our world that has attained equality at all levels ranging from social to economic, political to cultural indicators between men and women. This is not the farce of our century but a reality that shows a deep rooted challenge that humanity has sustained for centuries of interactions. In a similar vein, in its World Development Report (2012), the World Bank says that the disparity that exists between men and women with regards to access and influencing the decision-making process of their societies has economic costs. The Bank further emphasizes that states that fail to improve gender equality directly loss an immense portion of talent and productivity from women, with a direct bearing on economic and social development performances of these nations.

Sometimes, the situation of gender inequality and its corresponding consequences are similar but due to cultural differences and socio-economic realities in various countries, there are also vast differences. In some nations, women have lesser or unequal opportunities like men to participate in politics. In others, they are treated as lesser or “second-class” citizens who have no say at all in determining their country’s¹¹ political life. These situations are a result of the statuses of men and women as different beings created from our social constructions of expectations, behaviors and roles assigned to them.

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN’S POLITICAL STATUS FROM A CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

The achievement of gender equality and the full realization of women’s potentials, argues the UNDP, are not only fundamental human rights that are to be promoted and protected, but these are imperative to the realization of sustainable development and global socio-economic security (UNDP 2013). Therefore, the status of Chinese women is an extremely important indicator in demographic, socio-economic and political terms for the country, Asia Pacific and the world. Other than the fact that China has the biggest number of women descendants (650 million) on earth (Attané 2012), the country’s level of political equality between men and women is an important indicator that could be regarded as a success story for a “new” China. In addition, it will also serve as an example to its neighbors in a region it perceives itself a “giant” (Yu and Liu 2010).

In 2007, Louise Edwards commented that, China’s gender performance in politics does not match even its socialist “cousins” anymore. Presently, it lags seriously behind some of those communist countries. Cuba is doing exceptionally well with regards to women’s parliamentary

¹¹ United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia as of 2013 have gender biased electoral laws that forbid women from participating in elections (cited in Markham 2013). Note the link of this situation to the lowest regional ranking of women’s political participation in the Arab World.

presence. In 2013, it ranked behind only Rwanda on the IPU global ranking with 48.9% of its parliamentarians as women (IPU 2013). This shows that socialist countries are capable of approaching gender parity in politics based on the practical sense of social justice than the general ideological approach of equality and a classless society.

If there is any country that could be defined as a success story for rapid economic and social advancement in the last quarter century, there is none better than China. A state that has emerged from a tumultuous history (Teiwes 2011) sixty-five years ago has captivated global attention as an economic giant and an epitome of human advancement in recent years. Measuring from this socio-economic perspective, it is without doubt that China has ‘risen’ and it is progressing without much challenge in a global down-turn for other bigger powers such as the United States (politically) and Japan (economically, as a long-time holder of the second position of our global wealth) (McCurry and Kollwe 2011).

If there is investment in the social and economic lives of women, it is imperatively significant for a matching investment in the political engagement of women especially at top level politics so that national policies reflect a wider representation of the needs of the society. This is extremely important to the country’s treatment of its women as important citizens who can meaningfully contribute to the progress of their country not only in economic, social and cultural terms but also politically. Chinese women and men, have varying degrees of opportunities with regards to family or community voices and resources. Its more than six million women continue to live under a deep patriarchal system but the authoritarian political system of their society further weakens their voices, limit their opportunities of access to important political institutions while traditionally defined gender responsibilities mostly pave way for the success of men.

Whatever gauge is used to measure the civility of China's unequal political treatment of its men and women, it is objective to accept the fact that other countries have gone and or are still going through similar level of political discrimination based on wealth, race or ethnicity, sex and gender. It is true that advancements have taken place in most cases but it must be noted that nations, as mentioned earlier, only perform better than the other in the advancement of the lives of women but none has achieved complete parity between men and women in all aspects of life. As a result, there is a global social mobilization that seeks to change this long lasting phenomenon.

This social movement has emerged around the world and it is championed by the United Nations and several non-government organizations that seek to radically change the position of women in politics. With China's opening to the world at the end of the 1970s, it means that there is a global lens on it with regards to the empowerment of its women. Indeed to be the "modern and a civilized state" the founding fathers and reformists aim to achieve, it is important that the Chinese state is critically involved in the global democratic movement (at least from the gender dimension) that seeks to revolutionize how women are able to participate in the decision-making processes of their nations and how they are able to affect policy outcomes that will have direct bearings on their lives.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

FACTORS THAT SHAPED WOMEN'S POLITICAL POSITION IN CHINA

This chapter looks at the factors that shape women's political status of women in China. I will analyze how women's low political access to top level politics is positioned within the socio-cultural, economic and political discourse from scholars who work on Chinese politics. In other words, I will examine the literature about factors responsible for women's political underrepresentation in top political institutions especially the PB, PBSC, CPPCC and the NPC, among others.

Of particular interests are the works of Zeng (2014); Attané (2012); Zheng, Yongnian and Zhao (2009); Howell (2006, 2003, 2002); Hershatter (2007); Edwards (2007); Ma (2009); Lin (2003) and Rosen (1995). The selected works are from diverse scholarly backgrounds covering history, anthropology, sociology, politics and feminism, among others. With the founding of the PRC, sixty five years ago, the ambition of emancipating women from a position of political irrelevance was an important item on the national agenda of the communist leaders. However, Attané (2012), Hershatter (2007), Edwards (2007), Howell (2006) and Su (2006) claim that women's empowerment especially in political terms, was more of a party propaganda and gender-based difference existed almost throughout the communist regime except during the radical anti-identity period of the Cultural Revolution.

In fact, Hershatter accuses the Communist Party of using women's position as an appeal to win the public's confidence. People were made to believe that the best strategy of modernizing the nation was through women's liberation. This, she says was an essential way of justifying the

party's demand for power. She has this to say: "the Communist Party, in particular, drew much of its power from its promise to rescue the nation from feudalism, imperialism, Japanese invasion and Guomindang oppression. [However] it subordinated the fate of women to that of the nation, and whenever raising the status of the nation, or its prospects for revolutionary transformation, gender equality was deferred" (Hershatter 2007, 80).

Even though a large pool of literature has surfaced since China's beginning of liberal economic reform but concentration on the political impact on women has been minimal says Howell (2006), although this is now changing. Anyway, the gender dimension in scholarly works has either taken a provincial-based research or only focused on selected villages like the works of Wang and Dai (2010); Su (2006) and Howell (2006). It is noticed that much focus has not been devoted to extensive studies on the most important political institutions of the Party-State, except in few cases such as Zeng 2014; Edwards 2007, Yu and Liu 2010 and Guo and Zhao 2010¹² and how this situation affects the lives of the millions of women within such a system. It is also noted that studies on the elite political institutions are not extensive by scope and the most detailed study was done by Rosen almost twenty years ago. Hershatter's 2007 work is not entirely devoted on elite level politics but she touches on the subject by devoting a whole section (88-93) that analyzes the relation between the CCP and women, but again, she too did not dwell on women's access to top political institutions as much as needed.

Support for a grassroots political activeness is indeed relevant as it fosters equality in the democratic process right from the ward or village. Secondly, it also challenges the stereotypes that have isolated women from the governance of their own communities. Finally, women can

¹² I categorized works based on contents that have touched high ranking political institutions even in a minimal context within a section or an entire section devoted to it.

have greater proximity to their political representatives and this provides an opportunity of articulation of their needs more directly and practically. It is needless to argue over the importance of these points but it is reasoned in this paper that there could be greater impact when women are able to take up more opportunities at the highest level of politics and not stationed to village cadres for their entire lives.

While I argue that high level political participation of women has a potential of breaking away from the norm of placing them in proximal grassroots politics that do not directly challenge masculine domination at top national institutions, Zeng (2014, 136) maintains that "... a broader participation in politics from grassroots female population is more important and fundamental". To an extent, Zeng's argument is relevant especially in a large population like China with a vast land scape of different levels of development needs and investment modalities. Perhaps she believes that micro-level participation of women carries more pragmatic response to their needs and justly represents their interests as discussed above.

In addition, she also argues that the ratio of women active in politics might only be reflective of their statuses and not representative. I quite disagree with this interpretation because political participation and accessing governance institutions freely without socially constructed barriers is first of all a fundamental right of the members of a society and this additionally shows how fair that society stands out. For the second reason, I partly agree that inasmuch as women's representation is encouraged, it does not always result to immediate results yet this will not stop the demands for equality in the determination of the society one belongs to.

Additionally, it is apparent that women's power base in rural China will unlikely create tremendous effects on the elites in Beijing. Further, it also mostly extends women's domestic

responsibilities into the public realm where they hardly compete with men over more prestigious responsibilities or positions. In those village committees, women's likelihood of serving as assistants or subordinate officers is more apparent than their greater and assertive control of real power in the face of more evident traditional limitations. In a similar vein, Hearshatter argues that village committee membership grants women to execute assigned familial roles of health improvement, child welfare and sanitation among others into the public arena. O'Brien claims that, village elections have shattered the political ambitions of women and those that manage to serve in committees are mostly assigned "the thankless job of enforcing family planning" (O'brien 2006, as cited in Edwards 2007, 382). Su (2006) shares a similar position as she argues that high level politics allow women to directly engage in the formulation of laws and policies that have bearings on their lives while they are able to exert "accountability" from the executive in their positions as parliamentarians for instance.

In other discussions, Jude Howell (2006, 2002) says that women at village level politics do not carry with them overwhelming power that could cause dramatic changes of state policies to their advantage, talk-less of their declining opportunities to serve in those committees since the introduction of competitive village elections at the end of the 80s. In fact, in as much they intend to challenge certain policies that undermine women's liberty and integrity, there is little opportunity of doing what is not assigned by the state or its agencies to some degree but worst with policies that might be perceived politically conflicting to the party's interest. This situation might be changing but the fact is that the CCP retains its political interests and in an extremely authoritarian way.

At the end of the 70s, China was led by Deng Xiaoping and opened its doors to the international community by reforming its economic structure (Whyte 2012; Ma 2009; Su 2006;

Lin 2003; Rosen 1995 & Fernandez n. d). This caused some radical changes in many aspects of living patterns in a society that once closed its borders to the international community for decades. It is evident that changing to a “state-led” liberal economy has indeed far reaching effects on the status of women as a class that has for long been disadvantaged even within a communist system than any other group. There is a near coincidence of China’s opening and a global women’s movement that left only few countries immune from the demands for a global emancipation of women. The women’s movement is shaking the walls of our world, moving beyond national borders and crossing frontiers into even closed societies no matter how little a size could be. China was among the first countries that in 1980 enacted the CEDAW (1979) of the UN, which is mostly seen as the “International Bill of Rights” for women (Attané 2012).

Anyway, this was preceded by national laws such as the 1954 constitution that guarantees equality for all citizens (Zheng, Guo & Zhao 2009; Yu & Liu 2010; Edwards 2007 & Su 2006). It is stated in Article 96 of the 1954 constitution that “women in the People’s Republic of China have equal rights with men in all spheres of life including the political, economic, cultural, social and family spheres” (Constitution of the People’s Republic of China 1954)¹³. In the same vein, Article 86 appropriates the eligibility of women to vote and be voted for when qualified. An additional law specific to women’s human rights was enacted in 1992 and not ignoring the fact that China has initiated at least two national gender policies on women’s advancement between 1995 and 2010 (Zheng, Guo & Zhao 2009).

In addition, affirmative actions were said to be initiated by the regime that urged women’s inclusion across all strata of political organizations to strengthen their representation in

¹³ A version of the constitution in English and Chinese is available here: <http://e-chaupak.net/database/chicon/1954/1954bilingual.htm>

politics. To achieve “more than one woman at the leading bodies of governments at all levels” (Yu & Liu 2010, 312) became the common rhetoric on affirmative action to place women at political ranks both satisfying a domestic political need and posing as a modern responsible state. As a result, China holds a mid-level position on the IPU global ranking of women in parliament¹⁴ remarkably because of the regime’s mandatory increase in women’s representation at provincial bodies. The proportion of women representatives to the NPC has increased from 20.2% to 21.3% from 2003 to 2008 due to such intervention (Zheng, Guo & Zhao 2009) and an additional rise to 23.4% in 2013 thus giving it sixty first position on the parliamentary ranking (IPU 2014).

There is still a wide gap in the political domain which is either treated as a reserved echelon for men and or women seen not to be prepared enough to face such responsibilities. This situation is worst in the highest political institutions of the country. China has sent at least two women to space but reaching its political high power-base has become almost out of vision for women for many years. Even though these affirmative actions are initiated and implemented to some degree, women’s active participation and access to elite structures are not encouraging. In addition, this increment is not a satisfactory trend for China, considering the widening gap between it and other nations (Zheng, Guo and Zhao 2009; Edwards 2007) it perceives itself to be equal to in international relevance. Similarly, Zeng (2014) argues that, overall the regime has not significantly improved its commitment of political parity but has initiated programs that will improve women’s status.

¹⁴ Selection to the NPC according to the 1982 Constitution is done through elections at provincial, municipal and regional autonomous levels and the armed forces once every five years. For more details, see Article 59 of the constitution here: http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Constitution/2007-11/15/content_1372965.htm

As discussed above, the CCP is criticized that it brought immense changes in the socio-economic advancement of China but it continues to do this in a masculine way. As cited in Li (2000), Stacey (1983) argues that the party has ushered new socio-economic and political systems since it came to power but it has failed to replace the existing traditional notions of men as natural leaders while women act as keepers of families. In addition, Hershatter also believes that the party is more concerned with its modernization mission than the improvement of the status of women. In fact, she says that the CCP was never interested in raising women's status but *concerned* with the relation of the state and society. This is a result of the party's interest of national development and creating a new state considered wealthy and modern where citizens are empowered through a socialist ideology. As a result, when women's emancipation conflicts with the interest of nationalism, it is women's interest that is forgone. In the words of Ma (2009, 21)

. . . [T]he CCP tie women's interests with class interests and put the struggle of gender equality in the broad context of class equality. Although one could argue that the CCP appropriated Chinese women's interests to advance its own political agenda, regardless of the motivation of the CCP in promoting gender equality, Chinese women's acquiescence legitimized the CCP's merging of the gender and class struggles.

This position of the Communist Party has historical connections to the country's feminist movement but perhaps this is less utilized as a theoretical framework for analysis. Women's empowerment in the Chinese perspective did not begin with an aggressive civil movement as in the United States, United Kingdom or France. The beginnings of Chinese women's struggle for emancipation is traced to the May 4th Feminist Movements when few urban elites predominantly men, demanded for a revival of the gender division of their society (Ma, 2009; Hershatter 2007; Li 2000 & Rosen 1995). This singular historical incident has perhaps shaped the state-gender

relation in no small way. Because unlike the movements in other countries led by women that challenged existing political disparity and traditionally gender structured ideologies, China's movement has been a peculiar one mostly led by men. This masculine and elite-centered approach is often accused of having other ulterior motives perceived to be achievable through increased female capability. This will enable them to pose China to the outside world as a modern and equal nation with liberated women who participate in national development (Hershatter 2007) than the aim of guaranteeing women gender equality in a society that has condoned inequality and suppression for thousands of years.

Furthermore, Ma (2009) asserts that the very notion of tying women's liberation to the achievement of another objective (in this case, building a modern and advanced China) is a classic case of exploitation. This very vision of socialist view of women's empowerment is challenged by some Western Feminists also. Notable among the critics was Catherine MacKinnon who argues that Marxist thinkers have not done any better than the Capitalists with regards to the emancipation of women as Marxism or Communism is a male dominated ideology whose concept of class does not alter inequality between men and women. "Feminists charged that Marxism is male defined in theory and in practice, meaning that it moves within the world view and in the interest of men" (MacKinnon 1982, 518). In fact, she says that the "working-class" movements undervalue women's economic contribution. Their labor contribution in the society is often ignored and women are vulnerable in capitalism in the same way as in Marxism.

Conversely, Marxists also accuse the feminist movement of a class struggle that seeks to empower urban and educated (elite) women at the expense of others- the very practice against the Marxist idea of a classless society. The communist party saw women's empowerment whether in politics or otherwise to be imbedded within a larger engagement of national

development, where women's status will automatically improve through a national achievement of progress. What the State-Party still does not grasp is the fact that women's liberation is achieved through gender-responsive strategies at all levels of governance and not a mere achievement of economic growth results to the full empowerment of citizens. Placing women in the center of power will enable them to better represent their interests especially in a liberal economy that is still state controlled.

On the other hand, Zhao and Guo (2010) say that China does not lack 'high-profile' female politicians. The authors justify this claim because of the ranking of former Chinese Vice-Premier Wu Yi in *Forbe's* "100 Most Powerful Women" at second position in 2007. Indeed this achievement is worthy of recognition but it could also be argued that a single woman's position as an influential figure does not provide enough justification to assume that Chinese women have equal political footing with men. The use of Wu as an indicator of women's political achievement in China only provides a blurred reality of the political irrelevance millions of women face daily either as deputies or assistants to men superiors or designated to positions related to social welfare. In a similar vein, such an assertion could have been applied to the "Mother of the Nation", Soong Ching-Ling (wife of former revolutionary leader Sun Yat-Sen) who was named an Honorary President of the country shortly before her death (Snyder 1999). As emphasized above, it is indeed worthy of recognition for women who have reached important political positions especially in traditionally male dominated positions or institutions but without caution, it could blur the reality about the under-representation that many others faced in the same society.

