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Women's Political Participation in China: Improved or Not?

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Abstract

Continuous rapid economic growth has made China one of largest economies in the world. Chinese women have been playing an important role in many aspects of socio-economic activities. However, in recent decades overall women's political participation in China has not been significantly improved. The spindled shape of women's representation in the power structures will not support a sustainable improvement in women's political participation in China. This paper argues that high-profile women politicians would contribute to political gender equity, but a broader participation in politics from the grassroots female population is more important and fundamental. Therefore, a proactive policy in women's political participation will only work well when it not only focuses on the middle level of power structures but also on the participation of grassroots groups.

Key Words: Women in China, Politics China, Women Politics

Introduction

China has had a remarkable economic growth for three decades. It is currently probably the second largest economy in the world. Chinese women have been playing an important role in this flourishing economy; should we say now that the Chinese women "hold up half the sky"? This paper discusses in particular the political participation of Chinese women at different levels to argue that there is a long way to go to achieve real gender equity in China.

Women's Status and Their Political Participation

The main slogan of the 1995 UN Women's Conference was "parity". It suggested that "gender equity" was an equal 50 percent representation of men and women in power structures (Rosen 1995). Realization of ''gender equity'' is a multi-dimensional process of achieving basic capabilities, legal rights and participation in key social, economic, political and cultural domains (Healey 2009; Moghadam and Senftova 2005). It is clear that "political participation" is only one part of a "gender equity" measurement framework, which was suggested by Moghadam and Senftova (2005) to include 44 indicators within seven domains. However, whether at the local or national level, for women to attain empowerment, participation and rights in the formal political sphere are key indicators (Moghadam and Senftova 2005).

Women's political participation is generally measured by the percentage of women in power structures (Rosen 1995). The percentage of women representatives in parliament has been applied internationally as an important indicator for women's political participation, particularly at the national level (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2012).

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The "glass ceiling" effect has been broadly discussed in women's political participation (such as Powell and Butterfield 1994; Conway 2001; Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia and Vanneman 2001; Palmer and Simon 2008). In economics, the term "glass ceiling" refers to "the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements." (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995a). Nowadays, the metaphor widely applies to obstacles hindering the advancement of women (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995b).

Women's low rate of participation at the higher levels of politics (encountering a "glass ceiling") is an enduring problem in gender stratification. Three explanations for differences in women's political representation—social structure, politics and ideology—have been addressed at different levels. Paxton and Kunovich (2003) demonstrated that gender ideology strongly affected the number of women in national legislatures, by introducing a newly available measure of national gender ideology into a cross-national model of women in legislatures.

To increase the political leadership participation of women, it is important to pay more attention to a range of issues, such as customs and trade regulations, graft, the gender gap in political empowerment, public spending on education, the economic viability of the country, access to electricity and the internet, political freedom and cultural variables like performance orientation, collectivism and power distance. Of them, the gender gap in political empowerment and the collectivism/cultural variable are more important (Bullough, Kroeck, Newburry, Kundu and Lowe 2011).

While research and studies have been focusing on women's pursuit of careers in politics and government, some researchers indicated that there had been too little attention paid to participation by a broader stratum of women in different aspects of government and politics (e.g. Howell 2002). Getting women into politics and government is not just about occupying positions of leadership. Meaningful political participation requires a broader definition of politics, which extends beyond the institutional boundaries of the party-state to other domains of social and economic life (Howell 2002).

Women's Political Participation in China

There has been a lot of discussion about defining women's political participation in China. Although a universal definition has not been available, major aspects widely agreed upon with regard to such participation include: 1) aspiration and capacity; 2) women taking positions in governments; 3) women taking leadership positions and making decisions; 4) women participating in mass organisations; and 5) women involved with a broader range of issues in different ways including raising their concerns and contributing their suggestions (Wu 2005).

The Historic Trend of Women's Political Participation in China

Since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in 1949 and the National People's Congress of China (NPCC) was first formed in 1954, Chinese women have been taking part in politics as NPCC representatives. In the First NPCC (1954-1959), women representatives made up 12% of the total. In the first 20 years, the percentage of women representatives increased steadily, to 22.6% in the Fourth NPCC (1975). Since then, this percentage has largely plateaued without even a slight increase. In the latest NPCC (2008), women representatives totalled 21.3%, which was almost the same as 1978 (21.2%) (Table 1).

