

# Women's Participation in Adult Education in Rural Areas of China: An Exploratory Study

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## Abstract

This is an exploratory case study of adult education for women in a specific western rural locality in China, Qianjiang, based on interviews with four women. China has established a lifelong learning system and prioritized education in the process of social development. Adult education accounts for a significant part of the lifelong learning system and programs such as “Lifelong Learning Week” and “One Hundred Lifelong Learning Models” have been established. However, regardless of the achievements of gender equality in access to education reached in China in general, women in rural areas are still hindered by many factors for actively and effectively participating in the process of adult education and lifelong learning approaches according to the literature review. The following two main questions were examined: 1) In what ways factors including educational policies, health problems, traditional mindset, and economic situations, block women’s participation in education in rural areas of China? 2) How can distance learning and technology innovations benefit women’s education in rural areas?

The results indicate that despite the different purposes of adult education, the purpose of developing economy is gradually becoming the most important and only goal of adult education. Surprisingly, unlike what was found in the literature review, the educational opportunities for women in rural areas in Qianjiang do not seem to be limited by the traditional understanding of gender roles, as shown in the literature review. Since information technologies such as laptops and smart phones are becoming more and more popular in rural China, well developed distance education programs may widen and facilitate women’s access to adult education in rural areas.

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction, Research Questions, and Literature Review.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
The Current Situation of Women’s Education in China.....	4
Adult Education for Women in Rural Areas.....	8
The Purposes of Women’s Education.....	10
Current Obstacles to Women’s Participation in Adult education.....	12
Policies.....	12
Health problems.....	13
Traditional mindset.....	15
Economic problems.....	16
Different Platforms of Adult Education in China.....	18
Different Programs of Adult Education in Rural China.....	18
Informal training programs.....	22
Learning countryside.....	23
Women’s Roles in Adult Education in Rural Areas.....	27
Stories About Women Who Practiced Informal Adult Education.....	29
Adult Education Through Distance Education.....	30
Distance Education Tools.....	32
Interpretation of Education Informatization 2.0 Action Plan in China.....	38
The IDEAL Project: Impact of Distance Education on Adult Learning.....	40
Chapter 2: Study Design and Presentation of Data.....	43

Recruitment of Participants.....	45
Data Collection .....	47
Results and Analysis .....	49
Demographic Data of the Participants .....	49
Data contributed by Fangfang.....	50
Data Contributed by Yanzi .....	53
Data contributed by Jingxia .....	55
Data contributed by Xiaohua .....	59
Chapter 3: Data Analysis and Recommendations.....	63
Education change. ....	63
Policies.....	64
Health.....	66
Traditional mindset. ....	67
Economic problems. ....	68
Technology innovation and adult education. ....	70
Limitations .....	71
Recommendations.....	71
References.....	73
Appendices.....	79

## List of Figures

Figure 1 The structure of netizens in urban and rural areas in China .....	34
Figure 2 The spatial layout of poverty-stricken villages in China.....	47
Figure 3 The demographic data of the participants .....	49
Figure 4 The distribution chart of education in different field 2018 .....	66

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction, Research Questions, and Literature Review**

Even though the school attendance rate of girls has been increasing in China, there still exists a severe disparity between men and women in their participation of adult education. In 1993, for the first time, the state Council of Chinese government stressed the importance of lifelong learning in the new social and economic development (Sun, 2007, p.102). In 1995, the Education Law of People's Republic of China was approved by the National People's Congress, and one of the goals in the law was to set up and upgrade a lifelong education system in line with the needs of the market economy and for social progress.

A study on girls' education in four provinces in western China was conducted in 1992. This study has a range of twenty-eight rural elementary schools in sixteen poor counties in these provinces. This study shows several factors that may block women's participation in education. The first factor is poverty and low economic productivity, which may explain the decreasing accessibility of girls and women to education (Zhou, Zhang, Liu, Ma, & Peng, 2001, p.14). Problems caused by poverty, such as a lack of living necessities, tuition, and needs of education can also hinder education for girls. The second factor which can reduce the number of girl students is insufficient local funds for education (Zhou et al., 2001, p.14). This may lead to insufficient teaching facilities, such as classrooms and basic teaching equipment. The third factor is about a lack of information that limits parents' and girls' attainment for education. The fourth factor is that girls suffer from religious taboos and early marriage. The fifth factor, namely the geographical factor, such as mountains or remote location can cause lack of sufficient boarding facilities. The sixth factor is that education is practiced only in classroom-based settings. There



are no other alternatives for delivering education. The seventh factor is that teaching content is not practical and attractive enough for girls in poor areas. The authors of the study also discuss that a lack of female teachers may also be a factor influencing the lower participation of girls because the girls do not have role models who might inspire and motivate them (Zhou et al., 2001, p.14). On the other hand, adult education is also deeply correlated with the social development in China. As Sun (2009) noted, adult education practices in China have been strongly influenced by Chinese education and adult education policies (p.34). In this study, I explore, through an exploratory case study based on interviews with four women from a specific rural locality in China, the factors that may hinder women's participation in adult education in rural areas and the way in which technology innovations may facilitate women's participation.

The purpose of this research is to explore the blockages of women's participation in adult education, especially in Western rural areas in China. Policies have been enacted and measures have been taken to strengthen adult education in rural areas, such as "Lifelong Learning Week" and "One Hundred Lifelong Learning Models." However, regardless of the achievements of gender equality in access to education reached in China in general, women in rural areas are still hindered by many factors for actively and effectively participating in the process of adult education and lifelong learning approaches.

The two main research questions are:

1. In what ways factors including educational policies, health problems, traditional mindset, and economic situations, block women's participation in education in rural areas of China?
2. How can distance learning and technology innovations benefit women's education in rural areas?

## Literature Review

Adult education, as an important part of our life-long learning, is playing a significant role in transforming people around the world. Though China has roughly achieved gender equality in education, there are still many factors that can hinder women's participation in adult education. In this section, I will first present the current situation of the education of females in China. Proportions of girls in specific majors and labor distribution will be shown. I will then discuss the leading factors that affect modern female education, which are policy, traditional mindsets, economy, and health. Policy-related reasons often influence everyone's participation in education and systematic failures in educational policies are sometimes the most prominent causes of the decision people take in education. In the next section of the literature review, I will analyze the way health is related to women's participation in education. Certain diseases, such as lung disease, are still the main cause of death among women in rural areas in China. In the area of traditional mindsets, even though girls and women have equal right to access to education, people's attitudes toward girl's and women's education often affect the realization of girls' and women's study. In this respect, I will trace back to ancient China and explore the root of cultural values about genders. Changes in cultural values about genders during the 21st-century will then be discussed. Next, I will explore economy as a factor that does influence modern female education. With the process of industrialization, women's contribution to economy has increased in quite important ways. Economy thus becomes a major factor to affect education for women.