Furthermore, the authors add that there is advancement in the proportion of women's participation at all levels of politics due to the immense change the economic reform brought

along. “The progress in the level of women’s political participation can be attributed to the economic reform and open door policy introduced in China in 1978. Women’s political inclusion has greatly benefitted from various gender-related institutions and policies . . . and specific rules spelt out in various documents relating to personnel appointments by the Central Organization Department of the CCP” (Guo and Zhao 2010, 51). These achievements, they argue are a result of the reform that enabled women to be more aware of their individual human rights which inevitably results to the granting of political rights due to their economic status within a liberal competing economy. Despite these arguments, authors like Bo (2010), Howell (2006), Su (2006) and Rosen (1995) have pointed that; relatively China has not advanced quite well in the representation of women in high level political institutions.

In addition, Zeng (2014), Guo and Zhao (2010) and Zheng, Guo and Zhao (2009), say that the Party-State initiated a human rights program in 2009 that specifically promotes women’s participation in politics. An allocation of 20% of reserved cadres in the provinces, cities and counties was initiated which has great impact on the NPC and CPPCC for instance. However, there was no establishment of a similar initiative at the very core of power such as the Politburo or its Standing Committee. If there should be a genuine political empowerment of women, it has to be across all levels of the governance structure and not merely at provincial levels or below with little power over the policies that might be of interest to the male dominated central power in Beijing. Su (2006, 147) has this to say:

“. . . Chinese politics are quite resilient. The Party-State remains highly centralized and bureaucratized. . . Political leaders in the Party-State establishment are the real movers and shakers. Their preferences and interests determine what kind of issues are on the agenda, how policies are designed and whether or not policies are implemented”.

From this general background, I will now discuss the politico-economic and socio-cultural factors that have shaped China's gendered politics. Below, is a discussion on political orientation and culture, the political "glass ceiling" and patriarchal behaviors within the Chinese political system, among others.

First of all, through much of its narrative, China has always been labeled as a highly sexist and patriarchal society where women and men's lives constituted vast differences with regards to responsibilities, expectations and statuses within the family, community and the larger society (Zeng 2014; Attané 2012; Yu & Liu 2010; Ma 2009; Hershatter 2007; Edwards 2007; Hull 2006 & Rosen 1995), although fluctuations happened especially during Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution period (1966-76). This patriarchal preference could exist almost throughout an individual's lifespan where men mostly receive privileged treatment right from birth throughout their lives. This is because of their relatively potential social and economic standings for their families in the future. In Hershatter's (2007) work *Women in China's Long Twentieth History*, she observes that Chinese women generally have been over-shadowed by a strong male dominance for thousands of years. Women were mostly pushed into responsibilities of caring and shaping families while men were socialized to take up positions of governance, security and the economy both at village and national levels. Again, she argues that this provided an unbalanced platform for Chinese women to have relevant control and or influence over matters of governance whether in the family or beyond.

Secondly, the Chinese orientation about politics is similar to the classical period of Western political philosophy when politics was positioned as a public realm that mostly fits men's roles as public figures but do not match women's position as private and domesticated individuals (Tolleson-Rinehart & Carroll 2006; Okin 1998). As mentioned above, this has

reinforced the belief that men are naturally fit for leadership and have inherent rights to access public offices while women are naturally expected to serve in the private realm of child birth and rearing for instance. This is no difference in other cultures such as in the Arab world or as far as Africa. Women's political ability has been subjected to great ridicule from the beginnings of political debates led by philosophers such as Aristotle, Hobbes, Lock or Rousseau (Okin 2013, 1998) to present-day practice in many societies.

Contemporary cultural prophets and custodians of tradition have also in many ways reinforced the allocation of a public-private relation between men and women. A result of which is the woman's un-bargained location in the "private" in most civilizations and China is not an exception. These factors have resulted to women's underrepresentation in politics across all spheres and worst at the central level. The very notion that Chinese society is engendered in a way that positions women within the internal realm of human interactions (like within the household) and legitimize men's appropriate location in the outer realm justifies the domination of women in more important political institutions. Perhaps nothing has laid the foundation of this political discrimination more than the 'nu zhu nei, nan zhu wai' ('women live inside, men outside') belief (Howell 2006, 609) which has a similar meaning in Yu and Liu's interpretation of traditional Chinese idioms that say superiors, breadwinners and leaders are men while women serve as the opposite.

Thirdly, like most religious and traditional values supportive to patriarchy, China has its own version, mostly expressed in Confucius beliefs (Attané 2012; Yu & Liu 2010; Howell 2006; Hershatter 2007 & Li 2000) that provide women lesser opportunities to explore a world beyond natal and marital boundaries. It is not uncommon to hear feminists claim that perhaps all religions; and philosophical beliefs (Okin 1998, 2013) treat their women as secondary citizens or

by its famous name: “second-class citizens”. From Islam to Christianity, Judaism to Hinduism, religions are accused of positioning women to be subservient and where necessary, pave the way for the success of men at their own expense. The “feudal” belief only perpetuates and reinforces inequality between the sexes treating one as capable while the other is unfitting for some of the demands of leadership, if not leadership in its entirety. The perception that women are weak, passive, lack self-esteem, confidence and experience (Zeng 2014; Yu & Liu 2010; Hershatter 2007; Edwards 2007 & Rosen 1995) have resulted to a political culture that segregates and have positioned women in most of society’s domestic realm or place them at the bottom of the political ladder.

In this case, the Chinese society has also witnessed an environment for women’s political marginalization because of the family’s central position in Confucian belief (Zeng 2014; Yu & Liu 2010; Chang 2009; Hershatter 2007 & Howell 2006) and it has a lasting impact on Chinese gender relations. Li (2000, 31) argues that the beginning of “the most systematic, institutionalized and deep-rooted sexist ideologies and practices in China originated from the philosophy of “filial piety” of Confucius (551-479 B.C.)” who believed that women were subjects answerable to men. Ma (2009, 21) also says that “Confucian philosophy [therefore] helped maintain the patriarchal social order in China for thousands of years”. Further, Howell reiterates that the low level of women’s access and participation in politics is a result of both tangible and intangible traits of inequality between the two genders,

“the dominant explanation given for women’s numerical underrepresentation in village committees and in politics more generally, focuses on women’s lack of self-confidence, which inhabits them from standing as candidates and on the enduring drag of ‘feudal’ attitudes, which constructs women as inferior to men and therefore not capable of leadership” (Howell 2006, 603).

According to the constituents of the ‘filial piety’, women must be obedient to men, citizens to their rulers and the young to the elderly. At the individual level, women’s case seems to be more serious as they are expected to be obedient to their fathers before marriage; to their husbands during marriage and to their sons during widowhood (Chang 2009; Hershatter 2007). As a result, “for thousands of years, the rules of these three obedience helped maintain the patriarchal social order in China” (Li 2000, 31).

Despite these arguments, it is important to note that China through the Cultural Revolution had aimed for the abolition of all forms of religions perceived as old traditions and practices in replacement of a modern communist state¹⁵ (Zhong 2013; McLeister 2008; Li 2001; Zuo 1999). Some of these scholars observe what China experienced was a blatant attack on all forms of religious practices both materially and spiritually. Temples, Churches and Mosques, among others were not only destroyed but religious leaders and scholars were murdered, displaced or turned into farmers as if there were no other belief to worship other than Chairman Mao’s ideology. However, most of the dominant religious beliefs especially those associated with Confucianism either found their way back to the society or they actually never disappeared. This shows the fact that in as much as culture is said to be dynamic, it could also be hard to change especially if the society is more inclined to it than welcoming newer forms of living styles imposed on their livelihoods. This means that the Cultural Revolution which is said to have increased women’s direct participation in politics because China perhaps have reached the highest point of its revolution for a classless and uniform society was a short lived reality. The

¹⁵ The CCP has always been suspicious of religion that could pose threats to its political ambition. The Communist leaders have also alleged religious beliefs to be dogmatic and threatening to the attainment of a “modern” and “progressive” nation. In addition, atheism is the doctrine of the CCP and members are forbidden from religious affiliation. This party requirement is the most important indicator to understand the party’s sensitivity to religion from contemporary human rights approach to religious freedom. For details, see: (Clark 2014; Hornemann 2012; Lambert 1992).

change did not last since women's empowerment was not the objective of a politically motivated movement that aimed to sustain Chairman Mao's political ambition than a true commitment to equality and justice.

In addition, the social meaning of friendship and networking could be disadvantage to politically ambitious women in China. While men can have social ties with both sexes, women are expected to be virtuous, maintain cordial relations and free from promiscuous tendencies should they be given enough respect in whatever career paths they may want to choose. Taking the culture of "hanging out" and drinking as a normal part of Chinese social life for instance, gives women lesser opportunities of making political allies and networks as men Howell (2006). Cochrane et al. (2003) also say that social drinking is used as a strategy of reinforcing friendship, business ties and other relations which could be political too. Interestingly, Howell says that a woman is expected to safeguard her integrity not to interact too openly with men not proximal to her family should she be taken seriously in her leadership/political career or ambition. This expectation of satisfying a certain level of virtuousness, she says, while it denies women the opportunity of making the relevant social capital for their political ambitions, cause them a double lost. In her words,

"[A]t stake here is political cultural practices such as heavy drinking, toasting and smoking, which function to nurture and consolidate bonds of male solidarity and are interpreted as indicators of leadership ability. These practices pose a problem for women leaders as smoking and drinking are in general seen as inappropriate for women and undermine their reputation" (2006, 616).

Furthermore, the political "glass ceiling" (or what Howell calls the "bamboo ceiling" in a local context) is one of the most pervasive discriminatory cultures within the global political

system. China is not immune to this problem and some authors¹⁶ have examined how its existence is still an obstacle to women's career advancement whether in politics or in the corporate world. The political "glass ceiling" is defined as existing barriers that pose challenges for people, especially minorities and women to achieve advancement on the political ladder (Zeng 2014). The obstacles are seen as "invisible" barriers but they pose stratifications which unable women to break easily. This is a serious challenge as it delegitimizes the contributions of the affected individuals and could possibly render them un-useful.

The discriminations, Howell (2006) says are not only limited to the institutional strata where women are constantly expected to serve in subsidiary positions but some of the women in village political institutions receive lesser remuneration than men and have little or no chances of gaining pension benefits. At the upper echelons of power, the same institutional biasness takes place and could be even worse. Even during the height of communism, Yu and Liu (2010), Howell (2006) and Rosen (1995) report that only a handful of women served in the CCP's Politburo and all of those who did, gained their entrance through their husbands. Madam Mao and Ye Qun (the wife of Mao's then heir apparent) were the only two women in the Politburo between 1956 and 1977.

Moreover, regime type is an important determinant of women's activeness or passiveness in politics. It might be argued that democracy do not always represent the interests of women, neither does it fully guarantee those interests to be priotized in national development but its creation of a political environment for a likely equal contest of power makes the possibility of women's voices to be heard. In addition, responsive regimes and elected leaders that are both accountable and transparent to their citizens can provide better chances of guaranteeing diverse

¹⁶ In the corporate context, which is also similar to the political, see Cotter et al (2001); Mercer (2006); John 2013

interests and participation. Because elected leaders in democracies might face domestic demands from their citizens and the continuous failure of satisfying expectations might lead to their loss of political offices, they could be more pressured to be attentive than otherwise.

Under communist, theocratic or hybrid authoritarian-democratic leadership, women have found themselves within a serious web of inconsistent political interests and relations with the regime. Mentioned elsewhere, the CCP has historically used women's advancement as a strategic mechanism of achieving its socio-economic and political goals through ideological campaigns of equality and strong articulations in favor of women's political leadership for the "interest" of the nation. These behaviors however do not last because as soon as the objectives are achieved, the party either encourages women to go back to their previous responsibilities as wives or daughters or re-introduce other forms of ideological campaigns counter-productive to their previous stance (Zeng 2014; Hershatter 2007 & Howell 2006). Therefore, the relationship between the communist party and women is an overwhelmingly important variable to determine how gender plays and will continue to do so in a "new" or different China that sees itself as a modern and open society yet finds it extremely difficult to shake-off its communist beliefs and values.

An additional social factor, that constraints women's vibrancy in politics is the gender-division of labor. This causes strictly socially defined functions and expectations for the sexes (Zeng, 2014 & Okin 1998). Mentioned elsewhere, Okin says that as women become the subjects of domesticity and privacy, it has become a social norm that they are entirely left with the position to provide chores related to such status in the majority of households. This she says has to do with their economic positions especially when they earn less than men or depend entirely on them for sustenance. This results to the difficulty to break the vicious cycle of homemaking and keeping as if they were lifetime contracts for women. In certain cases, women's contribution

to family upkeep might be more prioritized than political engagements (Zeng 2014) especially in traditional or communal societies that gauge the success of off-springs based on the grooming they receive from their mothers to become “good” citizens in the future.

In the local context, this ideological concept was catastrophic to women’s earlier education in China- although it still exists in rural areas (Hershatter 2007). She also says that even when they access education, women were not intellectually prepared to become leaders or in certain cases, the education of male children was prioritized. The preparation of girls to be skillful in home management only creates a foundation of a lifelong commitment to the success of others rather than an individual woman’s personal success. Anyway, Zeng (2014) makes a different observation that women being “overload” with the responsibilities of the home makes them more unavailable than incapable as political actors. This she says is a matter of availability than capability.

This points to the unfair social division of labor because when the tasks of the household limit women from engaging in political life, it means that their voices, experiences, interests or needs are being negotiated by members outside their group and the guarantee of their interests becomes slimmer than if they had the opportunity of directly shaping public policies and investment. When women are deliberately subordinated within households and relegated to positions of cooks and gardeners, they will have little if any opportunity of deciding how the governance system should be accountable to the other half of the national population. Therefore, the social division of labor has serious implications on women’s political standing from whatever angle one views it from.

“Men are assumed to be chiefly preoccupied with and responsible for the occupations of the sphere of economic and political life, and women with those of the private sphere of domesticity and reproduction. Women

have been regarded “by nature” to be both unsuited for the public realm and rightly dependent on men and subordinated within the family” (Okin 1998, 118).

Finally, although these points have been extensively pointed out through much of the analysis above, none sums up the cultural and social barriers that disable women’s full enjoyment of political rights better than Feminist Jeanne Kirkpatrick:

Like men, women gain status for effective, responsible performance of culturally sanctioned roles. Any effort to perform roles assigned by the culture of the opposite sex is likely to result in loss of status on the sex specific status of the ladder. The values in which women are expected to concentrate are those of affection, rectitude, wellbeing; the skills relevant to the pursuit of these values are those associated with nurturing, serving and pleasing a family and community; home making . . . , nursing the ill comforting the downcast, aiding and pleasing a husband. It is assumed furthermore that these activities will consume all a women’s time, that to perform them well is both a fulltime and a lifetime job (Kirkpatrick 1974, cited in Palmer & Simon, 2008, 3).

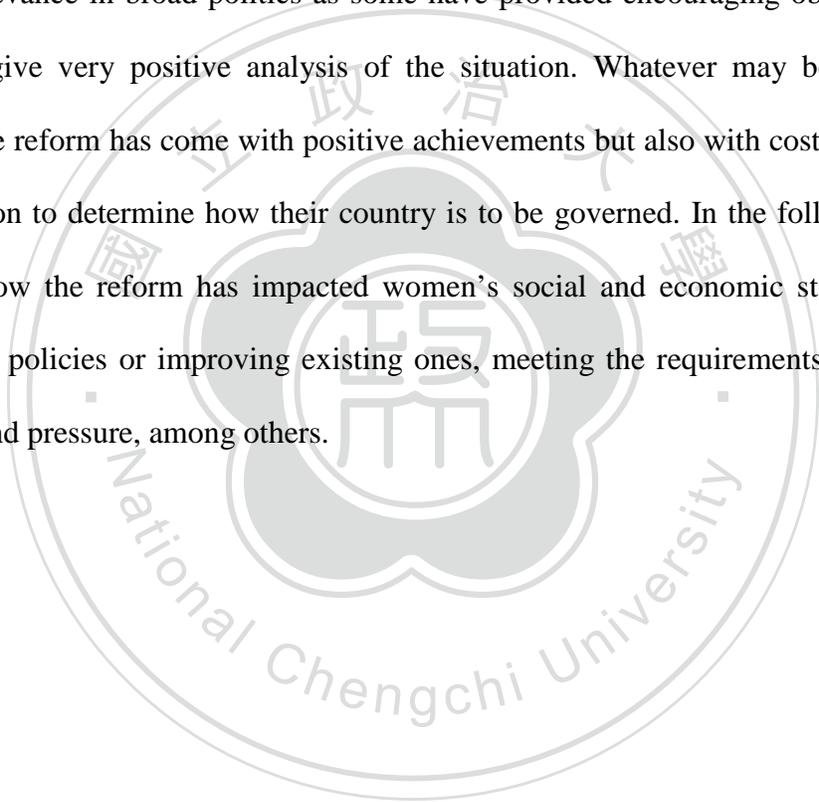
Moreover, women’s disadvantaged position in the economic realm has long been established by scholars and feminists (Zeng 2014; Attané 2012; Doris 2009; Hershatter 2007; Lin 2003; Okin 1995; Moller 1998) either demonstrated in the gender-pay gap, the preference of male employment or the inability to work outside the home because of religious or other factors. Economic activeness and independence are crucial indicators of women’s access to political institutions. Although economic standings might not readily provide an opportunity of equal influence over political organizations, but it provides women greater access to qualify for the needed resources to partake in competitive politics (Markham 2010; Okin 1998). In the absence of such, the economic advantaged position of men results to an imbalance of who has the gateway to political success than the other. This is especially possible in countries where there is absence of institutional arrangements that offer equality of all citizens to freely participate in politics either as voters or candidates without the eminent consideration of economic position.