Table 1: The Percentage of Women Representatives in the NPCC* and its Standing Committee (Cited from Zheng, Guo and Zhao, 2009: P10)

Year	1954	1959	1964	1975	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008
Women Represen-tatives (%)	12	12.3	17.8	22.6	21.2	21.1	21.3	21.0	21.8	20.2	21.3
Women in Standing Committee (%)	5	6.3	17.4	25.1	21	9	11.9	12.3	12.7	13.2	16.6

* NPCC is normally elected every 5 years.

The Standing Committee of NPCC is functionally similar to the Single House or Lower House in most parliamentary countries in the world. The percentage of women in the Standing Committee of the NPCC has been much lower in most years than that of women representatives (i.e. 11.9%-16.6% in last two decades, ref. Table 1).

Besides the NPCC, in China, there have been two major components in the power structures. So it is also important to investigate the representation of women in the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCCCP) and the Central Government particularly in its ministerial portfolios and higher leaders.

Since 1982, the percentages of women in NPCC, CCCCP (Note: the CCCCP is normally elected every 5 years and one year before the NPCC election) and in higher tiers of central government have not substantially increased. Moreover, in 2002(3)-2007(8), the percentages dropped significantly (cf Figure 1 below). This suggests that Chinese women's political participation at the national level has not been improved over last two decades.

Figure 1: Proportion of Women at Top Levels of Chinese Power Structures [from 1982(3) to 2012(3)]

Data sources: *Women in NPCC: http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/index.html; Women being Ministers or higher leaders: http://www.china.com.cn; http://www.people.com.cn/zgrdxw/zlk/main.html; http://www.npc.gov.cn; Women in CCCPC: http://lianghui.china.com.cn/08ch-meet/ziliao/index.html*

China has achieved significant progress in implementing a proactive policy in enhancing women's political influence in the past decade, in particular at middle levels. Having implemented quotas on the number of women taking leadership positions in governments, by the end of 2010, 86.2 percent of government departments at the county level offered leadership positions to women, an increase of more than 26 percent compared to the figure in 2000. About 87.1 percent of provincial governments had at least one female deputy governor in 2010. Women account for about 42.5 percent of total civil servants in government departments across the country according to the latest figures released by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (Cited from Women of China Online 2011). It must be noted that recently, in many provinces, women's participation in People's Councils has increased. For example, in Beijing, female representatives to the People's Council of Beijing were 32.4% of the total, ranked No 1 at the provincial level in China (cited from Ding, Li and Huang 2010).

Women in Power Structures

Although there has never been a single woman in the top tier of power (the Standing Committee of CCCCP) in China since 1949, Chinese women have been represented in the leadership. There were eight female state leaders in the Chinese Central Government, 230 female ministers and provincial governors (including deputies and equivalents), and 670 female mayors and deputy mayors in China in 2009 (Xinhua Online 2010). In 2008, female officials at different levels in China were almost a proportion of 40 percent (Xinhua Online

2010). However, a close look at the distribution of women in power structures reveals the clear disadvantage of women in the political system in China.

In the early 1990s, the real situation of women's political participation was described as "One low and three small": low in overall proportion of women participating in politics; small in the number of women taking positions at higher levels; small in the number of women taking head positions; small in the number of women taking positions in key sectors (Training Base for Women's Federation Officers 1993). The recent data suggested that this situation has not been substantially changed in decades.

Senior female officials holding positions of provincial governors/state ministers (including deputies) or above won around 8% in 2000 and around 11% in 2009. The proportions at levels of prefecture and county were higher, i.e. 10.8% and 13.7% (prefecture), 15.1% and 16.6% (county), in 2000 and 2009 respectively (Wu 2012).

Nevertheless, in 2009, the proportions of female heads (not including deputies) at different levels were much lower than those of female officials, i.e. 7.3% vs. 11% for provincial and ministerial level and above, 10.4% vs. 13.7% for prefecture level and 14.8% vs. 16.6% for county level (Wu 2012).