In the second part of the literature review, I will explore the situation of learning in the countryside and informal training projects in rural areas. Drawbacks of these programs will be discussed and then drawbacks of training specified for female participants will be explored.

In the third part of the review, I will examine the interpretation of education for women in rural areas. Interviews will be conducted and integrated in this part. Statistics and data collected from my interviews will be presented to analyze the factors that indeed affect women's participation and roles in modernized and socialistic rural areas in China. Women's roles in adult education as education practitioners, education providers, and receivers will then be explored. This literature review aims to draw attention to women's education in China and to China's systematic efforts to provide adult education programs in rural areas.

### **The Current Situation of Women's Education in China**

As it is stated in the White Paper of Gender equality and Women's Development, "Gender equality and women's development is a lasting theme of mankind's pursuit of equality and justice, a scale for measuring social progress and an important goal in realizing sustainable development in our world" (State Council of China, 2015). According to the White Paper, in 2014, the net primary school enrollment rates of boys and girls were both 99.8 percent, which achieved the United Nations millennium development goals in advance of the set deadlines (State Council of China, 2015). The proportion of female students in junior high schools was 46.7 percent, and that in high schools was 50 percent; in institutions of higher learning women accounted for 52.1 percent of undergraduate students, 51.6 percent of postgraduate students, and 36.9 percent of students studying for Ph.D. degrees (State Council of China, 2015). From the figures above, the conclusion can be drawn that gender equality in schooling has been achieved. But gender equality within education is more than access to schooling: it entails the cultivation of capabilities necessary for girls to participate fully, actively and equally in all aspects of their societies (Jones, 2011, p. 385). Besides the same opportunities to schooling, there is still a long way to achieving real gender equality within education.

Firstly, in primary schools, and in extracurricular private schools, girls are told to learn dance, play the piano, art subjects, while boys learn to play guitar, football, swimming besides the science subjects such as math. Since childhood, girls are told how to behave like girls or ladies, keep an elegant and well-behaved manner to get married to a rich and elegant husband. It is a universal practice that girls are told to obey and be good. Teachers intentionally divide girls and boys into different groups and tell them about what aspects each gender might be good at. After going into secondary school, students are separated into two majors, sciences and arts. At this juncture, students can mostly choose their major as they want, but because of the stereotype of girls being good at arts and boys being good at sciences, most girls choose, or their parents ask them to choose arts as their major, which they might be good at.

Girls are generally thought to be less talented than boys in logical analyzing ability, space imagination ability, inferential capability, math, physics or biology. According to figures from the Gender Report issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2014, even in Macao and Hong Kong, both are special administrative regions and more advanced in economy, it was reported that 80% of female students majored in education, and less than 18% of them studied engineering, manufacturing, and construction (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016). In the important step of personality shaping in school, girls are taught to be who they are instead of choosing by themselves according to their will, while boys usually have more opportunities to choose their life. Girls are shaped to be patient, careful, friendly, and sensitive while boys are encouraged to be wild, brave and curious. Girls are often told to be tender because that seems to be the only way to stay attractive to men. Due to the limitation of their majors in secondary school, most girl students choose majors in the university such as education, language, law,

literature, history or accountancy while boys will choose sciences such as information technology, engineering, construction design, medical science or physical science. In class management and student union activities, boys and girls take different positions. Boys are more active in extracurricular activities and most administration positions such as the president of students' unions, directors of various clubs, organizers of certain anniversaries and celebrations. While positions like voluntary translators, club members are normally taken by girls (Liu, 2008, p. 2). In university activities, boys and girls gain different experience and practice different aspects of their ability which influence their future job search. Boys are used to paying attention to their public speaking confidence, socializing ability and leadership while girls tend to be more shy and passive. With such a limitation in their majors and personalities, girls tend to choose more stable and less challenging jobs.

As for employment distribution for women, according to the data of the Sixth Population Census in 2010 in China, compared with men, women in the proportion of white-collar jobs, such as government officers, management, accounted for 12% in the total number of female employees. Most of them worked blue collar jobs, like factory workers professions, which reflects the status of females in low professional level overall (State Council of China & National Statistics Bureau, 2010). The percentage of female employees in common management and social organizations, health, social security and social welfare institutions and finance increased by 4.5, 4.2 and 2.8% respectively (State Council of China & National Statistics Bureau, 2010). While the proportion of women in scientific research, technical services and geological employment respectively decreased by 1.9 and 2.7%, lower than that in 1990 and 2000. Professional status is an important index reflecting social status. Even for men and women in the same industry, their professional status is also significantly different. Women's employment

accounted for 67.5% in the following industries: farming, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery, water conservation, accommodation, and catering, as well as wholesale and retail, which all belong to typical low average labor remuneration and marginalized occupations. From these figures, we can see problems in the current Chinese education system.

Besides different subjects, girls and boys often have different career plans and study focus in their university lives. Since most girls choose to learn arts subjects, they mainly develop their ability to write and do office work because these arts programs often require them to study and read independently. Some of them even put their focus on looking for a good boyfriend because it is commonly believed in China that it is much easier if you find a rich boyfriend than to get a higher education. This negative attitude toward study largely undermines their participation. As Boserup (2007) says, modern employment requires not only formal training but a certain attitude to work regularly and attentively (p.200).