Zeng (2014) points out that an improvement of the economic status of Chinese women might not automatically yield to greater control over politics. In fact, she further says that Chinese women hold up to 25% of senior positions at managerial levels as of 2012 and are outperforming women in more developed countries such as the United States, United Kingdom and Japan, among others. Contrary to this position, Attané and Lin enunciate that women's economic position has improved but only fairly with a mixture of progress and regression since 1978. This is a result of the shift from state protective economic practices in communist or socialist systems to new forms of semi-withdrawal in the capitalist competitive system. While women could have sought for the state's paternal protection outside the home while they work in national industries, they are not guaranteed such protection when hired by private companies. In addition to these, the lack of strong labor unions that exert influence on the regime or corporate organizations puts women to be in the exploitative position than men.

Having said these, it must also be noted that China's constitutions and the specific laws on gender equality have guaranteed an equal participation in politics despite people's economic standing. On an important note, many of the works examined here do not provide cases of monetary politics. At the grassroots and central levels that is no literature on practices that might disadvantage women to pursue the trust of voters both at village level or wooing the top elites for political connections and networking. In spite of this, there is ample scholarship (Whyte 2012; Pei 2006; Walder 2004; Lui 2006; Lu 2000; Steidlmeier 1999 & Liu 1983) on China's political elites and corruption and the use of political office to safeguard the interest of private business tycoons within one's networks and vice versa.

The discussion above provides an understanding of women's political standing in China. Of importance is the fact that the economic reform has positioned women in a political situation

that needs a mixture of state intervention and civil society activeness to create an equal level field between men and women. In the presence of policies and laws, there seem to be a weak sense of commitment for women's true advancement in politics. On the other hand, while China is preoccupied to be modern by all definitions of this concept, it remains a bastion of strong traditional beliefs and practices that are disadvantaged to the pursuance of gender equality. From this literature examination, it is somehow apparent that scholars do not agree on a unique status of women's relevance in broad politics as some have provided encouraging observations while others do not give very positive analysis of the situation. Whatever may be the case, it is apparent that the reform has come with positive achievements but also with costs that undermine women's position to determine how their country is to be governed. In the following chapter, I will examine how the reform has impacted women's social and economic status through the creation of new policies or improving existing ones, meeting the requirements of international commitments and pressure, among others.



CHAPTER THREE

This chapter looks at the way the reform has affected women's social and economic standings. How indicators such as equal access to education, health care and employment have fared in the interest of women will be examined and how these opportunities have provided for a greater political relevance and power for women. It seems that without the economic reform of the 1970s, these indicators would have remained less gender-oriented and sensitive in a typical communist setting. In addition, when women are economically empowered and self-reliant as men, it opens better chances of influencing national policies, especially when they have greater stakes in political consultations, wider representation and the required resources to form new political parties or movements and directly contest in elections. Greater social and economic standing also increases women's ability to mobilize and partner with existing political groups to work together in the promotion of their interests.

These opportunities remain less impossible, without the existence of concrete and effective local gender equality laws and policies in combination with international gender norms and agreements that support women's empowerment. What follows below is a joint analysis of domestic and external institutions, policies and arrangements that have effects on women's relevance in politics. While section one looks at domestic changes in relation to education and other indicators, the second part deals with two important international institutions or agreements that have affected the status of women in China. There are no better tools than reviewing China's hosting of the FWCW and its relation with the agreements that emerged from this conference. The second one is the CEDAW as the most authoritative international legal agreement on the human rights of women.

SECTION ONE

THE REFORM AND CHINESE WOMEN'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS

To a great extent, women and girls' social and economic positions have progressed in contemporary times (Attané 2012; Su 2006). There are more Chinese girls in school today and they stay longer than before (Lawson 2008). In addition, access to higher and tertiary education are among the most sustainable and effective opportunities of empowerment that can make exceptional outcomes in the lives of women. When women achieve higher education, it gives them opportunities of self-reliance, greater voice in governance and they become more assertive in demanding for equality. However, Attané notes that despite the efforts in closing the sex-ratio gap in recent years, China is still faced with educational inequality.

Hershatter also gives a similar picture about the gender gap in education especially in rural areas when parents are faced with the challenge of rising tuition and other costs- the result of which is almost always the preferential investment in sons as future breadwinners, sustainers of family lineages and individuals who are not destined to be married out of the family circle. As usual, valuing men's potential economic and social positions has serious bearings on women. When there is evident male preference even to the slightest extent in education, it could have lasting consequences on the future independence of women. In the end, this could add to their suffering from the challenge of unequal decision-making capacity within the family and also pose a direct threat to individual freedom in the larger society.

Similarly, Lin (2003) says some analysts provide disturbing scenarios of severe gender gaps in the employment sector as women and men's level of academic qualification do not carry equal weight thus increasing women to face the daunting challenge of job insecurity in a liberal

economy. She further reports a common discriminatory saying within the country's institutions of higher learning: "a saying is widespread in China's university campuses that an M.A. for female is worth a B.A. for male, and a Ph.D. for female is worth an MA for male" (Lin 2003, 88). However, women are said to be holding high positions in the country's corporate domain as Chief Executive Officers (Ma 2009) heading national and private enterprises. China has created several millionaires and billionaires (Whyte 2012) since its economic liberalization, and among them, there are several women who rely on personal skills to excel without reliance on feudal rules or connections to advance their economic positions. These women are called by Attané (2012, 8) as "Mistresses of their own personal and professional choices".

The economic reform has provided both rural and urban women an opportunity of financial exploration but the breakthrough for rural women's movement from homes and farmlands where they have been 'bonded' for years is indeed remarkable. Millions of rural women have relocated to the urban area and some have invested in personal businesses to be economically empowered and independent according to Lin (2003). Other than the urban millionaires, individual rural women are also breaking the poverty cycle by investing in small and medium scale businesses right in their villages.

In another version, Hershatter (2007) believes that the reform has a hidden yet open truth about the feminization of rural agriculture when men leave their families in search of greener pastures in the cities. As more male members of the family relocate nearer to factories and other centers of economic activities, rural households need to replace their labor in farming for sustenance. Therefore, sisters, daughters, wives and daughters-in-law become the most reliable source of labor for the provision of food for families. Therefore, Hershatter says that while more

men are encouraged to relocate for better economic opportunities in cities, more women are turning to unprofitable farming to feed their families.

Furthermore, Lin (2003) gives perspectives on women's inequality in the work sector, their vulnerability to labor exploitation and being extremely at risk of layoffs where the need arise. In addition, Kaufman (2012) says that female graduates find it tougher to get jobs than their male counterparts as employers strategically want to avoid extra costs on reproductive health rights and needs such as paying for maternity vacation or support. Again, these gender-based discriminations, Hershatter says, are related to the concepts of labor division between men and women- as more emphasis is placed on the domestic roles of women. These vulnerabilities are encircled within social and cultural beliefs that mostly treat women's financial earning as secondary even though their economic contribution to household financial security is evident in many societies.

Therefore, the reformation has put women in dual positions of access to economic progress so long as they are able to compete within a capitalist system while this situation does not end the social discriminations they are prone to. Perhaps none sum it better than Beaver, Hou and Xue (1995, 205): "Economic reforms, introduced in 1978, have brought new prosperity to China. However, along with new wealth has come renewed discrimination against women. Old Chinese patriarchal values have resurfaced and new values from capitalism have emerged, despite laws dictating women's equality and the terms of women's liberation". When trade unions are weak, government emphasis are placed on economic productivity than pressuring employers to adhere to standard labor conditions and the respect for labor rights, exploitation becomes widespread and the weaker carries the heaviest of the burdens these challenges come along with.

Other social goods such as improved health care have also increased to a great extent and this has a direct bearing on women's advancement. Improved women's wellbeing is directly related to their ability to participate effectively in their society's public life. Stein (2000) says that women's socio-economic subordination affects their status of health across the world. Therefore, a wealthier investment that boosts women's health indicators will directly give them the opportunities to critically take part in the governance process without being bothered by vulnerabilities that have hindered the level of women's political activism in other parts of the developing world. If women are bothered about the health of their children because of weak health systems, other duties, such as the exercise of their political rights or responsibilities usually become secondary.

Lifespans, according to Whyte (2012) have increased greatly, with more people living longer and healthier. Significant gains have been achieved around crucial indicators such as child survival and reduction of maternal mortality (Attané 2012) but these have happened unevenly between the rural and urban areas. She also adds that access to health care is institutionalized in a way that boys have greater access to medical needs than girls thus making China among few countries where girl child mortality is still higher than that of boys. Sex-selection abortion still happens and this marks the beginning of gender-based violence for the girls that are selectively aborted. The national family planning policy has indeed contributed to this situation. This practice represents the deeply entrenched favor for masculinity and sexism. Within the family, it starts right at birth in determining the fate of off-springs and this has notable impacts on their future lives. I will now turn to the second section, which looks at the effects of the CEDAW and the FWCW on China as two important events intended to radically change the lives of women around the world in the late 20th Century onwards.

SECTION TWO

THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN (FWCW) AND THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)

Beijing was stormed with one of the biggest global meetings of the century to mark the Fourth World Conference on Women from September 4th to 15th 1995 (United Nations 1996). From the Mexico Conference to the Nairobi conference in Africa, perhaps the momentum for Beijing was an extra ordinary one both from the volume of participation (government representatives, NGO representatives, human rights groups, women's organizations and media personnel) as well as the moral spirit about the event. Different reasons might be responsible for this but it certainly was an opportunity for a turning point in the global women's empowerment movement. Perhaps fascination about the oriental culture of Asia, coupled with the fact that China was perhaps at the peak of its socio-economic reform which has captivated the world. An opportunity emerged for it to lead while it also listen to the world about what commitments are mostly needed for the advancement of women in all spheres across the globe.

New issues emerged on the global agenda on women's empowerment; there was need for lessons to be learnt and success stories to be shared about commitment in building a world where men and women are equals. Gender activists and human rights promoters were prepared in no small way to make their demands to national governments despite what position one holds on the global political stage. What mattered in Beijing was to get national leaders listen and act as demanded in making the twenty first century a promising one for women to be free from destitute, political isolation and cultural exploitation.

To an extent, China really did listen. A turning point happened in domestic activism. Demands for gender equality became a business not only entrusted with the state but more civil society activism emerged than before. It is said that even China's relatively weak bureau responsible for women's issues- All China Women's Federation- a government mass organization entrusted with women's wellbeing became more active (Howell 2003) if not a little assertive. The Beijing conference was special for many reasons. Corpus (1995) provides a critical appraisal of the event because of the low participation of global leaders. According to her, only two heads of state were reportedly in attendance in such an important forum. She also laments the fact that top government officials who were sent as representatives, were either women or individuals who work in sectors related to *women's issues*.

However, a fleet of civil society organizations including human rights groups, religious institutions, the media, academics and researchers, among others stormed China for an event that had the capacity of changing the status of women from economic inequality or vulnerability and political injustice to that of empowered citizens. Estimates put the NGO forum at 50, 000 participants (Tarr-Whelan 2010) while 189 governments around the world were represented by 5,000 people. One might argue that China's political setting does not match with the kinds of demands that were motivating these participants or the resolutions that were put forward. Whatever the case, Beijing took up an international responsibility to show how China is sensitive towards gender equality and justice, "the equality between men and women is the fundamental policy of China" president at the time, Jiang Zemin, declared (cited in Guo and Zhao 2010, 53).

Some critics have noted that the attempt for hosting the FWCW was a political strategy to mend its international "face" after the shameful Tiananmen incident (Rosen 1995). A similar explanation but from a different perspective is provided by Bo (2012) who says that the

suppression of the students subsequently caused a strife both within the party and the nation which somehow almost led to the collapse of the CCP. Meaning, there was need for a swift action to regain both domestic and external trust of the state. Anyway, Chinese politicians are tactful in managing dissent, the regime, aware of the potential demonstrations of NGOs in global meetings; it wisely moved the NGO forum away from the government venue for twenty miles (Grant 2013). This however, did not stop the civil society representatives from their demanding nature.

Whatever reason must have been China's motivation to host the event, scholars have said that tangible impacts have emerged which have affected both the state and the ACWF's approach towards women's advancement especially with regards to the exercise of political rights and freedoms. The agreements reached in Beijing were basically additional demands for a better world where women's participation in all matters of life should be accelerated to meet the status of men. It has been acknowledged in the Beijing Declaration that even though some achievements have been registered, serious "obstacles" persist to limit progress. "Strategic Objective and Action 6" of the Beijing Platform for action was specifically devoted to address women's low participation or access to power and decision-making establishments of their states.

At the global level, women's human rights becomes a business of the majority of countries (Coleman 2005) and to a great extent, women's empowerment have featured in foreign policies and many of the development programs initiated in the world's least developed economies. A renewed focus on women's position in Chinese politics became an important policy and research area by scholars and practitioners (Wang 1996). Perhaps the CCP became more attentive to women's matters by relaxing to some extent with regards to the formation of advocacy groups. As a result of the FWCW, an additional eighteen women's groups were formed

in China (Liu 2013). She further says that domestic gender equality activism became more tolerant and somehow widespread and the impact of the conference was even felt more on China than other democracies like India.

In the words of Guo and Zhao (2010, 52), “following the 1995 conference, the Chinese government has been systematically supporting women’s political rights”. The authors claim an increased responsiveness from the regime, examples of which include the amendments of the 1992 women’s rights law in 2005 by explicitly giving responsibilities to the state for the selection and training of female cadres to accelerate women’s political participation. In addition, a national policy on women’s development was initiated in 1995; a subsequent form in 2000 followed and in 2009, there was another strategic action plan that demands that “congresses, peoples’ consultative conferences and governance institutions at all levels” are required a female member in leadership positions (Guo & Zhao, 53). True, it might be baseless to argue that women workers in government institutions did not spur but the authors seem to exaggerate the impacts on elite politics. Increase of the percentage of female parliamentarians seem to be gradual than dramatic during the aftermath of the FWCW.

The absolute objective during the Beijing Conference was the demand for “parity” between men and women, even though it popularized the 30% critical benchmark (temporal affirmative solution) for women to occupy in institutions. It is recommended by the conference that all governments initiate such minimum target in their legislatures and other bodies because “without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved”, Article 181 of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Finally, there is no denial that the FWCW has affected the CCP's orientation about women's causes. No matter how little the scale might be; hosting the biggest event of the decade and the last of its kind in the century has reminded the regime about its responsibility to consider the slogan of the conference "women's rights are human rights". New policies were formulated, organizations emerged and more women became politically active even though the "deputy" phenomenon (employing women as assistants to male leaders) became very evident (Wang 1996). I will now analyze how the CEDAW has provided any support for women's political participation in China.

Moving to the CEDAW, China was instrumental to be among the first signatories of this convention (Attané 2012; UN Women n.d.). It has been noted by scholars and advocates of gender equality that women's political activism, representation and influence depends on varying factors and key among them is the availability of both domestic and global laws or agreements. For many of these practitioners and organizations, the CEDAW is perhaps the biggest achievement that has created a legal "gender norm" to build national institutions both formal and informal to guarantee gender equality in all spheres without reservation.

Often referred to as the "International Bill of Rights for Women", the CEDAW has similar objectives with the agreements that emerged out of the Beijing Conference except that it is legally binding on its signatories. Since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration for Human Rights in 1948, there are several international laws and agreements that followed. Most of those that deal with women are either for protection from subordination or requires some sort of empowerment to enable them achieve parity with men but none seemed to be as holistic as the CEDAW.

The adoption of this convention in 1979 brought about some changes both at the domestic and global level as state parties are held more accountable to the requirements of the agreement. It even has recommended strategies on how to achieve the objectives stated in the agreement. Cook (1990, 643) describes it as:

[The] definitive international legal instrument requiring respect for and observance of the human rights of women; it is universal in reach, comprehensive in scope and legally binding in character. ...came into force in September 1981 after ratification by the twentieth state party. This was within two years of its adoption, faster than any previous human rights convention had come into force.

It is said to be one of the most globalized UN legal agreements that has been adopted by 188 nations on earth (UN Women n. d). CEDAW has guaranteed the full enjoyment of the rights of women in politics, economics, social and cultural lives without any sort of discrimination both in public and private. Therefore, the political dimension of the convention is of relevance to this study. According to Article 7 of the convention;

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;

(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

Indeed the ambition of the convention is both convincing and needed. While existing legal policies that specify equality in a society or special affirmative actions might not instantaneously achieve parity, they serve as a “necessary first step forward” (True, et al. 2012, 5). Practitioners and scholars on women’s issues strategically use international legal tools to lobby for domestic change (Alwis 2010). Through such innovation, the CEDAW has resulted to some policies, rules or regulations that have been initiated by local leaders such as rules against domestic violence, anti-discrimination policies in employment and laws on sexual harassment among others in China.

Despite these, the impact of CEDAW on China seems less captivating from the central level. It is indeed worthy of recognition that the country’s early ratification of the agreement has put it at a better standing than democracies like the US, who is among the few UN members who have failed to give their consent to this human rights convention (Baldez 2013 & Amnesty International 2005). China could have used its responsibility as an early signatory to ensure that women are not faced with discriminatory practices that negatively affect their political rights or interests and perhaps even engage other stakeholders within its threshold for greater investment on women.

Alwis points that women’s rights activists, who she calls “reformists”, are using an international gender norm to lobby for changes and certain human rights laws on women. She sums that the convention has required the creation of specific policies or laws on gender equality. As such, women’s groups are pressuring stakeholders to be responsible to the agreements

guaranteed in the CEDAW. Even though laws have emerged to deal with equal opportunities in employment, the criminality of domestic violence and the guarantee of women's equal access to resources such as land, the CCP could do more in the political sphere also. International gender norms and laws should be windows of opportunity to build the capacity of states to improve their ability to serve the interests of their citizens using gender difference both as an opportunity for an improved performance in governance and as a tool for accountability.