Data suggests that women's participation in politics in China encounters the "glass ceiling".

Women's Political Participation at Basic Levels

A case study of Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Hubei Province, provides a more specific picture of women's participation in politics at basic levels. Generally, since 1990, the proportion of female officials in Enshi has increased (Figure 2).

Figure 2: **Historic Trend of Proportions of Female Officials in Enshi Prefecture (1990-2003) (from: Han 2005)**
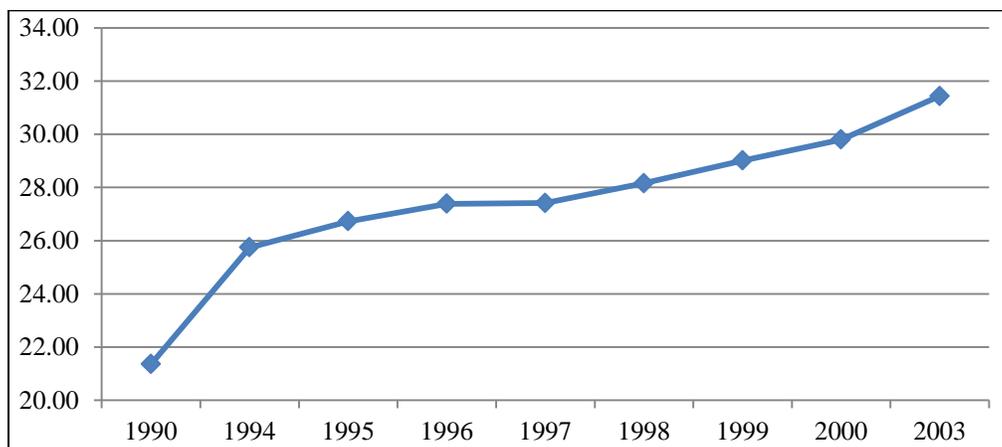

According to the data, we can see all major women's development indices but one (i.e. Percentage of female representatives of People's Congress) have steadily improved (Table 2).

Table 2: **Women Development Index in Enshi Autonomous Prefecture (2001-2008) (from: Enshi Women Online 2010)**

Indicators	Unit	2001	2005	2008
Percentage of females in total population	%	47.8	47.7	49.0
Percentage of females in population (>=18)	%	47.8	47.7	49.5
Percentage of female employees	%	43.2	30.8	30.7
Percentage of female employees in urban areas	%	31.0	31.2	31.4
Percentage of female professionals	%	33.3	35.4	36.2
Percentage of middle and senior female professionals	%	25.9	31.1	31.9
Percentage of female representatives of People's Congress	%	18.0	20.6	19.6
Percentage of female members of People's Political Consultative Conference (PPCC)	%	19.2	20.0	22.8
Female public servants	%	--	--	19.4
Percentage of female members in villagers' councils	%	12.0	17.4	24.9
Percentage of female members in residents' councils	%	32.0	41.3	46.5
Percentage of female members in workers' congresses	%	22.0	23.8	25.3
Percentage of female members in company Boards of Directors and Boards of Supervisors	%	5.6	10.0	12.5

Women's engagement in the power structure forms an inverted trapezoidal shape, as shown in Figure 3. At the end of 2009, there were six female high profile officials in the Prefecture leadership, 17.14% of 35 total such officials. At the middle levels (including directors of Prefecture departments, county and city leaderships), there were 73 female members out of 534 total officials (i.e. 13.67%). At the township level, 92 women (i.e. 14.18%) took leadership positions along with 649 male officials. Across the whole Prefecture, there were 2,765 female public servants, or 19.64% of a total of 14,078 (Enshi News Online 2010).