Most girls in universities pay attention to their appearance, go shopping and learn how to do makeup while most boys who choose science have no choice but to devote their time to the lab in order to meet the degree requirements and thus get a graduation certificate. Thus, after graduation, most boys are qualified to get the basic working knowledge and ability while girls tend to choose feminine jobs. Therefore, the phenomenon of women choosing specific occupations seems to be due to their own desires (Boserup, 2007). Besides that, girls are trained to be more materialistic toward education. Since it always takes girls such a long time to finish higher education, after that, girls are likely to miss the best age to start a relationship and are faced with the difficulty of finding a proper husband. Most of these girls give up getting a higher degree just because they think it is their proper time to find an acceptable husband and set up their family. Though university enrollment rates for boys and girls are quite similar recently in

China, the way boys and girls make use of these education facilities and opportunities are quite different. As the competition of being enrolled into universities becomes increasingly fierce, girls who are successfully enrolled do not intend to be independent enough in universities, which is ironic. Some of them regard an education background as a way to make themselves more valuable and competitive in the marriage market.

The role of the school system is not only to teach intellectual skills and scientific knowledge but also to indoctrinate pupils with dominant cultural values (Boserup, 2007). Unfortunately, in the education system in China nowadays, the second function of school does not make enough positive results for girls. In reality, schools pay far more attention to scientific knowledge and academic results than intellectual skills in primary and secondary education. Moreover, at the college and university level, schools still ignore character building and, specifically, the enhancement of independence for girls. It is still prevalent in China nowadays that men hold the lead position in important household decisions and girls are, as they have been taught to be, subordinate.

### **Adult Education for Women in Rural Areas**

Ancient China greatly relied on agriculture and a self-sufficient economy. During the agricultural era, men got more chances to learn to use farming tools such as ploughs or hoes, which required more physical strength, while women had to take care of the household errands to support men. The yields of farms were rewarded with money or food for home supply, which were taken as the contribution of men while the contributions made by women were often easily ignored. Outside of the farming season, men had more opportunities to learn new skills and to socialize, they may drink tea around the courtyard or entertain themselves while women still had

to work hard to take care of their children, respect their elders, and finish all the housework, as I experience growing up in that area.

Mittelman and Tambe noted that women worked without monetary compensation for hundreds of years and their work was considered to be rewarded by the honor and respect shown towards them by their children and family (as cited in Stromquist, 2002, p.137). Because of this differential division of work, men always held the power of decision-making and women were subordinate. As Stromquist (2002) said, the worker-breadwinner role integrates the family with the economy and the state while it confirms women's dependent status in each (p.134). This economic factor leads to the traditional perspective that it was a waste for women to get higher education; this view is still commonly held these days.

In more modern times, a major difference between male and female productivity began to develop when men became specialized producers of some agricultural or non-agricultural goods or services (Boserup, 2007, p.201). After the industrial revolution, human capital largely increased with the help of machines and women's potential to produce economic benefit began to be tapped. Women started to flock into employment and had more opportunities to get the basic training in working skills than before. But the increase in employment rates and financial remuneration do not necessarily reduce the pressure on women. They continue to have to finish the employment duties on the one hand and then still take charge of household duties on the other hand.

Recent statistics show that women's employment accounted for 67.5% in the following industries: farming, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery, water conservation, accommodation, and catering, as well as wholesale and retail, which all belong to typical low average labor remuneration and marginalized occupations (Yang, 2013). Most of the women, who are engaged



in the low average labor remuneration and marginalized occupations, come from the rural areas with lower educational levels and social resources. Though the statistics (Statistics of China, 2013) show that in 2013, women accounted for the 43% of the total participants in adult education in rural areas, all the factors that may hinder the quality of women's learning still largely affect women's education in rural areas. For example, in one of the four projects in education for rural areas, the participants are chosen from the most experienced farmers. Because of the historic and economic reasons stated above, men are more likely to have access to join the training project than women. This limited access to educational resources in rural areas can deeply influence women's participation in the workforce.

Though the government has diligently implemented policies to ensure gender equality in education, it does not necessarily guarantee women's social equality and status. First, the definition of gender should be clarified when it comes to gender equality. West and Zimmerman (1987) noted, gender is performative, or something we "do" (as cited in Street & Dardis, 2018). Lorber and Moore (2002) also noted that gender is socially constructed throughout life by daily performances of behavior consistent with a particular gender (as cited in Street & Dardis, 2018). Therefore, the characteristic of gender socialization makes it more challenging to fulfill gender equality. Equal access to educational resources is only one of numerous social aspects to achieve gender equality. Gender equality in education is to improve women's status and encourage them to be as active, confident, independent, and free citizen as men are, rather than just making them to have the same or even higher education than their male counterparts.

### **The Purposes of Women's Education**

Though China has actively promoted education equality, adjusted the structure of education, and made efforts to ensure equality between men and women of the rights and

opportunities to have access to education, problems in female education remain serious and women in China are still implicitly trained to be less capable than men, both economically and psychologically. The purposes of adult education, as Selman and his co-authors state, are to achieve academic and vocational performance, to develop personal interest, and to serve social change (as cited in Spencer & Lange, 2014, p.5). However, the second and third purposes are often undermined because of the pure pursuit of economic benefits in adult education, such as the employable skills. In terms of the content in adult education, many formal and non-formal institutions pay more attention to knowledge and vocational training than to create a critical participation of adults in social change. For example, at the college and university level, more and more female students still tend to choose majors that may enable them to easily acquire a better job after graduation. In non-formal adult education institutions, subjects such as learning English as a Second Language and information technology enjoy great popularity because they are regarded as useful skills in the workplace.

Based on the purposes of adult education pointed out by Spencer and Lange, the purpose of women's education is to empower women and facilitate them to improve their social status. There are many categories of barriers that may block women from benefiting from education. One of the obstructive factors is the shortcomings in current education system in China. Even those well-educated women cannot benefit sufficiently. These weaknesses in our education system may be due to historical, economic, social, and political reasons. For example, in China, education is usually practiced in the form of competition, rather than in the form of empowering and nurturing people. It does not necessarily address different and real needs of women from different backgrounds. Another common practice of education in China is that education is used as a benchmark of competing and selecting for jobs. However, the improvement of social status

among a certain group of women does not mean the general increase in women's social importance. As found in the literature review, another important factor that hinders the quality of women's education is the lack of awareness of family and community education. Education is a long-term and comprehensive process. It is often correlated with family, community, and schools. Attention had not been paid to the whole process of educating women, also based on my experience.