The CCP has invested in socio-economic and some political programs that seek to improve the general wellbeing of the people of the country, but again, it seems to have done this to consolidate more power and maintain a smaller cycle of network close to the highest political institutions. In the next chapter, it will be discussed if this network is welcoming to women because, Chinese women, now, more than ever before have more opportunities of education, chances of relying on personal economic investments and a health delivery system that have improved over the years. All these indicators have potentials for greater political inclusion and investment by women.

However, the political discrimination undoubtedly is most unfavorable as women have a bigger challenge to break the cycle of exclusion from the village level to central positions of power. From the cases of the FWCW and the ratification of the CEDAW, China still has a room for improvement in the effective use of international gender equality agreements to improve women's presence in politics. The following chapter contains the analysis of elite institutions and their relation with women since China's reform began.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN STATE INSTITUTIONS

The level of women's access to a country's top political institutions is an important indication of how far that country has attained equal influence between the genders over the determination of the affairs of their society. Considering the party-state nature of China, this research does not aim to dwell onto the differences between government entities and those of the party because of the inevitable overlap between the two. As such, the elite institutions to be analyzed in this chapter are those under the state or not exclusive to the party alone. The NPC, CPPCC and the State Council will be examined here. The roles, responsibilities and delegated powers of these institutions will be analyzed with a focus on the level of gender parity with regards to their access and the inner-workings within them. By order of relevance according to the 1982 constitution of the PRC, I will first analyze the NPC. The CPPCC will come second because of its closeness to the parliament. The final one will be the cabinet.

THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS (NPC)

Like legislative bodies of other countries, the National People's Congress is the institution for law making in the PRC (Ranade 2013; Lawrence and Martin 2013; Yu and Liu 2010; Wang 2002; Otto, et al. 2000; Rosen 1995; BBC 2012a). This responsibility is a mandate according to Article 57 of the 1982 constitution (Constitution 2014). Despite this legitimate obligation from the supreme law of the country, critics have doubt the true status of the NPC in various forms. The BBC for instance labels it as nothing more than a "rubber stamp" of the CCP and that it only displays "spectacle" rather than "power". Ding (2013) describes it as a powerless entity that only fast tracks and willingly nods to approvals or decisions set by the CCP while Su

(2006) says that it does not equate to a parliament at all by definition and practice and must not be treated as one. However, not all scholars agree with the perception of the NPC being totally weak and without any sense of power exercise. At least to Wang (1995), there have been instances when the NPC challenged the very core of the CCP. Despite these doubting perceptions about the institution, it is interestingly the highest body of governance (Otto, et al. 2000) in the country with extra-ordinary powers vested upon it perhaps more than many of its equals around the world can enjoy. The NPC is constitutionally mandated for electing the country's president, leader of the Supreme Court, the head of the military and approving the premier (Constitution 2014; Lawrence and Martin 2013; Wang 1995; BBC 2012a). In case the parliament is toothless, it seems to be so by action but not by mandate.

According to Wang (1995) the first NPC was convened in 1954. According to the rules that govern its operations, the NPC is selected every five years and meets once in a year for deliberation. During the same period, the CPPCC also convenes for its annual deliberation hence the moment is known as the “Lianghui” (two meetings) - an important event on China's “Political calendar” as one commentator notes. Every spring, Beijing hosts the parliamentary sitting for a period of two weeks during which deliberations are usually made on the approval of reports, budgets, and policies, among others (Brunswick Group 2014; Lawrence & Martin 2013 & Ding 2013). For instance, the 12th congress (incumbent) has just ended its annual sitting in March of 2014. Its almost 3000 membership is drawn from the country's 23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions and the 4 direct municipalities of the central government, special administrative regions and the armed forces (ChinaCulture.org 2014; Xiaoli 2012; Chiu n.d.).

This large number, coupled with the once-in-a-year sitting means that the tasks assigned to the parliament are not realistically exhaustible within such a work schedule. As a result, it is

not surprising that the constitution provides for a Standing Committee to the NPC that meets occasionally for the execution of duties of the overall institution. Scholars and commentators on China have also noted that such a large body cannot efficiently exert real power on its assigned duties as a lively and authoritative institution both in a timely and strategic fashion. This means that the Standing Committee is the administrative body of the NPC, tasked with the continuous business of the institution.

Parliaments are crucial institutions for the balance of power among the traditional three arms of governments in many countries around the world. As the entry point of almost all national policies, programs or laws (except otherwise delegated to some other bureaus), legislative power and influence directs a society's position from politics to social change to economic advancement and cultural matters. Therefore, the controllers of this institution are likely the determiners of government allocations of resources and opportunities. If this is the norm in domestic power politics, then there is no better place for a fair representation among a country's population segments than the legislature.

Mentioned elsewhere, women's level of participation in parliamentary bodies increases their voices in the governance process of their nations. In addition, it also gives them an extra opportunity to demand for government allocation of resources into sectors that directly impact their lives and or their dependents. Markham (2012) emphasizes the participation of women in parliaments in bridging the gap of inequality between men and women with regards to access to and allocation of resources and authority. Of the nearly 3000¹⁷ (a somewhat usual number) parliamentarians of the NPC, minority groups such as women, peasants, ethnic minorities and

¹⁷ The number has been more or less like this for the past 50 years. For more details, see: http://www.allcountries.org/china_statistics/23_1_number_of_deputies_to_all.html for detailed information.

young people tend to be less represented (Bo 2010 & Ming 2008). This phenomenon is an old age practice of the party system where present changes about minority involvement and representation become more of a “political drama” than a quest for equality. Ming (2008, 102) says that “a democratic tendency seems weak, whereas pattern of elitist politics run by male communist rulers in their sixties is evident”.

From the discussion above, it is true that the NPC (despite its claimed weaknesses) is an extremely important institution through which women will enhance their democratic participation and their inherent right to the determination of their society. Feminist Drude Dahlerup reaffirms that women’s exclusion from high political institutions such as parliaments only reinforces a democratic flaw and marginalization that is capable of wasting potential human resource for governance. There is ample scholarly evidence (see Marhakam 2013, 2012; Dahlerup 2009, 2008; 2005, Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005; Ballington 2002; Chodhurry 2002; Christensen 1999) that shows that women’s roles in parliament have very practical results on the agenda of national interests be it domestic or outside. Also Dahlerup says that their presence does not only address previous inability to demand for equal investment on issues that affect their lives but the “redistribution” of power has very practical results on the recreation of gendered institutions that have so long disadvantaged women. Further, Susan Markham of the NDI also says that the gender of lawmakers has different forms of effects on their perceptions and even the concern they attach to the types of policies or programs they initiate, lobby or vote for.

For China, it is statistically expected for women’s lesser control and influence over the affairs of the NPC considering the number of women parliamentarians. Therefore, a checks and balance system is required not only from a party or provincial affiliation but from a gender

perspective as well. While there is a dramatic demand for equal representation in the number of women entering legislatures (Dahlerup 2008) in the global feminist movement, especially since the ratification of the CEDAW and the adoption of the BD and BPA, Zeng (2014) says that China failed to take a similar commitment to seriously add more women in its legislature. Affirmative actions exist, but they seem not to be aggressively important to achieve anything like the historic achievements that have for instance taken place in Rwanda, South Africa (Herndon and Randell 2013; Dahlerup 2008; Powley 2005) and the rest of the Nordic world (World Economic Forum 2013). Edwards (2007) says that a serious achievement of more than the global average of women in parliament is not a pride to work for among China's masculine elites who do not perceive an overwhelming achievement of rates more than the global average as instrumental numbers in their power politics (see below for further analysis).

On a different note, Markham (2012) says that looking beyond numbers matters as this will shift attention to the quality of impacts women make in parliamentary processes and policies produced. This brings me to the discussion about the conflict between constitutional power vested on the NPC versus the real power it displays with regards to governance and holding the executive and the rest accountable. It is without doubt that the NPC is given enough mandates to execute these functions but there seems to be an agreement that the opposite persists. However, Dumbaugh and Martin (2009), Xia (2008) and Wang (1995) maintain that the NPC over the years is metamorphosing into a real legislature that do not always act in accordance to party expectations and have even refused to adopt certain reports, policies and the passage of laws as might be wanted by the CCP elites. Yet, it seems that there is a long way for the NPC to be a trusted institution that represents the diverse interests of China's more than one billion citizens without the CCP's not-so-hidden influence. It is indeed misleading to only focus on institutional

barriers. A critic once note that among parliamentarians, some place the interest of the party first before that of the NPC meaning that personal preferences and incentives also contributes to the seemingly weak image of the NPC. Therefore, it is time that Chinese women battle for both increase in the number of representation as well as the quality of agenda women submit to the institution.

This leads to the point about the interests that dominate the agenda of the parliament. It is important to note that it is almost always the larger group (whether in party form, gender or region) that has a greater opportunity of domination of others. After all, if gender equality is placed closer to democratic governance than any other system, it is also crucial to note that the tyranny of the majority is an unavoidable tendency. Mentioned earlier, the party is alleged to be the main agenda setter of the NPC, which clearly shows that any subject related to women's issues, concerns or interests should be first related to the desires of the CCP if there should be any relevance attached to them. Therefore, the advancement of women's interests in the forms of new policies or laws through the parliament should perhaps first be related to the interests of the CCP's broad gender policies.

If there should be a possible reform for women's greater empowerment for representation and relevance in the NPC, this will depend on the agenda set ahead for China in its engagement for greater reform- not only economically but socio-politically also. The possibility for women's membership in the NPC to move to a higher level depends on the future agenda of the party and how both domestic needs and international pressure are directed to it. It is conclusive that there is no better governance engine- by constitutional definition at least- than the NPC to enable women to demand for the desired changes they need. The reasons analyzed above show the eminence of women's representation in the legislature in a society where they are positioned between the

forces of tradition, modernity and ideological shift which are all encompassed in a deeply patriarchal order.

TABLE 1

COMPOSITION OF THE NATIONAL PEOPLE’S CONGRESS 1978- 2013

Congress/Year	Total	Number of women	% of women
5 th (1978)‡	3497	742	21.2%
6 th (1983)‡	2978	632	21.2%
7 th (1988)‡	2978	634	21.3%
8 th (1993)‡	2978	626	21.0%
9 th (1998)	2979	650	21.8%
10 th (2003)	2985	604	20.2%
11 th (2008)	2987	635	21.3%
12 th (2013)+	2987	699	23.4%
	24, 369	5, 222	Average: 21.4%

Sources: For ‡, see http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/women45-95_en.pdf. Photius Coutsoukis and Information Technology Associates, (2006), “Number of Deputies to All the Previous National People’s Congresses. Data marked with + are extracted from the IPU (2013a), “Women in national parliaments, World Classification”. (Accessed: May 30, 2014)

TABLE 2

COMPOSITION OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL PEOPLE’S CONGRESS 1978- 2013

Congress/Year	Total	Number of women in the Standing Committee	% of women in the Standing Committee
5 th (1978)*	183	35	19.1%
6 th (1983)*	138	13	9.4%
7 th (1988)*	137	16	11.7%
8 th (1993)*	138	17	12.3%
9 th (1998)*	134	16	12.0%
10 th (2003)*	159	21	13%
11 th (2008)	181XX	30 Δ	16.6% ‡
12 th (2013)	161+	25 Δ	15.5% X
	1231	173	Average: 14%

Sources: Data marked with * are adapted from Louise Edwards (2007), “Strategizing for politics: Chinese women’s participation in the one-party state”. Data marked with + are extracted from Susan V. Lawrence (2013), “China’s Political Institutions and Leaders in Charts”. Data with ‡, see Zheng Yongnian, Guo Xiajuan and Zhao Litao (2009, 10), *Women’s Political Participation in China*, EAI Background Brief No.453. Table 1 For the one marked X, see, <http://www.womenofchina.cn/html/womenofchina/report/153175-1.htm>. For XX, see: http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Special1/2008-03/04/content_1404033.htm. (Accessed: May 30, 2014) Δ is based on author’s calculation

TABLE 3**LIST OF CHAIRPERSONS OF THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS 1978- 2013**

Congress/Year	Name	Sex
5 th (1978)	Ye Jianying	Male
6 th (1983)	Peng Zhen	Male
7 th (1988)	Wan Li	Male
8 th (1993)	Qiao Shi	Male
9 th (1998)	Li Peng	Male
10 th (2003)	Wu Bangguo	Male
11 th (2008)	Wu Bangguo	Male
12 th (2013)	Zhang Dejiang	Male

Source: People's Daily Online/China Internet Information Center: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/data/organs/npc.shtml> (Accessed: May 30, 2014).

Table 1 displays data of the representatives of the National People's Congress of China for a period of 35 years (1978-2013). During this period, the Chinese legislature was filled by the 5th to the 12th Congress and there were 24, 360 parliamentarians, 5, 222 of whom were women. This means that an average of 21.42% of the parliamentary seats was controlled by women during the period under-review.

There is a static performance with gender representation in the NPC. There has not been any form of dramatic surge taking place since 1978 and the ratio remains less than 22% for the most part. In fact it is interesting to see how 21% has become the norm in almost all congresses from the 5th to 9th and a decline in the 10th congress to 20.2%. In the following one (11th) the percentage went back to 21% and reached 23% in 2013. According to Guo and Zhao (2010), there was a parliamentary decision in 2007 for 22% of all seats to be granted to women in the subsequent congress. This target was not met for the said year but until 2013 thus granting China a position of 61st on the IPU ranking.

In fact, China has surpassed the global average for many years¹⁸. However, it stagnated on the global IPU ranking not because of a reduction in female representatives but because of better performance of new countries that are breaking gender stereotypes in politics and the barrier of exclusion. Countries such as Rwanda, Andorra, South Africa, Senegal and Nicaragua have joined the Nordic countries-the long standing best performers- and outperformed many countries even in the democratic world¹⁹.

Moving to the standing committee, it is the permanent body of the NPC that executes its duties in its absence. This is because of the annual sitting schedule of the NPC. In essence, the standing committee is the executive arm of the parliament. Between 1978 and 2013, 1,231 members served as members of the standing committee; out of who 173 were women, representing 14% of the total. Compared to the entire parliament, the Standing Committee has never achieved women membership of 20% in any badge.

The 5th congress had the highest level of women's representation with 35 women out of 183. This is similar to the high rate of female membership in the NPC in general for that congress. The following badge got the smallest ratio of women as their membership fell to less than half of the preceding one by registering only 13 women. The 3 subsequent badges ranged

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ At the dawn of the Rwandan genocide, the country established a mandatory quota system of a minimum of parliament's 30% population to be women (through the 2000 constitution) thus leading it to be the world's only female dominated legislature. In 2003, it nearly reached parity by representation, giving 48% of seats to women. Since then, the country has never experienced a setback with regards to "descriptive representation" at least from a gender standpoint and it currently holds the world's highest score on female representation in parliament. See Powley (2005) for a detailed analysis. On the UNDP's gender inequality index (2012), this position is not held by Rwanda but Netherlands while the former ranked 76. Andorra has received no ranking while South Africa, Senegal and Nicaragua took 90, 89 and 115 positions respectively on the UNDP index. China beats all these countries in this index by ranking 35th. This data shows an important factor to note about a country's improvement of gender equality will be only achieved through increased political participation and fulfilling of other social and economic indicators such as education, health and participation in the economy. For details, see: <http://data.un.org/DocumentData.aspx?id=332>

between 16 and 17. In the 10th congress, the figure rose to 21 while the 11th reached a membership of 30 thus making it the second highest during this period. In the 12th standing committee, there are 25 women thus representing 15%.

Membership as deputies into parliaments and their caucuses do not entirely provide women's influence in the legislature. The number of Speakers determines how power is shared within the parliament itself. Around the world, there is a low tendency of electing women as parliamentary Speakers or Chairpersons the IPU (2013) reports. It further states that, in many countries Presidents or Speakers of the assembly are high ranking members of their governments because of the relevance of the parliamentary body.

This relevance and the growing demand for women's representation in national legislatures and their further demand for equal access of prestigious positions within the legislature has put the position of Speaker on the advocacy agenda of the women's movement. Some advocates believe that this is for good reason as it will likely alter the old gender division of labor when women parliamentarians were mostly made surrogates in committees or assignments. This is what Lovenduski and Karam (2005) report as women's representation in parliaments must be beyond numbers but focus should also be on what extra duties and positions they are able to command for greater influence and benefit to their constituencies.

Table 3 displays the Chairpersons of the Chinese parliament between 1978 and 2013. There has never been a female Speaker in the Chinese parliament. This shows a large power vacuum in the legislature as men do not only dominate women by access but also by definition of power. At a global stage also, there is a wide gap between women and men's access to the position of legislative leadership. As of 2013, out of a combination of all legislative chambers,

233 were headed by men and women were in control of 39 (IPU 2013b). For the case of China, the interlock between the party and state apparatuses can make it even tougher for women to hold some of the nation's most important posts, even though this is not always the case. Bo (2007) says that the Speaker of the NPC should be a Politburo member and without PB membership, certain important government posts cannot be held.

Deng Yingchao was Speaker of the CCPPC when she was in the PB (thus she could not obviously head the NPC) but Wu Yi was in the 10th PB but was given the position of a State Councilor and the same applied to Liu Yandong in the 11th badge. In the 12th congress, she has become a Vice-Premier. All these women's presence did not qualify them against their male counterparts for the Chairperson position of the NPC, at least from a theoretical perspective. From the data, while women's representation is increasing in the parliament and its executive standing committee, the position of Speaker is the least reachable.