Figure 3: Percentage of Female Leaders in the Power Structure in Enshi Prefecture (2009)
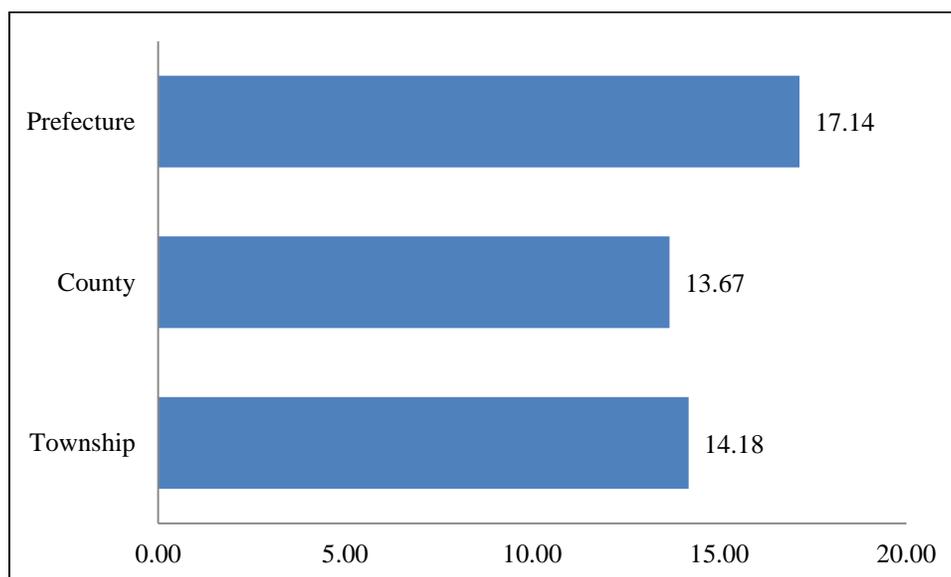
Statistical data for 2003 suggested that female officials took a percentage of 31.43%. As categorized by agencies, most women officials took positions in public institutions (84.79%) rather than administrative organs of government (11.77%) or business enterprises (3.44%) (Table 3).

Table 3: Female Officials at Different Governmental Levels in Enshi Prefecture in 2003

		Total official number (A)	Number of female officials (B)	% of female in total (B/A)	% of categorized female officials in total female officials (Bn/BTotal)
Total		75389	23696	31.43	100.00
by agency category	Administrative organisations of government	14600	2789	19.10	11.77
	Public institutions	57879	20091	34.71	84.79
	Business enterprises	2910	816	28.04	3.44
by govern-mental level	Prefecture	5134	2304	44.88	9.72
	County	16625	7964	47.90	33.61
	Township	39030	13428	34.40	56.67

As categorized by different sectors, 55.9% of women officials were in education and health sectors, 6.43% in agriculture, 5.82% in manufacturing and only 0.87% in the public security, procuratorial and judicial departments (Han 2005). This suggests that women's political participation is limited to some general non-key areas and sectors, and they are not substantially involved in key sectors such as economic development, governmental and communist party construction and legislative development and enforcement.

Regarding the leadership, there was only one female government head out of 17 heads at prefecture level (i.e. 5.88%). At county level, the situation was better; female heads took 11.68%. The worst was at township level: there were only 17 females out of 326 township heads (i.e. 5.21%) (Table 4). This suggests that women are in a very disadvantaged position to take leadership roles at all government levels.

Table 4: Women Heads at Different Levels of Governments in Enshi Prefecture (2003) (from: Han 2005)

Level of government	Total number of governmental heads (inc. vice heads)	Women heads					
		Total		Heads		Vice heads	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Prefecture	17	1	5.88	0	0	1	5.88
County	137	16	11.68	1	0.73	15	10.95
Township	326	17	5.21	3	0.92	14	4.29

Perspectives on Women's Political Participation

A recent national survey in China revealed some important information for an in-depth analysis of women's political participation. This survey shows that 2.2% of surveyed women in employment are principals of State organisations, Party and mass organisations and enterprises, almost half the percentage of surveyed men (All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011). This result is consistent with the official statistics shown above, revealing the paucity of women in leadership positions. A similar situation was reported in 2009. In decision-making positions, women are at an absolute disadvantage. In 2009, only around 3% of heads at different governmental agencies were women.