However, efforts have been made to widen and lengthen women's education. Life-long learning allows women more opportunities to be educated. A variety of informal, formal, and non-formal training have been provided for women. For instance, many companies in China have recently started to provide vocational and professional training to their employees, female employees included. Many women also pay directly to learn a second language or some other skills. Nevertheless, many of these education forms are limited to improve women's technical skills and stress the economic reward, which do not necessarily equip women with more social, economic, and political rights. Gender equality in education does not only refer to equal access to education opportunities, it also depends on the reform of the current education system and mechanism (Wang, 2009, p.17).

### **Current Obstacles to Women's Participation in Adult education**

**Policies.** Currently in China, educational policies do not partially privilege men or women. For example, in the revised version of the compulsory law of People's Republic of China, it is stated that all Chinese citizens in an appropriate age have the rights as well as the responsibilities and duties to attend compulsory education regardless of their age, minority status, race, household's financial situation, or religious beliefs (The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2006). In addition to the promotion of compulsory education, China

has also put efforts and enacted some regulations to benefit students from minorities and poverty-stricken areas. However, these kinds of educational policies may not effectively remove women's obstacles in participating in education, especially those in rural areas.

Though it seems that gender inequality has been resolved through the implementation of these policies, the practice of many of them still takes the form of gender inequality. To illustrate, to maintain a satisfactory gender ratio, some schools may control the number of students in a certain gender. Moreover, even in some majors, where students of one gender form the majority, students of the opposite gender may be more preferable, such as in accounting, or nursing, which have been mainly taken by more female students. In terms of developing effective adult education policies, Belanger (2014) states that it should be put in a larger context of policies because adult education is not only based on its own conditions, but also connected to environment, and cultural atmosphere (as cited in Zhang, 2011, p.14).

Since women tend to benefit less from our current educational system, more beneficial policies need to be implemented to update the educational system of China. However, some policies may have also played an important role in raising the social status of women. For example, the one-child policy in urban areas in China, may change women's social status and decision-making powers because parents would treasure and do the best as they can to provide their only child with the best education that money can provide if they can afford it, whether it is a girl or a boy.

**Health problems.** Speaking generally, the health situation of women has also been greatly improved due to the continuous development and implementation of policies, regulations, and laws. For example, according to the statistics from State Council of China (2015), 3131 medical institutions have been built for women and children by the year 2014. Besides that, 90%

women in pregnancy have enjoyed the basic public medical care welfare. 57,120,000 pregnant women in rural areas have benefited from hospitalization subsidy. Furthermore, women's average life expectancy has been lengthened to 77.4 years old in 2010, and maternal mortality rate has decreased from 88.8/100,000 in 1990 to 21.7/100,000 in 2014. China has also established a medical care system covering urban and rural areas, which particularly benefit women in rural and poverty-stricken areas. The establishment of medical projects for women and children has also increased the equality and access for women to public health welfare.

However, since the establishment of People's Republic of China, attention and efforts to improve women's health has been mainly put to their reproductive health and to the birth control policy, while women's health problems, at other stages of their life cycle, have been largely ignored (Hu, 2008, p.56). Besides that, more threats to women's health have emerged, such as AIDS, domestic violence, and mental diseases. According to the three national health surveys in 1993, 1998, and 2003, the prevalent rate of chronic diseases in women was higher than for men, while the hospitalization rate within two weeks for women in rural areas was higher than that of women in urban areas in 1998 and 2003 respectively (Hu, 2008, p.56). The higher rate for women in rural areas might be due to their lower health conditions. Many women in rural areas tend not to see a doctor if they can still endure their pain and they might finally choose to go to see a doctor if the pain becomes unbearable. In terms of the fatal diseases, respiratory disease was the number one killer in women in rural areas in 2005 (Hu, 2008, p.56). Another threat to women's health is suicide. The higher suicide rate in women compared to men appears to be particular to rural areas, in the 15 to 24 age bracket (Hu, 2008, p. 62).

In rural areas of China, the lack of power of women in dealing with family crisis, domestic violence, life challenges, lower social status and poverty, may all result in mental

anxiety, depression, and even suicide. In the area where I was brought up and lived for more than 15 years, I saw many women suffer from diseases but who chose not to see a doctor in order to save money. Most of them have rarely or never had a physical check-up. They rely on luck and fate for their health. I have also seen how a husband forcefully kicked his pregnant wife. In my childhood, I also saw an abandoned baby girl in a small basket, crying because she was hungry and cold. All these scenarios had a deep impact on me. These impressions are very deep and unforgettable. As well, women's satisfaction and autonomy in marriage are still lower than for men. Statistics on China Website (2006) show that the younger and better educated women are, the more autonomy they will have in choosing their partners (China Website, 2006). Compared with men's marriages, women's marriages are more deeply interfered with by their parents. In terms of women's satisfaction in marriage in rural areas, many of them admit that they feel disrespected by their spouses (China Website, 2006). These threatening factors to women's health in rural areas can also hinder women's participation in education. As a Chinese proverb goes, "a healthy body is the basis of a revolution" and a Western proverb goes "a sound soul dwells in a sound body," women's health situation has largely influenced their educational endeavours and status.

**Traditional mindset.** Problems in women's education still persist, and women in China are still implicitly educated to be less capable than men, both economically and psychologically. In ancient China, women were thought to be subordinate to men. Confucianism, which was the main theoretical background for governing the old China for hundreds of years, emphasized that men always ranked top in the household and government as well, and women were inferior to men. Women could rarely become the lead in the household. Men had the power of decision-making and women could only respect them and follow their management.

Statistics from a report on women's social status in 2010 still show that 33.7% of the participants believe that men are superior to women in China (National Women's Union and national Bureau of Statistics, 2010, p.2). Since women are often the inferior group in our society, educational policies must take this social factor into consideration. "jia chu qu de nv er, po chu qu de shui," which literally means "a married daughter-spilled water," is a deeply-rooted mindset of regarding the status of women in China. Many parents still believe that girls do not need to get higher education and they are also not willing to pay their daughters' tuition other than for the compulsory education level. From an economic perspective, these parents cannot obtain the reward of their investment in their daughters' education. By contrast, their investment in their sons' education can finally benefit them because sons will normally remain in the original family and take care of their parents in the future.