CHINESE PEOPLE'S POLITICAL CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE (CPPCC)

By virtue of proximity according to the NPC'S functions is the CPPCC. Due to this reason, it cohosts the annual "lianghui" (two meetings) that is simultaneously held for each parliamentary sitting giving it an opportunity to closely work with the parliament (Roberts 2014; Ding 2013 & Lawrence & Martin 2013). It is also an elite institution that was founded in 1949 to function as a multipurpose group until the stabilization of the nation (Chinese Government's Official Web Portal 2012). Prior to the formation of the NPC, the CPPCC was China's national parliament until the latter came into existence in 1954 (Yu and Liu 2010). The institution describes itself as the "united front organization" thereby providing an opportunity for reunification, stability and "democracy" for the country. According to one description by the

University of Minnesota, the CPPCC is an umbrella body that has always played crucial roles in the founding of the PRC such as the promotion of stability; moving between cultural, economic, social and political duties to ensure a united and progressive society. This means that the body is an important institution that somehow gives political legitimacy to the CCP through its diverse membership supposedly seen as just and balanced.

It is interesting that the CPPCC has shaped the future of modern China, when it approved its first constitution, declared the national anthem, adopted Beijing as the country's administrative center, and most importantly, it declared the founding of the PRC (CCPPC 2012; University of Minnesota n.d.). Scholars divided the functions of the institution into three main categories as a forum that provides political discussion; democratic observation and participation in the debate; and administration of state matters (University of Minnesota n.d.). The communist regime boasts of the composition of the CCPPC and its functions as its “socialist democracy” that reflects the diverse groups of the entire country (Lawrence & Martin 2013). Yu and Liu (2010) see it as a political advisory organization to the NPC but unfitting to be treated as the Upper House of a legislature in the current Chinese political hierarchy even though it might seemingly serve such a purpose. The CPPCC has a similar set-up like the parliament. It has a combination of national and local levels but only the national level is of importance to this research.

In a very important way, the CPPCC seems to implement part of the roles of the parliament. Some of the deliberations that should have been taken up by parliamentarians are said to be first conducted in this bureau which has reduced the power of the parliament in many ways as debates about national policies or programs are expected to be held in the legislature (at least according to the Western democratic criteria). For this reason, it seems to corroborate critics'

views that the parliament is a “rubber stamp” that only approves policies, report and programs that have passed through previous deliberations from the PB or the CPPCC. “The relation between the CPPCC, the NPC and the government is that the CPPCC holds discussions before policy decisions are made, the NPC votes on policy decisions after the discussions are finished, and the government carries them out after policy decisions are made” (University of Minnesota n.d.). In addition, some people see it as a “retirement home” for politicians (Yu & Liu 2010), meaning, it might not have as much authority as discussed above.

Like the NPC, it is said that members of the CCPPC are selected once in every five years. It has a membership of more than 2000 people with members drawn from a diverse background (CCPPC 2012). Its 2000 plus members are from the CCP, China’s lenient democratic parties, the corporate sector, independent political activists, the academia, technocrats, the All-China Women’s Federation, representatives of young people, overseas Chinese people, ethnic minority people, religious organizations and other social groups or movements (CCPPC 2012; University of Minnesota n.d.). Indeed the list of participants is a rich combination of individuals and organizations from “all walks of life”.

Referred to as “political advisors” by the regime itself, the CPPCC gives platform to ordinary citizens who might not have a party backing to participate in the policy deliberation process of the country (Lawrence & Martin 2013). Anyway, it is stated on the official site of the institution that its policies even when adopted by the regime are not legally binding and this view is shared by analysts Lawrence and Martin. Although the CPPCC is a “powerless” institution, it is nonetheless treated as a high level platform within the country’s political setting. But then, it seems that all other political establishments of the country are secondary to the communist party

by relevance. Then, why must it be relevant for women's proper representation in this important yet "powerless" platform?

It seems there are no governments or political institutions that are more powerful than those that are exclusively composed of the CCP members. Therefore, where possible, it is important that citizens access all others in order to put some sort of balance and articulate their needs in a much organized manner. It is important to note that monopolizing power- no matter how little it might be- especially in the absent of watch dog institutions is a possible tendency be it in hybrid systems or full fledged democracies.

In addition, it seems that issues discussed within this institution are sort of reflective of those close to the interests of the regime. Therefore, more women representatives in the CPPCC could serve as a good catalyst to dialogue policies equally. If one has to go with the claim of the Minnesota University report that the CPPCC first has deliberations about policies before forwarding them to the parliament for approval for executive implementation, then one might boldly hold that it is an institution with possibly ample opportunity for women to put forward their needs, aspirations and issues affecting them. If this is a primary stage for policy negotiation, then it serves in their interest to have a high level membership. It is fact that the organization might be able to provide opportunities for women but this is mostly possible through their presence.

TABLE 4

**COMPOSITION OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S POLITICAL CONSULTATIVE
CONFERENCE (CPPCC) 1978-2013**

Congress/Year	Total	Number of women	% of women
5 th (1978)	1988*	289 Δ	14.50%
6 th (1983)	2039*	258 Δ	12.50%
7 th (1988)	2081*	288 Δ	13.80%
8 th (1993)	2093*	283 Δ	13.52%
9 th (1998)	2196*	341 Δ	15.5% †
10 th (2003)	2238*	373 Δ	16.7% †
11 th (2008)+	2237	395	17.7%
12 th (2013)	2237 -	399#	18%
	17109	2626	15.3%

Source: Data marked as * and the corresponding data are retrieved from the CPPCC official website: <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/2012/07/03/ART11341301557203107.shtml>. Data corresponding with the + sign are derived from Bo Zhiyue (2010, 21) *China's Model of Democracy*. For †, see: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/gender-equality-china.pdf>. For #, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/photo/2013-03/08/c_132219102.htm (Accessed: May 5, 2014) For Δ , see: Xu Xiaoge and Lang Juan (2006), *Women, Globalization and mass media: The Chinese experience*. Table 2 Available here: https://www.academia.edu/1830347/Women_globalization_and_mass_media_The_Chinese_experience. For -, see: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/249954/number-of-members-of-chinese-peoples-political-consultative-conference-in-china>. (Accessed: May 15, 2014)

TABLE 5

**COMPOSITION OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S
POLITICAL CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE 1978-2013**

Congress/Year	Total	Number of women	% of women
5 th (1978)	316†	24*	7.60%*
6 th (1983)	300†	33*	11%*
7 th (1988)	280†	28*	10%*
8 th (1993)	315†	29*	9.20%*
9 th (1998)	323†	29*	8.97%*
10 th (2003)	299†	35*	11.71%*
11 th (2008)	323+	57†	17.8%#
12 th (2013) Δ	322	36	11%
Total	2478	271	10.9%

Data marked *, see: *Women, Globalization and mass media: The Chinese experience*. Table 2 For Δ , see: <http://tradebridgeconsultants.com/news/reshuffles/yu-zhengsheng-elected-chairman-of-national-committee-of-chinese-peoples-political-consultative-conference/> For +, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/13/content_7783102.htm. For #, see: <http://www.womenofchina.cn/html/womenofchina/report/153175-1.htm>. (Accessed: 31st May 2014), †, it is based on author's calculation.

TABLE 6**LIST OF CHAIRPERSONS OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S POLITICAL CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE (CPPCC) 1978- 2013**

Congress/Year	Name	Sex
5 th (1978)*	Deng Xiaoping	Male
6 th (1983)*	Deng Yingchao	Female
7 th (1988)*	Li Xiannian	Male
8 th (1993)*	Li Ruihuan	Male
9 th (1998)*	Li Ruihuan	Male
10 th (2003)*	Jia Qinglin	Male
11 th (2008)*	Jia Qinglin	Male
12 th (2013) ‡	Yu Zhengsheng	Male

Sources: Data marked as * are retrieved from the CPPCC official website: <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/2012/07/03/ART11341301557203107.shtml>. For ‡, see: <http://english.people.com.cn/90785/8162931.html> (Accessed: 31st May, 2014)

Table 7 shows membership in the CPPCC for the past 35 years. During this period, 17, 109 members served in this organization. The 1978 conference received the smallest membership population. There was a steady increase in the subsequent conferences. From 1983 to 1993, the membership did not reach 2, 100. The year 1998 marked the beginning of membership beyond 2100. From 2003 onwards, membership grew to more than 2, 200. The 10th conference received the highest membership whereas the 11th and 12th conferences received the same figures of 2, 237.

Women constituted 2, 626 of the total membership of the 8 badges of the conference under-review. This is 15.3% of the total population. From the 5th to the 8th conference, women were never up to 300 in the CPPCC. From the 9th to 12th, this trend changed; there were 341, 373, 395 and 399 women respectively. The incumbent conference has the highest number of women (399) in the entire 35 years studied.

In addition, the Standing Committee of the CPPCC, received a total membership of 2,478 from 1978 to 2013. Women took 271 of the seats thus representing almost 11%. Unlike the general conference, data for women's membership in the CPPCC-SC, shows a tendency of flexible pattern. The lowest representation happened in 1978 with a female membership of 24 which was followed by an increase of 9 making the 1983 conference to have 33 women. However, the figure dropped to 28 in the following one. A decrease- an insignificant one though- took place in the following two conferences thus 29 women were members in the 8th and 9th conferences. The 10th, 11th and 12th conferences all experienced an increase; with the 11th outperforming (57) while the 10th and 12th got 35 and 36 correspondingly.

According to Lawrence and Martin's explanation, the Chairperson of the CPPCC could be safely defined as the CCP's Public-Relations Strategist Officer between the party and non-CCP members and organizations. In addition, the position of Chairpersonship of the CPPCC is ranked high in the Chinese political system. For this reason, holding this position is linked with a PB membership (Bo 2007). Accordingly, out of the 6 Chairpersons of the CPPCC from 1978 to 2013, Deng Xiaoping, Li Ruihuan (Bo 2007) and Jia Qinglin (China Vitae n. d) all had SC membership while Yu Zhengsheng is a member of the incumbent one. Bo says that Deng Yinchao was a member of the PB while Li Xinian has never served in any of the two. This shows that women's access to the Chairperson position requires firstly, a membership in the PB. This is the obvious reason why women constitute only 12.5% of the position since 1978 because of the only female Chairperson, Deng Yinchao's leadership of the body from 1983 to 1988.

THE STATE COUNCIL

China's executive body is the State Council otherwise called the Central People's Government. In the formative years of the PRC, the party and the state existed as a single organizational structure responsible for the day to day execution of governance until the 1970s when moves were taken to reform this style of operation (Lawrence & Martin 2013). The authors however observe that regardless of this structural change of the state apparatus, the CCP continues its domination in the executive council. Despite this, the State Council is bestowed with the highest executive power to administer the daily needs of the country (Wang 1995). Article 85 of the 1982 Constitution, declares the State Council as the "highest organ of state power" and "the highest organ of state administration". It is China's bureaucracy with a capacity that is perhaps unmatched in the modern world by virtue of the size and population of the country.

The constitution has decreed the executive bureaucracy to be composed of ministries, commissions and departments (Constitution 2014; Lawrence & Martin 2013; Wang 1995). As of 2013, the cabinet lists under its authority 25²⁰ ministries, several commissions, administrations and bureaus, organizations and administrative offices of Specially Administered Regions such as Hong Kong and Macau (The Central People's Government of China 2013). These institutions are said to be headed differently but are all answerable to the Premier of the council. His or her Vice-Premiers come second and are followed by the State Councilors, Secretary General, the Governor of the Central Bank and the Auditor General. Due to its size, the cabinet has a similar division of hierarchy as the NPC and the CPPCC that enables its smaller standing committee to do more coordination of the affairs of the agency. Lawrence (2013) says that the executive

²⁰ Note a disparity between the IPU and state records with regards to the cabinet composition. The former only relies on national ministries as part of a cabinet while the Chinese one is a little different with regards to other organizations under the cabinet. For the data analysis, I will rely on the IPU approach as the international norm to only analyze ministerial bodies and no other bureaus under the cabinet.

committee of the cabinet is normally comprised of the Premier, State Councilors and the Secretary General. It is reported to meet more than once in a week while the larger body meets monthly (BBC 2012a).

Unlike the presidential system of governance in many countries, China's party state system despite some political "reforms" does not fit the Westminster style also. The Secretary General of the CCP holds the highest position of state presidency of the country (Lawrence and Martin 2013) and it would have been traditionally expected that he heads the country's executive organ too. Instead, as mentioned before, the Premier is constitutionally mandated to technically oversee the civil service. The Premier ranks second on the PBSC ladder meaning that he is the second most powerful holder of political position within the CCP on one hand, and on another, he is the number one man within the cabinet structure. Lawless and Martin (2013, 29) define the Premier as the "most senior economic official" of the country. Under his leadership, he and his team will jointly manage the execution of national policies.

The constitution has bestowed several responsibilities on the cabinet, ranging from economic policy development and implementation, management of the national budget, to the initiation and implementation of administrative rules and decisions, coordination and leadership of governance between the central government and all other levels, provision of technical manpower for national development to the management of China's foreign relations. Those mentioned here are a mere summary of the vast roles this institution carries out for the Chinese government. Perhaps one of its most critical roles in modern times is economic advancement for the country thus making it more instrumental at a time of continuity of structural reform for continuous growth and stability. Hence the BBC (2012a) observes that there is a power shift

between the State Council and the NPC as the former mostly initiates or drafts laws/policies whose approval by the parliament are mostly absolute.

Lawrence and Martin observe that the executive branch is administratively responsible for policy than political issues. However, a deeper look might suggest an otherwise different situation, considering the eminent rank of the Premier in the PBSC while all the four Vice-Premiers of the State Council are also members of the larger PB. In addition, the Vice-Premier serves as the Premier's sitting-mate in the Politburo Standing Committee. For this reason, Zhang Gaoli (Vice-Premier of the incumbent cabinet) is also a member of the PBSC but this cannot also be conclusive, considering the intertwining nature of the government, the State Council could be seen as a technocratic, administrative as well as political organization.

Even though women's parliamentary position holdings have become the most famous indicator of quick analysis of access and participation in politics, women holders of top executive positions is critical for weighing their political power within a government. Ministerial cabinets are major bureaus that determine the progress of meeting national goals be it in the economy, social sectors or political ambitions internally or externally. "Ministers control disproportionate shares of states' resources, managing vast bureaucracies, overseeing the disbursement of funds, and projecting state power domestically and internationally" (Jacob, Scherpereel and Adams 2014, 322).

Therefore, ministerial positions, governorship, leadership in state executive institutions and managing national bureaus are all extremely important to gauge women's advancement in the public life of their countries. Access to such organizations and being pivotal in their management does not only increase the legitimacy of state institutions as Dovi (2002) argues but

it also gives women the opportunity of power to determine or suggest policies in the interest of fellow women or bring gender perspectives to policy-making and implementation processes. Such presence gives opportunity in the forms of gender responsive budgeting or mainstreaming women and men's different needs in a sector such as health or education.

Caution must be taken to consider the reality that these women in executive power might also be constraint with structural or institutional norms that are closely associated with societal prejudices thus limiting their influence or impacts. However, this possibility is not reason enough to glorify their exclusion from such positions. In addition, there has always been some sort of debates about the ministerial positions handled by women around the world (True, et al. 2012). Although granting female ministers social offices such as health, welfare and education might be an extension of their *prescribed feminine roles* of the household into the public domain, such developments should not only be criticized but there must be policy provisions for improvement. On the other hand, True, et al. (2012) observes that women holding such ceremonial and low level ministries will give them opportunities of mastering the art of politics, enable them to gather support and could boost up their esteems and those of their fellows to compete for higher positions.

This argument will of course not fit well with the expectations of the radicals within the women's movement but there is need for practicality. In comparison to men, ministerial positions that are deemed more "prestigious" such as Foreign Affairs, Economics/Finance or Trade²¹ and Security are less accessed by women (Franceschet & Piscopo 2008), this, however, is not a global phenomenon. In the local context, China's Wu Yi have broken an extremely

²¹ Wu Yi's case is an unusual female top government personnel who has accumulated power and influence both in China and outside. Her management of the ministry that deals with China's external trading evidently increased her reputation as tactful negotiator.

important record as the only woman who served in several top government positions and held even traditionally male posts such the Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (Rosen 1995) and played crucial roles in the negotiation of China's entrance into the World Trade Organization (Chiu n. d.). Later on, her position as Vice-Premier has even brought greater responsibilities to execute on behalf of the Chinese government both within and outside the country. As Wu served as Vice-Premier, her continuous role as the government's key reliant for international trade and economic negotiation has put her once again on the Forbes ranking of the "100 Most Influential Women" as second position, coming after only Angela Merkel of Germany in 2007 (Forbes 2007).

As the State Council is the government's as well as the CCP's implementation mechanism, that executes the national laws of the former and the policies of the latter (Lawrence 2013), I have deliberately focused on a macro analysis of the institution for feasibility reasons. Within the executive, I have considered only ministerial positions and the standing committee to provide a gendered situation of membership. It is very interesting that a politics of gender is not the only one at play within the executive bureaucracy but that of institutions as well. The constitution places the State Council to be directly accountable to the NPC by the former executing policies or laws that would have originated from the latter, but the opposite prevails even though not all state policies are directly initiated by the cabinet neither does the latter also accepts all policy proposals (Lawrence and Martin 2013). I perceive this has to do with the ambiguity of the constitution by virtue of placing too many responsibilities on the council, some of which are typically legislative functions. On the other hand, the interlocking nature of the Chinese governance structure does not also enable a strict form of separation of powers.

According to a UN Women and IPU (2014) report, the number of women holding ministerial positions has increased from 16.1% in 2008 to 17.2% in 2014. This increase is neither dramatic and perhaps nor disappointing too considering the slow pace of change the politics of representation is driving with. In China, a similar situation persists. As of January 2012, only 3 out of the country's 26 ministers were women thus positioning 66th on the IPU "Women in Ministerial Positions" ranking (Inter-Parliamentary Union; UN Women 2012).