There has been a continuing low level of women's political participation at grassroots levels, such as township and village governance structures (township governments, village councils and committees). The dominant explanation given for women's numerical under-representation in the lower level of structures, and in politics more generally, focuses on women's lack of self-confidence, and on the enduring drag of 'feudal' attitudes (e.g. women being constructed as inferior to men). More than half of surveyed people (61.6% of men and 54.6% of women) agreed that 'the field for men is in public and the domain for women is within household' (All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011). This seems to suggest that, generally, people tend to believe that women are not naturally political or public animals, which means traditional ideology about women's role impedes the improvement and promotion of gender equity, especially regarding women's political participation. Although I am reluctant to conclude that this situation is worsening, it must be noted that the people holding this perspective have increased by 7.7 and 4.4 percentage points for

men and women, respectively, compared with the year 2000 (All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011). However, the real situation seems more complicated, as social practices, economic structures, institutional norms and procedures and political culture all reflect, revitalise and reproduce gendered notions of the appropriate place of women and men in political life (Howell 2006).

Political participation is not just in taking positions in parliaments or governments, but also in a broader range of leadership roles reflecting representation in governance and citizenship, such as leadership in top companies, membership in central government boards and bodies and so on. From the general perspective of citizenship, political participation is a primary human right, obligation and responsibility for citizens to concern themselves with broad public affairs, which does not require that they take positions in politics. In this regard, women's participation in civic and mass organisations and grassroots organisations is an important indicator for women's political participation. However, in China, such grassroots participation is very low. Data indicates that although 92.9% of women are concerned about 'major domestic and foreign affairs', only 54.1% have been involved in democratic supervision on one way or another, and just 18.3% take the initiative to raise suggestions in their working units, communities and villages (All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011). Women's participation in local-level organisations and associations was at very low level. A survey in Xiangxi Prefecture, Hunan Province in 2006 revealed that 87% of rural women and 54% of urban women had not taken part in any political, mass or civic organisations and associations (Anonymous 2012). This suggests that, generally, women in both urban and rural areas, whilst interested in politics, nearly always act in a passive way as demonstrated by the fact that very few women actively take the initiative to raise suggestions.

Although a range of factors affects women's political participation in China, such as traditional culture and women's lower participation compared with men, family responsibilities and home duties have been critical factors with no doubt (Wang and Ren 2011). The recent national survey mentioned above indicates that one of the barriers to women's participation in the mainstream of political, socio-cultural and economic life is their overload of home duties but not their participation capacity; a large majority (83.5%-88.6%) of surveyed people thought that 'women's capabilities are no worse than men's' and that 'men should shoulder housework responsibilities consciously' (All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011).

A survey early in 2003 (Tong 2003) found a persistent gender difference in several main facets of political culture and participation, with female respondents scoring significant lower, compared with males, on media attention, political knowledge, interest, internal and external efficacy and non-electoral participation. While this gender gap persisted in all socio-economic strata, higher socio-economic status women were more politically engaged than lower socio-economic status women (Tong 2003). Tong's survey reported that women respondents were more passive towards achievement, were more accommodating in conflict situations and had a higher preference for conflict mediation by traditional authority than men and that these traits were further negatively correlated with political culture and participation measures. It must be noticed that a reduction in the gender gap was not found when this passivity was controlled. Moreover, the duties of the domestic routine (including child-bearing and rearing) was not found to have a significant dampening effect on women's political culture and participation (Tong 2003).

The Chinese Central Government has been trying to increase the number of women taking positions and leadership roles at different levels. The mandatory requirements for government branches to strike a balance between the sexes in senior positions across the country has sparked controversy, with some concerned this may lead to unfair elections (Women of China Online 2011). However, given the fact that a relatively high percentage of women believe that they are treated unfairly in the workforce although they have worked very hard, this mandatory quota system currently implemented at different governmental levels is broadly welcomed. A large majority (86.7%) agrees that 'gender equality will not be achieved on its own but only through proactive promotion' (All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011).

Gender discrimination remains as an issue to some extent. About 20-30% of surveyed women reported either 'hiring men exclusively or prioritizing men over women when both have the same capabilities' (20.6%), or 'promoting men faster than women with the same workforce qualifications '(30.8%) (All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011). In the job search, 24.7% of women reported encountering unequal treatment (All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011).