Education for women in rural areas is very different compared to urban areas. Due to the lack of awareness of education and stereotypes of women's social roles, women in rural areas can suffer more from the disparity in education. For instance, among urban women, 25.7% of them have college education and above, 54.2% have received high school education and above; the proportion of rural women is only 2.1% and 11.6% respectively (National Women's Union and national Bureau of Statistics, 2010, p.4). Women in urban areas nowadays can often enjoy equal opportunities in education. Because of the fast development in economy and sufficient exchange between cultures through intensive international trade, women in urban areas are affected less by the traditional mindset of women's status.

**Economic problems.** Economic problems such as poverty still affect women's education in distant villages and some poor minority groups in western China. According to the white paper "Gender Equality and Women's Development in China" published in 2015, women of

ethnic minority groups, girls in remote and poverty-stricken areas, and other women groups now enjoy equal access to educational resources. Though the government has made legislation and efforts to guarantee education equality for poverty-stricken areas, many girls still have no chance to get an adequate education. People, from ethnic minority groups in China, who are not bound by the one-child policy and can have two children, still strongly hold, that boys can ensure the continuance of the family. If the family cannot afford to pay the tuition for all the children, they would support the boy to be educated if they must make a choice. School-aged girls can still lose opportunities to get a higher education due to their poverty. Thus, after entering their adulthood, these girls cannot learn as efficiently as their counterparts from economically-developed areas.

Another factor related to economy which influences women's participation in adult education in China is the division of household labor. According to the statistics in China Website (2006), though women in China spent about one hour less on household work than ten years ago, women still perform the majority of household work, on the average two hours per day more than men (China Website, 2006). Spencer and Lange (2014) state that violence affects women's participation in adult education; this is the same case in China (p.116). The statistics on Chinese women's social status show that 13% of women admit that they have been physically abused in the past half year and more women in rural areas suffer from domestic violence (as cited in China Website, 2006). Moreover, cyber violence is emerging these days and the majority of the victims are women. Hate speech about women's body, makeup, and behavior is increasing. In addition, with increasing industrialization and urbanization, many women choose to work in a better-developed province. Thus, many married female migrant workers may not be able to stay with their husbands. Loneliness and long separation may result in "temporary



couples” to meet their physical and mental needs (Wangyi News, 2015). However, this kind of solution can often result in moral and mental sufferings, especially for women.

The factors of policies, traditional mindset, health, and economy can largely impact women’s education in adulthood. To eliminate these obstacles, efforts should be made jointly by the government, academia, and individuals as well. Women should be guaranteed with sufficient access to adult education and be provided with quality education. The quality and outcome of women’s education should be stressed rather than the equal access itself. Different forms of adult education are undergoing these days in China, which I will present in the following section, as will be included in the recommendations.

### **Different Platforms of Adult Education in China**

The Outline of China’s Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan has pointed out that adult education is an important part of the life-long learning system (Xinhua Press, 2010). It is also stressed in the Outline to develop and regulate education and training service, to incorporate and widen the resources for continuing education, in order to establish an open and flexible lifelong learning system. From the Outline, we can see the main platforms of continuing education include schools, science research and development institutions, enterprises, and urban and village community schools.

1. Degree education and degree continuing education for adults are mainly conducted by schools. The continuing education of primary level and intermediate level degree are held in adult high schools, adult vocational schools, and adult middle schools. Statistics show that in 2011, there were 875 adult high schools, 1614 adult vocational schools, and 2055 adult middle schools (Yi, 2016).

2. Normal higher educational institutions are the main force of higher degree continuing education. It is conducted at four places, including night universities, correspondence universities, online distance education, and self-taught examinations (Yi, 2016). To meet the job requirements, degree improvement has become imperative for many people. Degree has also become an essential entry requirement for many fields.

3. Non-degree continuing education has also been largely increased, especially after the open-up policy in the 1980s and the urbanization in China. To better adapt to the workplace, many people have become interested in non-degree continuing education, represented by language and vocational training programs. Non-degree continuing education is more flexible and more customized than degree continuing education. In China, there is also a great need for many adults to better improve themselves.

Yi (2016) categorizes the institutions that offer non-degree continuing education into three forms. The first form is the sustainable improvement for teachers at primary and secondary schools, which is designed by educational administration and implemented by universities. This kind of practice is often based on policies and social development. For example, in the process of China's industrialization, working skills in factories are paid more attention to. After China's economy entered the information age, computer programming and web design have become the priority of non-degree continuing education.

The second form is non-degree continuing education conducted by community colleges. Community education centers and community colleges and schools are the main force of this kind of non-degree continuing education. After the success of community schools in the United States of America (USA), to develop community schools has become a consensus around the world. Education in community schools is regarded as a meaningful addition to the current education system. Community schools can also strengthen the relationship between education and society. In China, community schools have gone through different experience, compared with those in the USA. Though the Chinese government has issued some regulations to promote community schools, they are somehow marginalized and are less important than other forms of continuing education. For example, compared with continuing education conducted by higher educational institutions, community colleges do not have sufficient and professional education resources. Compared with private training institutions, community colleges do not have their publicity and their business team to meet the needs of customers. In addition, the management of community schools is not as developed as other forms of continuing education. In China, education is mostly regarded as a necessary way to prepare people to meet the employment requirements and a degree in hand, is also an important factor that employers may consider when they recruit new staff. Because of its popular distribution and its advantage to reach to every resident all over China, it is recommended to develop community continuing education into a main form of continuing education.

The third form is non-degree continuing education held by normal higher educational institutions. Higher educational institutions have paid attention to the large number of potential students who are interested in developing themselves. Non-degree continuing education participants have also accounted for a large proportion of all the students in higher educational institutions. Non-degree continuing education is an important part of establishing a learning society. Though this form of continuing education does not award degrees, it can largely improve the proficiency of the workforce and prepare them to meet the increasing entry requirement of our industrial and information driven business. However, since it is conducted by normal higher educational institutions, mostly universities, it plays a significant role in promoting and popularizing continuing education.

Both degree and non-degree continuing education are supplementary to normal higher education. Due to a lack of attention, fund, and resources, continuing education has been confronted with difficulties to enroll more students, to ensure its quality, and to develop its operation conditions.

### **Different Programs of Adult Education in Rural China**

Though adult education may have different functions to better serve individuals and our society, adult education in China still mainly focuses on education for economy. At institutional levels, Adult education in China is mainly divided into the following aspects: education at community schools, at companies and enterprises, in rural areas, education for migrant workers and for senior citizens, continuing education, formal secondary and higher education. While adult education in rural China is mainly applied into two projects: informal training program and the learning countryside.