The Chinese executive arm seems not to be as weak as some people perceived considering its proximity to the CCP as its implementing organ as well as that of the NPC. This situation might not be the best option for those concerned about the present context of governance in China but most worrying is China's very low performance with regards to gender parity in its executive branch. As Lampton (2013) notes, modern Chinese society is increasingly a fractioned society with diverse groups contesting for their interests to be represented by state officials. This shows that socialist claims of citizen protection is not likely feasible but it is also wise that representation is done with lesser monopoly. This will not only enable marginalized groups such as women to be heard, but it will grant an opportunity of creating gendered policies and the national income will likely be budgeted according to the gender needs of the citizens.

TABLE 7

THE STATE COUNCIL MINISTERS 1979- 2013

Congress/Year	Total	Number of women	% of women
1979	-	-	-
1984	-	-	-
1989†	27	-	-
1993‡	40	3	8.5%
1998-	29	-	-
2003	27	3	11.1%
2008*	27	3	11.1%
2013+	24	2	8.3%
	174	11	Average- 6.3%

Dates and data corresponding + are derived from the IPU global ranking reports of Women in Politics. See http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wmnmap14_en.pdf. For -, see <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/mar/19/news/mn-30390>. (Accessed: May 25, 2014). For ‡, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/html/cd/1998/199803/19980319/19980319001_1.html (Accessed: 2014) *Cheng Li (2010, 6), *China's Midterm Jockeying: Gearing up for 2012 (Part 2: Cabinet Ministers)* Table 2 Available here: http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/articles/2010/5/17%20china%20cabinet%20members%20li/0517_china_cabinet_members_li.pdf.

TABLE 8

STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE STATE COUNCIL

Congress/Year	Total	Number of women	% of women
1979	-	-	-
1984	-	-	-
1989	-	-	-
1994 Δ	14	-	-
1998Δ	10 ²²	2	20%
2003 *	10	2	20%
2008‡	10	2	20%
2013+	10	1	10%
	54	7	Average- 12.9%

For +, see http://english.gov.cn/2013-03/15/content_2355096.htm. For ‡, see <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/data/organs/statecouncil.shtml>. Number of women is based on author's calculation. For *, see: http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200303/17/eng20030317_113407.shtml. For Δ, see: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/html/cd/1998/199803/19980319/19980319001_1.html. (Accessed: May 25, 2014)

²² The researcher is not sure if Zou Jiahua and Jiang Chunyun were Vice-Premiers from 1998 onwards hence I omitted them from the 1998 Executive Council that would have been 12. It is not clearly stated on the People Daily report while their biographies stated that their tenures ended in 1998. See Zou Jianua's biography here: http://www.chinavitae.com/biography/Zou_Jiahua/career
See Jiang Chunyun's biography here: http://www.chinavitae.com/biography/Jiang_Chunyun/career

TABLE 9**LIST OF PREMIERS OF THE STATE COUNCIL 1976- 2013**

Congress/Year	Name	Sex
1976-1980 ^{23*}	Hua Guofeng	Male
1980-1988*	Zhao Ziyang	Male
1988-1998*	Li Pei	Male
1998-2003*	Zhu Rongji	Male
2003-2013*	Wen Jiabao	Male
2013-†	Li Keqiang	Male

Data corresponding with * are extracted from, Bo Zhiyue (2007, 59) *China's Elite Politics: Political Transition and Power Balancing*. Table 2. For †, see: see http://english.gov.cn/2013-03/15/content_2355096.htm. (Accessed: May 25, 2014)

With regards to the composition of the State Council, this research takes the norm of the international categorization by focusing on ministerial positions only. Although, women's ratio in parliament has become the most standard way of calculating a country's division of authority between the genders, cabinet ministries also have important actors in the governance of states.

Despite this, women are worst under-represented in national cabinets than legislatures and as of 2009; they represented only 16% of the global cabinet composition (Jacob, Scherpereel and Adams 2014). In a 2012 IPU ranking, out of 1, 065 ministerial positions in 188 countries, women were found in 98 ministries of social affairs, 79 held positions dealing with the family, children or the elderly, 73 were heading ministries for gender equality and women's affairs, 68 were dealing with education and so forth. From this global picture, women are mostly related with ministries dealing with social and cultural portfolios while positions that deal with defense, finance, the economy and foreign policy are mostly entrusted with men.

In the case of the Chinese cabinet, because of data unavailability for the entire period under review, the researcher is unable to analyze the entire cabinet composition for this study.

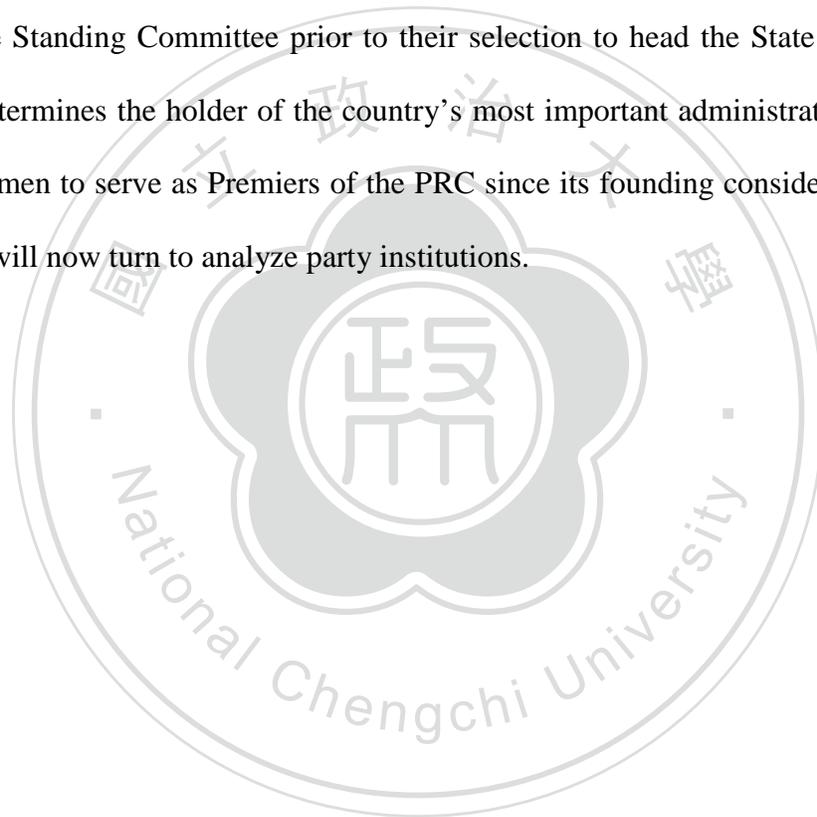
²³ Hua Guofeng's tenure as Premier preceded this research timeline as it was 2 years earlier than 1978 which is the beginning time for state institutions in this study.

Data available from 1989 to 2013 put the number of cabinet ministers at 174 and women ministers as 11. In 1993, 3 women served as ministers out of a total of 40. The 1998 cabinet under Zhu Rongji had 29 ministers but no data was found on the gender composition. Under the Wen Jiabao premiership of 2003 and 2008 cabinets, there were 27 ministers in each of them and 3 women were found in each. In 2013, Li Keqiang's cabinet according to an IPU data has reduced in size from 27 to 24 and women also have seen a slight decrease from 3 to 2. Ministers for Justice and Health are the two held by women. Wu Aiying holds the justice position while Li Bin is in control of the nation's health and family planning office (Flanders-China Chamber of Commerce 2013). Because of the lack of a systematic data that provides the portfolio description of all the female members, the researcher is unable to analyze the positions held by the female ministers in relation to their male counterparts.

Data available for the State Council Executive is from 1994 to 2013. During this period, 54 people entered the State Council's Executive bureau. While data on women is unavailable for the 1994 badge which had 14 members, 1998 to 2013 all had 10 members in them and 2 women in each of them except 2013 with only one woman. In 2003 for instance, there was only one Vice Premier out of four and one female State Councilor (People's Daily n. d). Wu Yi was the only female out of the 4 Vice Premiers and Chen Zhili out of the 5 State Councilors. Between 1998 and 2013, the Li Premiership era has the least number of women in his cabinet as well as the Standing Committee. This reflects the IPU 2014 ranking putting China, Thailand and Mauritius at the 77th position due to the low presence of women in their executives. Liu Yandong is the only female Vice-Premier out of 4 and all the 5 State Councilors are men. Her ranking in the Standing Committee is high, as she holds the 3rd position. In spite of this, her responsibilities, as reported by Lawrence (2013) include science, education, health and culture. Other than science,

women tend to be more visible in cabinet politics related with education, health and matters of culture. These important yet less prestigious positions are an extension of women's domestic duties into the cabinet realm.

Moving to the position of Premiership, between 1976 and 2013, China did not have a single female Premier. This situation is closely related with the composition of the Politburo and its Standing Committee. According to Bo (2007), it is a familiar rule that Premiers should be members of the Standing Committee prior to their selection to head the State Council. As this qualification determines the holder of the country's most important administrative position, it is unlikely for women to serve as Premiers of the PRC since its founding considering accessibility to the PBSC. I will now turn to analyze party institutions.



CHAPTER FIVE

THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PARTY INSTITUTIONS

In China, because of the inter-locking nature of the party and the state, the CCP has institutional establishments that concurrently exist and execute governance functions other than those of normal political parties found in other countries. These party organizations carry overwhelmingly important powers and privileges in the country. Access to and participation within them depends on party membership and by extension representation or handling of certain national or party responsibilities. This chapter focuses on these organizations with regards to their functions and gender-composition since the beginning of the reform. The Central Committee comes first in the discussion. The PB will be second and its Standing Committee will be the last.

THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA (CCCCP)

All party-states whether they adopt electoral dictatorships, authoritarian-democracy, communism, totalitarian or hybrid systems have their party centers that mostly serve as the power base for the regime and indirectly for the nation. On the other hand, these establishments are somehow responsible for the agenda that will constitute the regime's daily businesses. For the CCP, it is the CCCCCP that is the highest decision making body of the party (Yu and Liu 2010) at least theoretically. According to a web portal owned by the party, it is clearly stated that the CC derives its authorities from the larger NPC²⁴ that is the overall "supreme" body of the party membership (Chinese Government's Official Web Portal 2012).

²⁴ Not to be confused with the same abbreviation of China's parliament, also shortened as such.

Therefore, the CC serves functions that are designated to it by the NPC. Beina Su of the *Council on Foreign Relations* describes it as a kind of “Board of Directors” for the CCP, which is tasked to select other elite institutions of the party. Members are drawn/elected from all the local government levels (provinces, autonomous areas), the military, ministries and other paramount affiliations of the party every five years at the NPC congress (Xu 2012; Chinese Government's Official Web Portal 2012).

Despite the importance attached to this body, there is scanty in depth academic information regarding its politics and other matters. Anyway, the government web site (2012) writes, “when the National Party Congress is not in session, the Central Committee leads all the work of the Party and represents the CPC outside the Party”. Nevertheless, it is indeed, fact that, the organization conducts far more than this. Perhaps this body would have possibly executed the daily duties of the party but, that, is not the case as it is empowered to select the Politburo that is said to have the real “supreme” power of the country.

It is important at least in a technical sense to gauge the importance of the CC as the eminent political group that selects China’s oligarchy- a tiny threshold- that rules the most populous country on earth. From this perspective, there is yet another important opportunity for women to be part of this body. From the CCP’s organizational hierarchy, the CC-which is only second to the NPC- asserts influence in a very top-down manner hence showing that all other establishments act according to its will at least in a theoretical sense. In addition, PB membership is only through being a full member of this organization (Bo 2007). Therefore, women’s access to this body is the only gate-way to membership in the PB and PBSC provided they are not overshadowed by the greater male presence.

TABLE 10

**COMPOSITION OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY
OF CHINA (CCCCP) 1977-2012**

Congress/Year	Total	Number of women	% of women
11 th (1977)	201*	14-	6.6%
12 th (1982)	210*	11-	5.2%
13 th (1987)	175*	10-	5.7%
14 th (1992)	189*	12-	6.3%
15 th (1997)	193*	8+	4.1%
16 th (2002)	198*	5+	2.5%
17 th (2007)	204*	13+	6.3%
18 th (2012)	205#	10#	4.8%
	1575	83	Average: 5.2%

Sources: Data marked with + are extracted from Bo Zhiyue (2007, 96), *China's Elite Politics: Political Transition and Power Balancing* Table 2.13 and the one marked with # is from Bo Zhiyue (2010, 78), *China's Elite Politics: Governance and Democratization* Table 2.10. Data marked with * are derived from the official page of the CCP's People's Daily data on party congresses, available here: <http://english.cpc.people.com.cn/206972/207190/index.html>. Data marked with - sign are extracted from Stanley Rosen (1995, 319) *Women and Political Participation in China* Table 2. Data marked as † are extracted from the People's Daily web site, available here: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/102774/8020732.html> (Accessed: 31st May, 2014).

With an entrance of 1, 575 full time members since 1977 into the CCCCCP, 83 of them are women. This represents 5.2% of the data. The CC provides a somewhat low membership with its peak for women taking place in the 11th party congress shortly after the Cultural Revolution. The 11th congress had 14 women in it. This signals an important indicator that a large membership of the CCCPC might open more opportunities of representation for women. However, as participants get their entrance into the CC through a passively election process of an NPC gathering every half a decade (Lawrence 2013), it seems that chances become even slimmer for women without the required networking for support.

Out of the 8 badges of the CC, a total membership between 201 and 210 occurred 4 times and the remaining 4 had less than 200 members in each of them. After the 12th Congress, the 18th, 17th and 11th congresses had 205, 204 and 201 members respectively. From 1977 to 1992, female members ranged between 10 and 14. The subsequent two congresses received the biggest

downturn of 8 members in 1997 and 5 in 2002. In fact, 2002 was the worst congress with less than 3% of the membership been women. The important lesson here is the fact that this huge reduction took place immediately after Beijing's hosting of the FWCW. Reasons responsible for this are not known but the findings counter the common claim that women made a breakthrough in political institutions after the conference. In the case of the central committee, the opposite actually happened. Indeed as mentioned elsewhere, the Chinese regime responded partly to the demands of the international community but the response did not alter the gendered nature of its most important institutions.

The 21st Century also has not yet proved any prospective picture for women in the central committee. In fact, the 17th congress outperformed the 18th by 3 people. With the pace the composition of this party institution is taking, neither the suggestion for political parties to widen leadership positions for women nor their full equality with men is in sight for the near future. Indeed the argument that diverse membership in political parties- their caucuses, committees or executive bodies improves intra-party democracy and gives a fair representation of their membership, feminist scholars on Chinese politics seem too often to ignore the level of women's membership in the CCP itself.

For a balanced analysis, it is important to consider how women's affiliation with the party influences their opportunities of leadership within it. According to an official data, as of 2012, the CCP is said to have a membership of 85.13 million, out of which, female members are 20.27 million putting them at 23.8% (People.com 2013). This means that women are a minority population within the CCP as 76% of the party's human resource is men. Even where representation in prestigious party organizations such as the Central Committee has to be based on the proportion of membership, women will have fewer leaders. In a case like this, the demand

for more female representation could be on the basis of each according to proportional requirement than a demand for equal representation of 50-50 for instance.

Taking the 18th CC as a case, 4.8% of power is entrusted with women (who are 10 out of 205 members) while men took more than 95% of representative power. When analyzed from this perspective, there is a power in-balance as female membership in the party was 23.8% at the time of the 18th National People's Congress but a mere 4.8% of the total number of the Central Committee membership is granted to them. This shows that the intra-party governance structure is undemocratic where leadership does not “mirror” a full picture of the membership characteristics, gender inclusive.

THE POLITBURO (PB)

Drawn from the CCCCPC, the Politburo is a grand elite institution according to the power pyramid of the CCP. This usually twenty-plus member organization is supposedly elected by the CC even though scholars and Chinese political experts Bo Zhiyue (2007), Joseph Fewsmith (2003) and Lawrence and Martin (2013) claim that it does not have an entire control on the formation of the Politburo. The argument is about the not-so-hidden hands of party elders and veterans on who gets into the Politburo and who is turned down. Negotiations and compromises are likely the most important features of the process of selection and election while the PBSC is getting to be a little more predictable perhaps due to what Bo calls the “political institutionalization” of rules presently unfolding in Chinese politics especially with regards to the portfolios that require an automatic seat in the PBSC than the PB itself.

Despite this, the political “black box” might still be a barrier for a definitive assumption of the selection, election and approval process as the Central Committee does not have the

overarching power it should have asserted. Whatever the selection process might be, the PB's functions are overwhelmingly important to the country's political system. This organization derives its legitimacy from Article 22 of the CCP constitution which states that: "When the Central Committee is not in session, the Political Bureau and its Standing Committee exercise the functions and powers of the Central Committee".

This specification is somehow vague without tangible explanations about all the expectations and functions of the organization but Wang (1995, 2001) summarizes the primary responsibilities of the PB, as: an institution of policy initiator ranging from security, political ideology, education, domestic stability to the economy. Sullivan (2012) calls it the "chief political decision-maker of China". According to Cheng Li of the Brookings Institution, the Politburo is a combination of the highest ranking officials of the party, military and government bureaucracy (2013). This is what I call the *Cream* of the Chinese nation. Additionally, in the words of Dumbaugh and Martin (2009, 3): "[t]he Party's most powerful policy- and decision-making entity is the Politburo and its Standing Committee". It seems that the CCP has likely stayed in power for the past 65 years while maintaining its dominance largely due to how power-politics is played by the PB. It seems to be the political body that perhaps maintained communist rule in China with a combination of ease and vulnerability.