Women are generally conscious of gender inequity, although women in higher profiles felt that they needed greater effort and better performance to compete equally with men. The survey shows that in the workforce, 81.4% of female high-level position-holders have college and postgraduate degrees, 7.1 percentage points higher than men. 95.9% of female senior personnel take the initiative to update their knowledge and skills, 93.7% of them have regular exchanges with colleagues and peers regarding their work knowledge and skills, and 79.1% of them have well-defined self-development plans. The survey also finds that in universities, 62.4% of female college students show an excellent academic performance, 9.7 percentage points higher than male students. It also finds that 64.5% of female students participate in volunteer activities—4.8 percentage points higher than men. Generally, 87.5% female students hope to advance in their careers, and of that group, 83.8% are willing to make great efforts to achieve success in their professional work (All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011).

Chinese Women's Political Participation in Global Context
Women's participation in politics in China is far behind that in many other countries. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union—on the basis of information provided by National Parliaments—by 30 November 2011 the percentage of women in the lower or single House (equivalent to the National People's Congress of China) in China (21.3%) was ranked 52nd out of 188 total countries. This is slightly higher than the world average at 20.0%) (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2012). It is obvious that if the percentage of women in the Standing Committee of NPCC would be applied (which is 16.6%, refer to Table 1), the international rank of women's participation in politics in China was even much lower (it would be ranked at 72nd).

The percentage of women holding top profile positions in China is small compared with many major countries. In the top 50 countries by GDP, as ranked by the International Monetary Foundation (IMF) in 2010, there were 13 female heads of state (i.e. 26.0% of all) (Refer to Wang and Ren 2011). In Australia, women make up 29.2% of federal parliamentarians, and in 2012 they comprised 23.3% of federal government ministers. In addition, Australian women held 46% of executive level manager positions in the Australian public service in 2011 and were 28.9% of

Commonwealth judges and magistrates (ABS 2012). By contrast, in 2012 China had only one female member (i.e. 4%) in the Politbureau (the top leadership group in China) and women members comprised only 21.3% of NPCC, 6.4% of CCCPC, and 8.33% of ministers and higher leaders in Central Government (Refer to Table 2).

Discussion

Despite China's emphasis on increasing women's political participation and representation, the international ranking of female deputies in the People's Congress decreased from 12th in 1994 to 42nd in 2005 and further to 52nd in 2012. This does not necessarily suggest that women's political participation has been declining, nor that the percentage of female representatives in the NPCC has decreased, but it does suggest that the improvement has lagged behind many other countries. The gap between women's participation in different political power structures in China and in other countries has widened rather than narrowed in recent years.

Some scholars argue that the proactive policy for women's political participation currently implemented by Chinese governments has not been effective in encouraging a broader women's participation including their political participation. Such a state-derived feminism has paradoxically both advanced and constrained the position of women in China (Howell 2002). When the party needs to mobilise women for the purpose of socio-economic transformation, raising economic output, or for ideological and political ends, then it emphasises the public role of women in its official rhetoric and issues guidelines to encourage more women into leadership positions. This, in turn, leads to a rise in women's numerical representation in political and governmental structures. Then, when the heat of political campaigns cools, and/or when economic restructuring requires adjustments in the labour force, party pressure to mobilise women wanes. Conservative gender ideologies then break into the open to justify the repositioning of women in the economy and society, and the party retreats from its overt appeal to women to enter the public domain. Over time, the drawing back of women from waged production becomes mirrored at the political level in their falling participation in party and government leadership (Howell 2002). One important reason is the reverse functioning of the policy that a priority would give to female candidates to take a leadership role in governments and/or be members in political organisations. This policy has a dualistic impact. On the one hand, this policy aims at a minimum number of women taking leadership positions in governmental and civil organisations. On the other hand, this minimum requirement is eventually interpreted in practice as the "maximum". To meet the "minimum" becomes the only thing to be done to deal with women's participation, which seems to imply the gender equity has been achieved to some extent in political participation.