**Informal training programs.** One of the measures to raise the public's awareness of lifelong learning is to initiate a "learning week" every year. This activity is aimed at engaging more citizens into adult education. In this "learning week," almost all the local governments and communities will decide various themes of "learning," such as painting, singing, playing chess, and so on. Another measure the government has taken to raise people's awareness in adult education is to select learning models in different communities, such as the "100 National Life-Long Learning Stars." Stress has also been given to theoretical research and professional teachers training in adult education at community level. These efforts are promising signs in adult education in China. However, I am wondering about the outcome of these activities. For example, the "learning week" could be a very helpful and meaningful grass-root activity. If they conduct this activity during the day time at communities and residential areas, when most people are at workplace, who might participate in these activities? Probably the infants, the senior and the retired can be the only groups who can afford the time. In terms of the learning themes in the "learning week," they focus on specific skills instead of cultivating people's ability to practice their life-long learning after the "learning week." As for the learning site in the "learning week," they are mostly arranged in communities and residential areas, which largely reduce the chances for migrant workers to participate, since most of them can basically afford to live in those "urban villages" (i.e., slums), instead of a well-organized and well-managed residential area.

There are four major projects of adult education being conducted in rural areas of China these days. The first project is to raise the literacy level of residents in rural areas. Though adult education for literacy has been the priority in education for decades, there are still many people in rural areas who are under average literacy level, most of whom are women. In order to improve the literacy in rural areas, community schools and village-run schools conduct

numerous primary vocational trainings. These schools can issue certificates of elementary education. Another method to improve literacy rate in rural areas is to initiate a three-year program of degree education and technical education at the same time, in vocational colleges and community-based learning centers. Meanwhile, training programs in computer skills and mandarin are also conducted to generally raise the education level for rural residents.

The second project in adult education in rural areas is to update the residents' knowledge of new technologies, such as their skills in fishery, planting, livestock husbandry, knowledge about economic cooperation, and so on. To master new skills and new technologies is regarded as the basic requirement for professional farmers in this new era. All the participants in this project are selected from those most experienced and recommended farmers. This project contains training at village level, city level, and province level.

The third project of adult education is to strengthen the core value system in rural residents, such as their sense of responsibility, patriotism, honesty and friendliness. This project aims to ensure that participants will be the practitioners and leaders in socialism's value system. The fourth project is to improve the happiness index in rural areas. This project aims to enforce the happiness of these participants, and hence influence other farmers to be happy. One of the courses in this project is to guide people's attitude toward happiness, raise their awareness of happiness, and promote their ability to create happiness. In all the above projects, different types of teaching methods and technologies are introduced in adult education in rural areas, such as "TV class," "Internet class," "phone class," and class-room based class.

**Learning countryside.** "A learning society" in China was first put forward in 1993 in "The Program Outline for Education Reform and Development in China" by the State Council. China's Education Law, issued in 1995, clarified to establish and fulfill a lifelong learning

system. After the announcement of this target, a wave of establishing learning cities, learning communities, learning organizations, learning army, learning party was being vigorously implemented. Based on establishing a learning society, some scholars have put forward to establish a learning countryside in order to motivate more participants in rural areas in China (Su, 2006, p.30). A *learning countryside* is defined as a learning environment where people value learning, knowledge, and science and participate in learning whenever and wherever to maintain a sustainable development in rural areas (Su, 2006, p.30). A learning countryside would fully tap the workforce pool in rural areas, by improving not only rural residents' technical and professional capacity, but also addressing the social problems rooted in their areas.

A learning countryside in China is characterized by organized learning, public platforms, well-equipped learning facilities, learning materials, administration mechanism, and sufficient literacy level of the learners. The learning contents for residents in rural areas mainly focus on improving their skills and knowledge of farming and getting adapted to international food safety standard. Another important aspect of training rural residents is market economy and sales skills. It is common in rural areas that some products are unsalable because of the farmers' poor market knowledge. Health education also accounts for a large proportion of learning materials for a learning countryside, such as knowledge about reproductive health, nutritious diet, disease control and healthy lifestyle (Su, 2006, p.31). A learning countryside is a significant way of promoting education equity and lifelong learning. It can practically address the problems that are deeply rooted in rural areas and change in important ways people's thinking and living patterns. However, to establish a learning countryside is far more than issuing a policy or drafting a plan because of time and resource constraints. It has been two decades since a learning countryside was put forward, yet satisfactory outcomes haven't been reached. I will explore in the following

section how E-learning can facilitate building a learning countryside and especially benefit women's participation in their lifelong learning.

In 2016, President Xi Jin Ping pointed out that we should accelerate the speed to build up farmers' competency and proficiency in farming production. This is a strategic step to achieve farming modernization in China. In the process of establishing a learning countryside under the context of constructing new types of rural areas in socialist China, new challenges have emerged. For example, statistics show that in 2016, more than half of the population in rural areas is over 50 years old and the rural workforce pool is confronted with a serious aging problem. Statistics also illustrate that China suffers a low efficiency of transferring agricultural science and technology achievements, due to the lower learning ability of farmers to accept new technologies (Wang, 2017, p.21). In the report and analysis of farmers' competency training, Wang (2017) asserted that farmers did not actively participate in the farmers' competency training. One reason for their indifference to the training program is their traditional mindset. They tend to believe that farming does not require knowledge of new technologies. Another factor is that they are not willing to sacrifice their working time to attend the training program. Wang (2017) analyzed in his report that there are three factors resulting in farmers' lack of active participation in the training. The first reason is that the training program is not closely related to farmers' needs. For instance, the teaching materials might be repetitive, useless, and unpractical. Besides that, teachers in these programs from agricultural departments may not be qualified enough to provide interactive and motivating courses. Second, the farmers' training programs are sometimes compulsory. For example, in order to meet the minimum number of participants, some areas may make the training compulsory or forced for farmers. In some areas, it is counted as participation when farmers only sign on the name list but do not actually complete the course. Third, the



schedule of the training is not logical and reasonable. The time interval between two trainings is too long, sometimes even one year and each training program might last for only one day, which makes it more difficult for the farmers to comprehend the materials.