The establishment of the PB finds its roots from the Lenin doctrine of centralized democracy through which decision-making power resides in the hands of few (Wang 1995). Scholars have indeed agreed that the PB serves as the over-arching crown of the party with the Secretary General (president of the country) as its head (Lawrence & Martin 2013; Bo 2012, 2007; Li 2013; Dumbaugh & Martin 2009). However, it must also be noted that despite the assumption that Chinese politics is hierarchical, politics is now shifting to a more "complex,

diffused and at times highly competitive” where tiered contacts among political institutions might not be any more enough (Dumbaugh & Martin 2009, 1).

Membership for the PB is associated with dynamic qualifications that are both strictly and flexibly adhered to depending on the particular political climate of the time (Bo 2007). In addition to CCCCPC membership to qualify for politburo entrance, another requirement is a “party standing” of five years. These rules are stipulated in the CCP constitution²⁵ (Article 22). Lawless says that six elite regions (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing municipalities) and Guangdong and Xinjiang provinces, Chairpersons of the NPC and CPPCC, few top ranking military officers, among others have become automatic members to the PB, some through written policies while others through informal unwritten norms. In addition to membership of the PB, all these individuals are said to be full holders of key positions within the state apparatus and execute those duties concurrently. Perhaps this is why Bo (2007) defines politburo membership as more of status than work; yet, these people are the real *movers* of the Chinese society.

With regards to the operations of the Politburo, experts, spectators and the media share a common view that it is “opaque” with little outside influence over subject matters (Lawrence 2012). Perhaps this is related to the whole political landscape as a system and not exclusive to this organization. Despite its modus operandi, the PB and its SC run China both politically and economically. It is said to meet monthly to deliberate issues felt eminent to the country and perhaps more importantly, to the party. Whatever the case, the members act uniformly on many of the issues they are faced to deal with as decisions are not taken based on majority-based rule but mostly through consensus (Lawrence & Martin 2013, 2009).

²⁵ An English version of the CCP constitution is available here: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/25/content_6944738_3.htm

Throughout its existence, only few women have made it to the PB. On the other hand, it is interesting how the very few women who have made breakthroughs in extremely male dominated circles are use as political cosmetics to hide the reality of inequality. Despite the fact she was perhaps the most renowned female politician both domestically and internationally during her time, she was only became a full member of the PB in 2002. Known as the “Iron Lady” or Margret Thatcher of China, Wu Yi exerted great influence in Chinese politics but it seems not due to her membership in the PB but in other posts such as Vice Premier, Ministers of Health and Foreign Trade and Economy.

Since the Cultural Revolution, the 18th PB registers more female membership than any other (Li 2013). Deng Yingchao became member of the PB between 1983 and 1988 (Rosen 1995) because of her chairperson position of the CPPCC (although Rosen claims that some people credited her entrance to Deng Xioping’s influence). In addition, Jiang Qing, wife of Mao and Ye Qun, wife of Mao’s then-heir apparent were members in 1969 (Yu and Liu 2010 & Rosen 1995) not in their own rights but because of the status of their husbands, Rosen continues. This shows that some of the women access elite institutions through political lineages or dynasties.

As the political hierarchy places the PB and its PBSC at the apex, women are not expected to be better heard anywhere else than the very organization that sets China’s national agenda. It is through serious representation in such bodies that women’s interests ranging from economic equality to social justice will be placed on the national agenda for important government action. The likelihood that China will divorce from its socialist notion of women’s empowerment taking place as the country develops will only shift when female representatives are able to command for greater commitment both in principle and practice for gender specific

programs and solutions. This however will likely be a farce until the number of women representatives escalate dramatically.

TABLE 11

COMPOSITION OF THE POLITBURO 1977-2012

Congress/Year	Total	Number of women	% of women
11 th (1977)+	26	0	0%
12 th (1982)+	25	1	4%
13 th (1987)+	14	0‡	0%
14 th (1992)+	20	0‡	0%
²⁶ 15 th (1997)	22*	0	0%
16 th (2002)	24*	1‡	4.1%
17 th (2007)	25*	1‡	4%
18 th (2012)	25‡	2‡	8%
	181	5	Average: 2.7%

Sources: Data corresponding with + are derived from Stanley Rosen (1995, 318), *Women and Political Participation in China*. Table 1 Data marked with * are derived from Miller (2011, 2), *The Politburo Standing Committee under Hu Jintao* Table 1. Data marked with ‡, see Cheng Li (2013, 3-4) *A Biographical and Factional Analysis of the Post-2012 Politburo*. Table 1

Between 1977 and 2012, there have been 181 full members of the Politburo, out of which 5 were women thus representing 2.7% of the membership. 1977 was the year with the largest PB membership but it had no woman just like the 13th (14), 14th (20) and 15th (22) which are Politburos with the least membership. In addition, 1977 was immediately after Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution. The allegations against his widow Jiang Qing for the "excesses" of the Cultural Revolution and her roles (Yu & Liu 2010) might have affected the recruitment of women into the organization as she was a member from 1969 until 1976 (Rosen 1995).

The following badge (1982) witnessed the entrance of one female (Deng Yingchao)²⁷, not because of her gender but by virtue of her relation with Deng Xiaoping and a sort of political

²⁶ In Li's calculation, Wu Yi was included as a full member in the 15th PB but she actually was an alternate member at the time. See Li 2013 (p3) for details and China Vitae at: http://www.chinavitae.com/biography/Wu_Yi|33 for Wu's full official biography.

compensation as a widow of a veteran party leader (Rosen 1995). A 15 year vacuum period existed before another female member entered through the 16th PB. The 16th and 17th both had one, Wu Yi and Liu Yandong respectively. As Cheng Li noted, 2012 is the peak of women's entrance into the PB since the Cultural Revolution. When viewed critically, Liu maintained her position may be because she failed to be elevated to the PBSC as it was widely speculated among China spectators and even some scholars (Bo 2012(b); Li 2012; The Economist 2012; McDonnell 2012). Having been in the PB for five years already, some of her male counterparts she entered with were elevated to the PBSC as in the cases of Wang Qishan or Zhang Gaoli^{28 29}. Instead of a lift to the PBSC, Liu got a political compensation of Vice-Premiership thus granting her an elevation somewhere else.

On the other hand, it is also important to note that China is not immune to the practice of political dynasty. In fact, China has an institutionalized practice of political hereditary system where the children of former communist veterans have opportunities of excelling in the political system in modern Chinese politics. Liu Yandong is considered a "princeling" (Chen 2013; Bo 2007). Liu of course does not achieve her political success entirely based on her political inheritance but clearly this must have played an important role.

Sun Chunlan on the other hand, did not gain her entrance into the PB because of the drive for gender inclusiveness. She became a member by virtue of her position as the Party Chief of Tianjin Municipality which now has an "elite" status with a privilege membership into the PB starting in the 1980s (Bo 2007). The lack of women's access to the most important political

²⁷ Stanley Rosen notes that Deng Yingchao, entered the PB in 1978 and resigned in 1985. What must have been the cause of her resignation is not known while the 12th Politburo came into existence in 1982. The ambiguity about her late entrance and early exit is not known to the researcher.

²⁸ For details of the membership of the 17th Politburo, see: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS22767.pdf>

²⁹ For a full list of the 18th PBSC, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/15/c_131976451.htm

organizations reflects a disadvantaged position of women in China's elite political life. It is ironic that the CCP proclaims to be a proponent of women's political advancement-at least this is true to some extent- with the gender equality policies and laws initiated for women's equality. Interestingly, these initiatives are only meant for lower level politics and the party's most important institutions become sacred-no-go-areas for women. The case of Sun Chunlan links to the finding that women's leadership at provincial level has a close link with access to other party organizations.

In addition, the 15th Party Congress was held in 1997, two years after China's landmark hosting of the FWCW. Mentioned earlier, the Beijing conference was a moment of push-up for parity. Basically, it was the language spoken and promoted during the span of the conference. What women wanted was not a political surrogating but real commitments and actions that grant them and men as equals in the determination of the affairs of their societies by occupying not only low level seats in party organizations, village committees or heads of social establishments. Indeed it is undeniable that Beijing listened to the calls of the UN and the global feminist or gender equality movement but it did so according to the wish of the CCP.

From the case of the PB, the CCP regime is not yet prepared to share its most prestigious positions with women; not even China's educated and economically reliant women who are as skilled and exposed as men. Indeed China has many Liu and Suns but the data confirms a tendency of political prestige being mostly kept for men who have been socialized and prepared for the most parts of their lives for these responsibilities.

POLITBURO STANDING COMMITTEE

The powerhouse of the CCP and by extension, the PRC is its Politburo Standing Committee. The PBSC is the most superior institution in Chinese politics- sitting at the peak of the CCP hierarchy with people having both the initial and final say on anything about Chinese politics especially at central level. This is what Wang (1995) calls “apex of the apex”. It is said to be as secretive as its superior status, keeping its operations from public view while determining China’s present (Wang 1995, 2001; BBC 2012a) and perhaps its future too. Members are drawn from the larger PB and currently, the 18th PBSC has seven (7) members. The president of the country heads the organization in the portfolio of Secretary General but who is now referred as “one among equals” (Beech 2012; Lawrence 2012 & Li 2012).

Hannah Beech writes in the *Time* that: “In China, there is not just one wizard, but seven”. The remaining 6 are heads of the parliament, the Central Party School and the cabinet, among others. Like their predecessors (at least from the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras), these men of “equals” are expected to run the affairs of China likely for the next decade except for those who might reach the age limit requirement of 68 which leads to one’s exit according to Bo (2007) and Lawless and Martin (2013).

Having a PBSC in the CCP started in 1956 (Dexter 2012) and since then, the institution has asserted immense power both implicitly and explicitly. While the PBSC and the PB should have been answerable to the CCCCPC, the opposite seems to be the reality by all evidences. Because of the composition of the PB, its relatively larger membership and other responsibilities of the members, it is the PBSC and the Secretariat that runs the daily affairs of the country (Lawrence and Martin 2013). Even though little is known about the inner workings of the body,

researchers conclude that the PBSC weaves the Chinese society. The institution provides the most important governance responsibilities of a modern nation state being “responsible for the country’s political and ideological affairs, economic and financial administration, foreign policy, public security, and military operations” (Li 2012, p1-2). The PSCB embodies and decides all policy matters that are to be initiated, governed or not by all other organs of the government and the party.

Mentioned earlier, the seven most powerful individuals of China are the PSCB members but since its founding, it has been an exclusive men’s club. Zhongnanhai as a state house glorifies the power of China today mostly because of its occupation by the PBSC dealing with matters that they believe stitch China together as a nation while also posing to the world as a powerful state that can influence global affairs through its wealth as well as a unique political system.

TABLE 12

COMPOSITION OF THE POLITBURO STANDING COMMITTEE 1978-2012

Congress/Year	Total	Number of women	% of women
11 th (1977) ‡	8	0	0%
12 th (1982)*	6	0	0%
13 th (1987)*	5	0	0%
14 th (1992)*	7	0	0%
15 th (1997)*	7	0	0%
16 th (2002)*	9	0	0%
17 th (2007)*	9	0	0%
18 th (2012)+	7	0	0%
	58	0	0%

Data marked as *, see: Alice Miller (2011, 2), *The Politburo Standing Committee under HU Jinta.*. Data marked as + See: Cheng Li (2013, 3-4) *A Biographical and Factional Analysis of the Post-2012 Politburo.* Table 1 Data marked as ‡, see, China Today at http://www.chinatoday.com/org/cpc/cpc_11th_congress_standing_polibureau.htm (Accessed: 25th May, 2014)

During the period under review, the PBSC performs worse than any other organization with regards to women’s membership. Between 1977 and 2012, there were 58 entrances into this

powerful institution but none was a woman. The reason for the lack of entrance seems to be inter-connected but prominently, this has to do with the positions that fill the PBSC and the Chinese political system's inner-power struggle instead of public competition. Bo Zhiyue outlines certain positions that give an automatic entrance opportunity to the PBSC (although few exceptions might exist).

They include the Party Secretary General, Premier, Chairpersons of the NPC and CPPCC, Chief of the Party Secretariat, Head of the Central Party Discipline Commission and the first Vice Premier (Lawrence 2013; BBC 2012a & Bo 2007). From this breakdown, women have hardly held these positions in the period under review if not the entire history of the PRC. Notably, China's legislature never has a female Speaker/Chairperson, a female never rose to the party's highest leadership position as Secretary General and the limited data available on the cabinet shows all Vice-Premiers during the period under review are men except Wu Yi and Liu Yandong. Perhaps this exclusion also reinforces the CCP's habit of granting female politicians with positions deemed as *women's issues*. If there were a position dealing with family planning and child nutrition in the PBSC, perhaps the party will enthusiastically welcome women on board.

The first PBSC immediately after the Cultural Revolution was larger than the 4 succeeding ones. Therefore, it is evident that entrance into the SC must have been based on competitive power struggle and compromise on the sides of those who entered and their fractions or political protégés that enabled their entrance into the organization. This period coincided with Deng's membership in the 12th PB but she was not granted an opportunity to sit in the PBSC.

An expansion happened in 2002 and 2007 in the PB and both periods received 1 female member. Similar expansion happened in the PBSC, the number moved upwards (9 people) but no opportunity of entrance took place. Despite an opportunity of membership expansion in the 16th batch, Wu Yi, did not make it to the PBSC because she was not the First Executive Vice-Premier at the time.

A similar repetition followed in 2012 by Liu Yandong failing to enter the body. One could have argued in 2007 that because of a possible norm constraint (as a State Councilor) limited her entrance to the PB. In reality, State Councilors do not generally enter the PB (Lawrence & Martin 2013; Bo 2007). Regardless of this, there could be little possibility if any for her entrance into the 18th SC because Zhang Gaoli is the 1st Vice-Premier (and he therefore sits together with the Premier in the PBSC) while Liu comes second on the Vice-Premiership list.

Therefore, the highest post she could reach at the moment is membership in the general PB. Hence in November 2012, 7 men in matching dark suits were paraded on the stage of the People's Great Hall as members of the 18th Politburo Standing Committee of the CCP. This moment marked the formal closure of anticipation for a female membership. China's "most powerful" woman does not have an equal weight with her male counterparts. Indeed, the core of power in the CCP has neither a reserved seat nor a competitive one for women throughout the party's existence. Not even Madam Mao passed the line into the PBSC.

A chance of turning a lifelong exclusion and undermining women's contribution at the top echelon of politics is yet to have an opportunity to change. One thing is apparent is the fact that exclusion of women from the PBSC has a direct effect on the morality of the female politicians who have made it closer to the top as well as a limitation to those on the grassroots.

Indeed the glass ceiling is a reality in the CCP hierarchy and it happens in a formidable way against its victims.

For the next five years (from 2012), Liu will continue in her position as a PB member with a legacy like her predecessors who were close to the core but the glass-ceiling barred them from reaching the highest level. As she steps down in 2017 both due to her age and term limit, Sun Chunlan will be 67 by then. Even though her fate will clearly depend on this, she would not have reached the age limit (68) that would have warrant an exit.

In case of her retention, the world will watch yet again an opportunity of ascendance to the inner-cohort of the supreme power. For the entrance of members in the 19th PB and its Standing Committee, it will depend on which women are able to enter the CC as full members, their professional backgrounds, the connections they share with which political figures at the moment and the positions they will be recruited for, and of course the economic and political climate the country will be experiencing around such a period. Whatever might be the case, the data shows that as of 2013, women's participation in all the elite political institutions do not meet the global 30% benchmark as it ranges between an average of 0% and 21.4%, the least found in the PBSC while the parliament has the highest.

Data of this magnitude provide an in-depth understanding of power distribution within the society. The parliament and its affiliated committees for example have to be shared with a more diverse representation; more women from various backgrounds have to share the negotiating table with men. As for other state institutions such as the cabinet, membership should not be determined by other factors such as party affiliation in absent of a balanced gender reflection. It is useful to note here that despite women's present in the cabinet, it is important that

portfolios are shared based on expertise and not gendered roles of men and women. In other organizations of the party also, especially the PB and PBCS, representation has to be broadened to reflect the different social and economic classes of the society. Therefore, political institutions should be shared by men and women to determine how their society should be governed as equal members.

The last two chapters have analyzed some of China's most important political institutions and the possible factors that have limited women's greater presence in them. From a theoretical perspective, the country does not lack the potential of improving political parity between men and women. Practically, on the other hand, the CCP as well as the Chinese society seems to be extensively constrained by gender stereotypes and socio-cultural practices that reinforce women's subordination to men even though the party has declared countless times that it supports gender equality. In reality, the efforts seem to be too slow.