There has been a so called "peak power defection" in women's political participation, reflecting the fact that women have reduced their taking up of positions at higher levels of governments or in decision-making roles or leadership roles (i.e. being heads of units at different levels) in organisations. Both Enshi and Xiangxi prefectures have demonstrated this phenomenon.

There are three basic causes for "Peak Power Defection" in Chinese women's participation in politics: women's relative lack of economic capital and time capital; the limitation of the personnel system and "minimal proportion system"; and the traditional culture of women's absence in political history. To solve the problems of women's participation in politics, it is necessary to increase the proportion of women's capital, realize economic equality

between men and women, give women more spare time and improve women's educational qualifications (Jin 2007).

Very few women are found in the upper echelons, partly due to conservative attitudes and the influence of the country's traditional culture. Many Chinese hold that women should devote themselves to their family rather than career development. There is no denying that China is still a male-dominated society. Many comparable countries (e.g. the Philippines, Vietnam) have a similar cultural background, but women's political participation has recently increased and is maintained at a much higher level (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2012). This seems to suggest that conservative cultural factors are not the determinant of women's disadvantage.

There has been a lack of political participation at grassroots levels, which is characterized as "grassroots participation defection". One of the important reasons for low women's political participation at grassroots levels is the immature development of civil society in China. Women lack mechanisms to take part in broad range of issues including politics. Although this has improved to some extent, the development of civil society is facing many challenges such as the lower pass rate for registration, shortages in operational funding, confusion over functions, and an imbalance between civil and governmental organisations (Ding, Li and Huang 2010).

The percentage of women in politics can reflect but not necessarily represent women's status in the country. For example, women's political participation in the United States ranked the 71st, and Japan ranked the 96th in the world in 2011 (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2012).

Women's political participation has been affected by many factors, with their economic situation as one of key factors, as the superstructure is determined by the economic base. However, neither improved economic participation of women nor an increasing control over social wealth will automatically convert to an improvement in women's political participation. According to a recent international business survey, Chinese women hold one in four (25%) senior management roles, ahead of many developed countries such as Australia (24%), France (24%), the United Kingdom (20%), the United States (17%), Germany (13%) and Japan (5%) (Grant Thornton IBR 2012). Based on data from Wind Information Co., Ltd (Wind Info) (http://www.wind.com.cn/), Chinese women have increasing control over wealth growth in recent years. On China's stock market, out of 802 listed companies that are actually controlled by some shareholders, women are holding control over 123 companies, i.e. 15.34% of total. Of 305 newly listed companies in 2011, 62 of them are controlled by women, i.e. 20.3% (Qilu Weekly 2012), this notwithstanding that Chinese women's political participation at all levels has not been generally improved. This fact demonstrates the research finding that there is a significant positive correlation between economic development and the economic status of women in China, but not between economic development and the political status of women (Xinhua Online 2010).

Conclusion

Observing some aspects of women's participation, for example, in economic development, Chinese women seem to be leading the way towards "gender equity" in the world. However, Chinese women's political participation lags far behind many other countries.

Women's political participation has been improved to some extent, especially at middle levels (e.g. municipal and county levels), this mainly attributable to the application of quotas of the number of women on political positions. But there has been no substantial improvement (even negative movement in some cases) at either the base level or the top level. There has been

a neglect of grassroots empowerment of women and also of a wide range of engagement and participation ("grassroots participation defection"). The "glass ceiling" effect and "peak power defection" have broadly replicated women's under-representation at peak levels. High profile women politicians contribute to gender equity, but the broad participation in politics from grassroots women is more important and fundamental to society at large. The narrow and weak base of women's political participation at lower levels would never support and maintain a functional promotion ladder through power structures and fundamentally constrain and hinder overall women's political participation. This spindle-shaped structure of women's political participation is damaging the sustainable increase in women's participation and even leading to a negative movement of gender equity. The fact that, currently, the proactive policy in women's engagement and participation is focusing on the middle strata rather than the whole spectrum of power structures contributes to the shape of this spindled structure of women's political participation. Proactive policy in women's political participation will only work well when it is not only focusing on the middle level of structure but also dealing with the grassroots level.

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