The national seminar of establishing “learning countryside” was held in Anji, Zhejiang province. This seminar aims to explore the importance of adult education in rural areas and the way adult education in rural areas can influence establishing a learning society and a life-long learning system (China Adult Education Association, 2017). About 80 representatives from education Bureaus and related schools nationwide attended this seminar. One theme of this seminar to conduct adult education in rural areas is to cultivate “new professional farmers.”

To establish a learning society is an important part of establishing a well-off society in China. In the process of building a learning society, priority should be put to establish learning rural areas. In the years after the third and fourth plenary session of the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC central committee, many outstanding examples of learning rural areas have come into being. In order to accelerate the process of building learning rural areas and facilitate the communication and information sharing among different rural areas, China’s Adult Education Committee have conducted the activity to find out the excellent learning rural areas. The requirements of being selected as an excellent example are as follows:

1. It should be well-organized and there should be a leading team in these areas to guide and coordinate public participation.
2. It should effectively implement learning plans, motivate a wide range of participants, and incorporate new information technologies.
3. It should activate special funds and be equipped with related personnel, good learning environment and meet learners’ needs.

4. It should achieve excellent learning outcomes, and obtain good social influence and reputation. (Adult Education Committee Specified in Rural Areas of China Adult Education Committee, 2015).

### **Women's Roles in Adult Education in Rural Areas**

Women's education in China has been greatly developed with the joint efforts of government and United Nations. China has almost reached its goal of education equality in primary education in rich villages and cities. Education has also improved employment for women in China recently. However, education disparity still remains. Girls choose specific majors which are thought suitable for them and thus lack more opportunities to fully tap their potential in other subjects. This phenomenon is due to the traditional mentality of male and female division of labour and cultural value toward different genders. Besides that, the change of economy has also influenced education, especially girls' attitudes toward study, while for girls in distant villages and poor ethnic groups, the economy becomes a major factor that affects education equality.

This deep-rooted inequality of education for girls strongly leads to the current situation of women's roles in adult education, especially for those in rural areas. In terms of women's roles in adult education, they perform different roles as students, education practitioners, and teachers alike. The sixth nationwide population census of China shows that among all the people beyond 15 years old, 7.2% are illiterate women and illiterate men only accounts for 2.52%, while in rural areas, illiterate women account for 10.66% and illiterate men for 3.92% of the total rural population (State Council of China & National Statistics Bureau, 2010). Since the total population of men and women beyond 15 years are similar, we can still see a gap between men and women in education.

Despite the existing educational inequality, great achievements have been acquired in women's participation in adult education. For example, women students account for 44.7% in secondary vocational schools, and the number of women undergraduate students and graduate students respectively reach 52.6% and 51.6% (State Council of China, 2015). The number of women attending the vocational training programs held by the government increased to 43% in 2014. However, this increase may be due to the increasing need for women with higher education in the job market. Additionally, women teachers and professors in universities reached 48.1% in 2014. The White Paper also indicates that the proportion of women in school management and decision-making has largely increased, though the continued disproportion of men's and women's participation in administration can still be commonly seen.

Economic problems still affect female education in distant villages and some poor minority groups in western China. According to the white paper "Gender Equality and Women's Development in China" published in 2015, women of ethnic minority groups, girls in remote, poverty-stricken areas and other female groups now enjoy equal access to educational resources. Though the government have made legislation and efforts to guarantee education equality for poverty-stricken areas, many girls still have no chances to get enough education. People of ethnic minority groups in China, who are not bound by the one-child policy and can have two children, still strongly hold that boys ensure the continuance of the family line. If the family cannot afford to pay the tuition for all the children, they would support the boy to be educated if they must make a choice (Stromquist, 2002, p.144). School-aged girls can still lose opportunities to get a higher education due to their poverty.

There is still a problem for girls in distant places under economic problems. Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report of 2016 on gender review by United Nations Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization emphasizes that education has a responsibility to foster the right type of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that will lead to sustainable and inclusive growth (UNESCO, 2016). In reality, in the process of carrying out compulsory education for poverty-stricken areas, development in education contradicts with the undeveloped economy. The increasing expenses of school facilities and personnel lead to the relocation of schools, making a different influence on boys and girls. Girls are usually faced with more problems than boys in the rapidly changing system of schools. With the emergence and separation of primary and secondary schools, which would necessarily increase the expense of going to school, more girls will lose their opportunities to go to high schools because they are not included in the free compulsory education system in China.

### **Stories About Women Who Practiced Informal Adult Education**

A friend of mine told me with great passion and admiration the story about her female boss's experience. Her boss was born around the 1970s and had only finished primary school. In China, primary school often means less intellectual capability and disadvantage at the workplace. However, with substantial effort, she successfully became the general manager in a production factory. She was even chosen as the "100 most diligent national model workers", which required great achievement at the workplace. My friend told me that regardless of her boss's lower education, she can quickly adopt new things that she learns in her everyday life, from her daily conversations with other people, from TV, or from the Internet. She can easily and intentionally utilize and absorb new skills and knowledge.

Another friend of mine graduated from high school. She left her hometown and started to da gong (to leave their hometown and work in the developed coastal areas) when she was around 19 years old. Several years later she went back to her hometown and set up a bakery store with

her friend. At first, it was her friend who was mainly responsible for baking and my friend had no idea about bakery or running a business, since baking is not as popular in China as it is in the Western culture. My friend gradually started to learn bakery online from her home, and she also registered for a short baking course in a private baking studio. Now she has opened her own bakery store and she hires two of her family members to work for her. Her management skills have also been developed through her start-up experience.

This friend is the third daughter in her family. Normally, the third daughter has been often paid the least attention to because her parents had been usually expecting a boy rather than a girl. Her family could not afford her high school tuition and she dropped out right after she finished middle school, namely the nine-year compulsory education. She was married to a man who lives in a faraway place where fruits are produced abundantly. She started to learn to sell fruits online, especially on personal social media such as WeChat. After several years of hard work, now she has established her supply chain, sales network, sales team, and logistics partnership. During our occasional phone conversations, she told me that she had been learning through online free courses about how to set up the online sales platform and how to increase the publicity of her store.

### **Adult Education Through Distance Education**

Distance education was defined, in a broad sense, as the sum of various kinds of education and training completed through distant teaching and learning (including the education that is conducted by educational institutions and social organizations, as well as in a social context) (Ding & Wu, 2016, p .4). In this paper, the researcher aims to examine distance education in the broad sense because no matter who, where, when, and how the distance

education is provided, it will somehow become the educational resources for women in the rural areas. This is also the advantage of technology development that we can make use of for adult education.