Indeed, this points to the fact that China is moving too fast economically but slowly in its political advancement that will guarantee the citizens an equal opportunity to determine the affairs of their society without structural and ideological barriers. Investment in women's political presence is indeed a "smart investment" the regime cannot continue to ignore. Such a venture also should not be used as a strategy to achieve other vested interests and it must be done in a reflective way that includes women of all backgrounds as in level of education, geographical difference, economic and social classes.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

RESEARCH FINDINGS

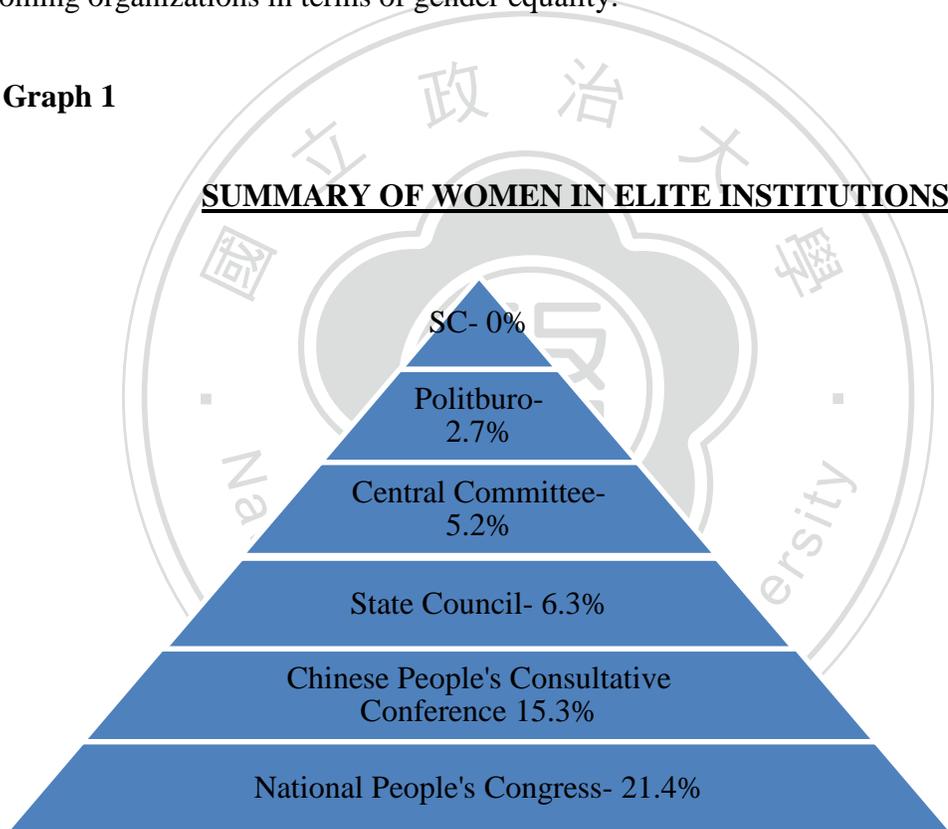
This research has reached important and some interesting findings about the status of women in Chinese elite politics. To an extent, the hypothesis that the structure of the regime results to women's under-representation in politics holds substance. However, it is realized that other than the political system, traditional beliefs and practices, difficulty in meeting the required social ties for inclusion and networking cost women an opportunity of an entire political career.

Since Rosen's 1995 work on women and politics in China, which this study has complemented, much has not changed with regards to women's presence in Chinese elite politics. In fact, the data shows a static performance of women's inclusion in top government institutions. However, there is a tendency of exaggeration from some spectators about the improvement of the situation. This is only known when one looks at the matter from data that covers a reasonable timespan and from a deeper angle than a mere dependence on national reports or events. The most important feature in Chinese elite politics is the dominance of male elitist politicians who have gathered ample network within the party and having strong technical backgrounds in bureaucracy. For a succinct outlining of this chapter, the research questions are answered below.

Has China provided an expected room of political participation on the basis of gender equality since the beginning of its reforms in 1978? There are two folds to this question. The first answer is that room for gender equality in the political sphere only happened at lower level politics because the regime initiated programs of accelerating women's presence at cadre levels and provincial branches. Secondly, elite politics have not received any sort of such arrangements

and the only institution that has performed better is the parliament. The graph below shows an informative summary of the average of all the institutions analyzed above. As portrayed, women never achieved even an average of one fourth in an institution for the period under review. Anyway, state institutions perform relatively better than the party. In addition, as the branches of the pyramid move upward, especially with regards to party institutions, the slimmer the chances of their presence. This means that prestigious bodies at the apex of the pyramid are the most unwelcoming organizations in terms of gender equality.

Graph 1



The fact that Chinese politics remains highly patriarchal does not mean men in general but those who have affiliation with the CCP. Indeed it is true that the communist party has relaxed to a great extent from a more aggressive control of the lives and livelihoods of its people since the beginning of the reform. However, the party seems to be more pre-occupied with the

improvement of its legitimacy both domestically and externally and its actions reflect more of a party-interest than real power sharing.

In addition, the relation between the regime and the women's movement is complex as the former continues to show patterns of "state feminism". This is because of the CCP's orientation of class and gender equality. The state's engagement as the sole institution interested and charged with the empowerment of women is hard to remedy in case it fails to perform as expected and yet it does not provide room for others to hold it accountable for such failure or assist it to objectively improve as might be needed. To an extent, this limits initiatives from non-government bodies to tackle women's subordination whether in the form of capacity building or simply networking them with others for sharing best practices.

In addition, Chinese politics is more interconnected and stratified than expected. There is greater tendency that political offices are accessed based on one's membership in a grassroots party-cell or other party organizations thus granting opportunities for election or selection to bodies at the provincial or national level. Therefore, those who argue for more female presence at local level politics, (such as Zeng 2014) indeed have good reason for their position. Even though it has been argued in the paper that women's presence in high level politics provides them with ample opportunities of accessing platforms where final decisions are made, if they can reach such positions only through starting their careers from the very bottom of the political ladder, it is worthy of the process. This is unlike other relatively democratic countries where individuals might not be limited from contesting or partaking in the political life of their countries due strict stratification. While beginning as a representative of a county or district is of advantage to a female Swedish politician, she might be able to choose to run as candidate for a

parliamentary seat directly at the central level with or without a party backing. This situation is of little possibility for her female Chinese counterpart.

If more females are heading party institutions (party secretaries) at provincial levels such as elite ones, it will directly increase their chances of entrance into the Central Committee and Politburo membership (Bo 2007). Taking Sun Chunlan as a case, her entrance into the 18th Politburo is as a result of her position as the Party Secretary of Tianjin province. Therefore, this also corroborates Zeng's (2014) argument that there is need for greater women inclusion in grassroots political participation.

Furthermore, the data shows a very weak intra-party democracy practice. True, to an extent, the party has initiated an electoral participation process in the selection of candidates making it to the CCP's congresses, but the required gender make-up for a fair representation seems missing. As a result, party institutions perform very weakly in the inclusion of women as leaders or in the most prestigious bodies such as the Politburo or its Standing Committee. In fact, in all party institutions studied here, none has attained a significant portion of political power shared between the genders. The Central Committee attained an average female membership of 5.2% and the Politburo got 2.7% during the period under-review. The Standing Committee never witnessed a female membership. The CCP does not share its power according to its gender composition but a tendency of men with elitist backgrounds or technocrats seems to be the unchallenged norm.

It is also interesting to unveil the fact that China has many more "Princelings" than princesses. The idea of "princelings" became relevant after the Mao era when past revolutionary leaders are replaced by their children in contemporary Chinese politics. Anyway, there is a

serious tendency that sons are more expected and prepared for such future responsibilities than daughters. If this identity is relevant as an analytical concept, women are lesser prepared for such future engagements thus dynasty politics in China seems not to be a major opportunity for women to ascend the throne of power as might be more evident in other Asian countries such as Burma, India, Thailand, Sri Lanka or Pakistan.

Are there frameworks that support genuine institutional arrangements for gender-related demands in the “new” China? To say that the regime does not initiate affirmative actions to enable women’s political involvement is not a fact. The 1982 constitution, the special law on women’s human rights of 1995, the gender equality policies initiated in 2001 and 2005 are all tangible examples aimed at accelerating women’s political progress. However, the CCP focuses more on the parliament than any other elite institution that really carry true political power in the Chinese context. Unfortunately, not even the legislature’s case shows dramatic changes as might be expected. Indeed, women’s gains in parliamentary membership give greater opportunities for constructive policies and programs to be initiated. With the presence of women in the legislature, laws become engendered and their impacts on men and women are analyzed from those with such social experiences. This is where gender mainstreaming finds its way into national programs.

Anyway, considering the inter-locking nature of the state and party in China, it is imperative, that women’s inclusion in party-institutions will even provide more gains for their empowerment as they will be able to directly influence the agenda making process of the country. It turns out that in China, anything that is not the CCP is of little influence except if the party gives its direct blessing or support to it. Several political pronouncements, commitments and

laws exist but they are the least effective to result to any dramatic increase of the number of women in the country's most relevant institutions.

Moving to the economic framework, growth does not necessarily guarantee an equitable society. Therefore, to equate a high GDP productivity and gender equality is not helpful. Presently, in China, economic growth and stability tops the national agenda as the regime's primary tool of political maintenance because such growth will lead to greater achievements in social and economic standing of the citizens. With regards to women, good and inclusive economic policies enable them to work outside their homes, to contribute directly to the country's economic output while they are able to live financially independent and achieve the necessary resources needed to run for public office. Despite these benefits, economic growth does not automatically grant women equality in the political process except when growth is combined with practical policies that enable full and non-discriminate enjoyment of political rights. Indeed there will be need for more economic justice to women as demands in the sector for gender-friendly laws and policies will be necessary tools to guarantee the different fiscal needs of men and women in a country that pursues even greater economic relevance in the world.

How greater international opening will continue to affect both government and women regarding the demand for more political rights and positions in the country's elite institutions? To be seen as a responsible state within the global community indeed goes along with the fulfillment of certain responsibilities and expectations. Even states that are theocratic or have extremely isolated themselves from the influence of non-state actors and social movements are somehow not immune from the pressure to adjust to the need for women's inclusion in all processes of governance. With the influence of such a global social movement, it is getting harder to ignore the power of advocacy for gender equality. For instance, while global rankings

matters especially at a time that there is a specific and time bound target such as the 30% benchmark, intense monitoring over performance is a critical engagement of the UN, women's rights organizations, scholars and the media.

More actors are adding to the long list of women's organizations, the UN and other social justice movements for a global gender norm that maintains women's political participation key on the international human rights agenda. In case women are not able to make the demands locally, international pressure could lead to positive response. The male leaders of the CCP cannot continue to lack concern on how far women are able to share or rotate political offices with men. The authoritarian system will also require some adjustments because of the need for some forms of adherence and responsiveness to global agreements. The habit of ignoring demands that do not match the interest of the party will obviously not continue as a political strategy in the long run. It will be interesting how the CCP will maneuver these pressures if not domestically but internationally as it poses further as an economic prowess and a modern state with a high sense of social and political advancement. The regime will likely have to prove this through a compromise even if it will be by reluctance in the future.

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

For women's voices to be accelerated in the governance process, especially at top level politics, there should be initiatives that target both the state and society. Ranging from the need for the state to change its reorientation about women's empowerment to the society's adjustment of acceptance that political rights are inherent and that their enjoyment should not be infringed by stereotypical practices at the disadvantage of women should be critical initiatives.

Firstly, if China will continue with “state feminism”, it has to face reality that gender equality is not a matter of choice or a political tool. There is need for reorientation about gender equality in its specific form different from the socialist concept of class equality. The socialist approach for women’s empowerment only provides abstract rhetoric that does not put women’s equality as a need that is attained true realistic approaches of investing in the special needs of the genders. “State feminism” usually approaches women’s advancement through patriarchal support to lift the other group from backwardness and subordination as if it were a favor doing such. However, gender equality and genuine investment in women’s wellbeing be it political or social is a “smart investment” that guarantees progress for a society. Therefore, it will be of benefit to the Chinese regime to approach women’s equal inclusion in the governance process of the nation foremost as a responsibility and second as a rational opportunity for building a sustainable and stable society.

Secondly, a little assertiveness of the ACWF will enable this agency to mobilize the necessary resources be it material or otherwise to invest in women’s advancement. This means that women need a combination of resources to enable them attain the qualities that qualify them to partake in competitive political process. Despite the fact that China’s performance in educational attainment has increased, there is need for capacity building in areas such as self-esteem to boost women’s political confidence and networking to link women with the relevant individuals and political organizations for their recruitment. These are some of the practical approaches that will ultimately increase their presence in politics. The ACWF could even do more by initiating and implementing programs that will genuinely contribute to women’s advancement than party expectations. In reality, there are constraints towards the feasibility of this act but it is possible when national laws and policies are used as a backing for such demands.

Thirdly, intraparty democracy from a gender perspective will increase the tendency of a reflective composition of party institutions. Even though the use of quotas has received controversial reactions from critics who do not accept it as a real strategy of women's empowerment, it has become one of the fastest ways to improve women's presence in high level politics (Dahlerup, 2008; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005). Many more countries are initiating some form of quota system to increase women's presence in high ranking government positions. As the major if not sole political party through which women can gain a gateway to the legislature and other offices, stipulation of a required quota to be granted women is a sustainable way that guarantee their presence. If the CCP initiates such a party electoral law, it will likely be more efficient than mere pronouncements of proportional increase before a parliamentary election for instance.

Fourthly, there should be initiatives to broaden membership in state institutions from local to central levels. Focus on increasing capacity at the local level is reasonable but a balanced approach to empowerment could yield better results both at the local and central level politics. It is important to note that women's inclusion in grassroots politics highly relies on their membership in the CCP because this is the most available way to their political activeness in village, county and township levels. In addition, their capability of running as vibrant candidates in village elections depends on the possibility of obtaining the necessary political resources such as networking, confidence and trust building. However, in such processes, there have been controversial appraisals of women's access to local government offices as they lack the necessary opportunities to challenge male counterparts. As a matter of fact, party affiliation cannot continue be a determiner to women's political relevance and their inclusion at all levels be it in the village or the center should be a priority.

Fifthly, empower new and existing civil society organizations to complement the efforts of the ACWF. This way, NGO resources are channeled into areas the state is not able to fully cater for while it also provides women with alternative opportunities to contribute to national development. Indeed the post-1978 China has received various forms of international interactions which have provided a turning point (to some extent) about state and civil-society relation (Tan and Wang 2012). An extremely important legacy the FWCW had on Chinese politics and the feminist movement is the connection it created by linking women's advocacy organizations in China and the global feminist movement. This benefit will only survive productively if the state does not interfere too much into the programs of the independent organizations that innovate and act in the interest of women. This means that non-mass organizations or state-funded organizations will be able to continue partnering and utilizing resources from their cousin organizations (both within and outside China) for greater productivity. As noted by Howell (2003), the ACWF continues its role as a mobilizer for the state and simultaneously represent women's interests but the reality is that the dual responsibility weakens its relevance and independence if it were to be expected as a true pressure group.

In addition, it is totally unrealistic to assume that the 23% female presence in the NPC means that all national policies will be greatly influenced by those women. However, the mere fact that they are able to communicate the needs of their social groups and having the government realize the different needs of the Chinese men and women with regards to national development, is a step worthy of encouragement. Despite this point, it is also important that more efforts are geared towards the improvement of women's activism in the NPC or any other institution they are found. Politics of presence will not be enough for the long run and there is

need for institutions, capacities and strategies geared towards greater female mobilization to influence policies in real rational forms and not as agents for party satisfaction within the system.

Further, international agreements and commitments about the status of women have advanced since the emergence of the CEDAW. National governments and the civil society have both relied on such global commitments to require greater investment in the lives of women ranging from economic to political. Therefore, it is in the interest of China to make use of the international women's rights instruments it has ratified. This is possible from the regime as well as the NGOs working on women's empowerment. According to the agreements stipulated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the achievement of gender parity in politics should be the responsibility of all national governments across the world. The initial 30% bench mark could be a target for China because that is the most practical way of accelerating gender equality in politics. If quotas are to be made, it is necessary that they are drawn above one-fourth of the membership because this will allow for a quicker performance than relying on global averages to gauge the success of women's ratio in national institutions such as the parliament. Indeed constitutional quotas have assisted countries such as Rwanda but the attainment is a result of higher targets than the 2007 Chinese target of 22% of women in parliament.

Finally, women's political participation can take even a higher level if the post-Beijing conference momentum does not fade out. It has been discussed that there have been initiatives for women's access to political positions both at local and central levels, and more focus have been on their contribution to the governance in the parliament, but this has received a mixed success. Despite this, if there is continuous activism, research focus and other public engagements to support women's direct demand for political office, both the regime and the society will be reminded of the importance of the political system being gendered in a fair way.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS, WEAKNESSES AND FURTHER WORK

Other than the major challenge of data unavailability, especially, in the case of the State Council, and the lack of a major data bank for many of the institutions examined here, the result shows a serious gender disparity in Chinese elite politics.

In addition, the data collection was more challenging than expected because most of the researchers do not focus on all the institutions studied in this research neither do some of the works relate to the entire period under-review.

An even in-depth analysis of the situation would have been desired if not the graduate timeline of the researcher. This means that the project work could not be any further than my study schedule, which also constraint my ability of interacting with expert scholars on Chinese elite politics.

Finally, language barrier has possible implications on this work as the researcher depended on English works only thus missing an opportunity of studying many of the works done by local scholars in Chinese.

Despite these weaknesses, this research took a rigorous process of information finding and verification to contribute to the existing debate in the feminist discourse about women's position in Chinese politics. This study has augmented my interest to further explore the affiliates of female elite politicians in those powerful institutions controlled by men. Knowledge of this will provide a greater understanding of working with those establishments for partnership.

This future engagement will look at women's relevance in elite politics from a "factional" perspective. Bo (2007) started an interesting debate about "factional politics" in Chinese elite politics. This suggestion is a result of the researcher's curiosity about how the few women in Chinese elite politics are able to select the "camps" to affiliate with, their roles in such camps and how their presence paves recruitment opportunities for fellow women. Using Bo's theoretical framework from a feminist perspective could be an interesting contribution to the ongoing scholarly discussions of gender politics in China.

In conclusion, the political system of the CCP has resulted to a chronic isolation of citizens to fully determine the affairs of their nation through competitive and plural political mechanisms. This has effects on the political life of the country but when engendered, it even deepens women's inequality and under-representation than any other class or social group. Since 1978, China has indeed listened, adjusted and initiated policies and commitments especially those influenced from global gender activism to advance women's interest.

Anyway, power is visibly controlled by the CCP and its focus on women's inclusion is more of a political ambition than true commitment to gender equality. Until a time that women's participation in politics is turned into a serious commitment and not a mere lip service to the acceptance that, it is a fundamental human right and necessity for justice, China will definitely keep missing an opportunity where the other half of its human resource is not relevant to enough in determining the political health of their nation.

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