Different terminologies have been used to describe distant learning, such as online teaching/learning, networked education, tele-education, E-learning (Ding & Wu, 2016, p.2). Internationally, The International Council for Open and Distance Education is the leading global membership organization for open, distance, flexible and online education, including e-learning (Boampong & Holmber, 2015, p.3). In China, according to Ding and Wu's definition above, I will use the term of distance education in my research, which is also the most popular term for the kind of education which is conducted through distant teaching and learning in China.

Distance education has significantly developed since its start in China in 1980s. As for the basis on which distance education has grown, Ding and Wu (2009) classified them into five aspects: the social and historic motive power (social and historic basis), science and technology basis, theoretical basis, political decision basis, and educational discipline basis (p.9). They continued to explain in detail about the five bases of distance education. Since the growing industrialization and economy in China demand a large amount of human resources, distance education becomes an essential option to transform the large population into effective human resources (Ding & Wu, 2016, p.10). The function of distance education has thus been well recognized by the government. The social and historic motive power of distance education can also implement the purposes of adult education, which are to achieve academic and vocational performance, to develop personal interest, and to serve social change (as cited in Spencer & Lange, 2014, p.5). Online educational programs can offer training to people who are interested in pursuing further education or acquiring vocational skills. In addition, science and technology

has made it possible for women in rural areas to participate in adult education through distance learning and teaching. Support and attention from government and political authorities to distance education can lead to a systematic and sustainable development of distance education. Finally, Academic efforts to broaden and deepen the discipline and theories of distance education accelerate the growth of distance education.

Internationally, online courses such as MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) have largely transformed the way of traditional education. Students are not restricted to physical attendance in a classroom any more. Besides that, we can easily find other kinds of education provided in a social context, such as training about technical skills or cooking skills. We can also easily get access to a video teaching people how to use Excel software or Photoshop. In China, a full range of courses have been provided online. For example, on Tencent Classroom, one of the largest online educational platforms, we can find courses related to graphic designs, information technology, programming, languages, schoolwork tutoring, photography, investment, and etc. In the process of distance education development in China, digital satellite network, cable TV network, and internet network have been mainly used to establish the distant educational platforms, while IP technology has played a key role in integrating the three networks (Ding & Wu, 2016, p.23).

### **Distance Education Tools**

With the popularization and individualization of Internet, online courses become far more accessible than before. In the age when distance education mainly relied on recorded CDs and community projecting facilities, people were largely hindered to participate in educational programs. For example, people had to physically attend the courses, which may result in

transport expenses; government had to invest a large amount of fund to arrange educational space, to deliver the teaching materials, and to purchase educational facilities.

Prerecorded course programs are not the main option of distance education nowadays, since Internet has become easily accessible all over China. Statistics show that until December 2017 in China, rural users of internet consisted of 27% and reached 200 million (China Internet Information Center, 2017, p.22). For people who have access to Internet, they have many opportunities to benefit from online courses. They can choose to view the live streaming platforms which can facilitate more interaction and socializing activities in the process of distance education. Recorded courses are also available online, as long as people have access to Internet, they can choose to download the programs or watch them online, either freely or to be bought. Distance education has gradually grown into an individual discipline in the field of education. The reason why I explore how women in rural areas can participate in adult education through distance education is mainly because of the historic and social factor, and economy factor.



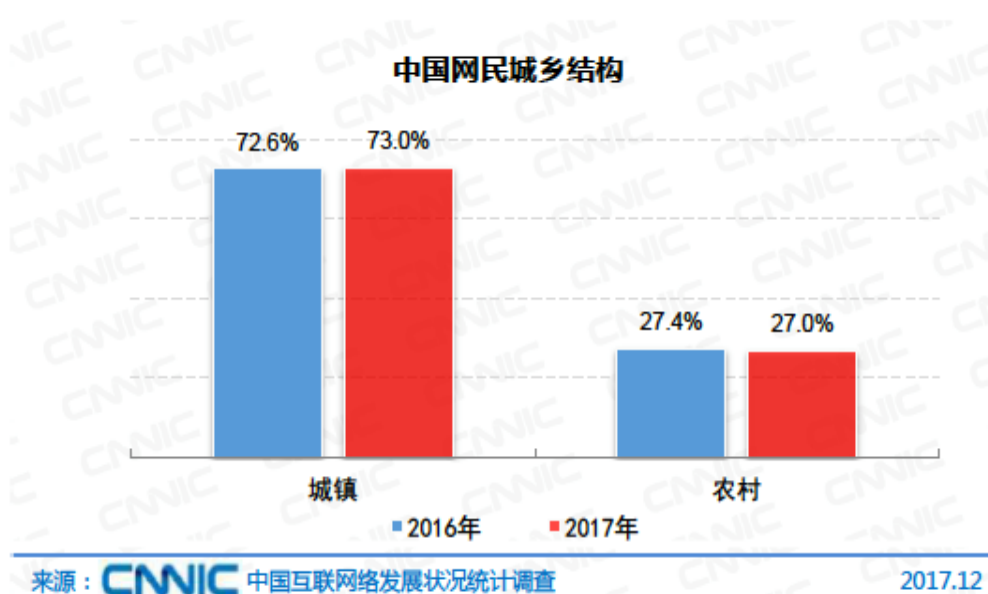


图 23 中国网民城乡结构

Figure 1. The structure of netizens in urban and rural areas in China  
 [[http://www.cac.gov.cn/2018-01/31/c\\_1122347026.htm](http://www.cac.gov.cn/2018-01/31/c_1122347026.htm)]

[English translation of Figure 1: the structure of netizens in urban and rural areas in China: urban areas 72.6% in 2016, and 73.0% in 2017; rural areas, 27.4% in 2016, and 27.0% in 2016].

In terms of the historic and social factor, people become used to receiving information and knowledge online, especially through smartphones. Recently, even in many rural areas, smart phones are extremely common. Reading news and information online has been commonplace and a necessary part of people's life. Even for women in rural areas, who might be trapped by housework and care-giving, they still have a large amount of spare moments to surf the internet through smartphones. Thanks to the technology innovations, using smartphones become so much more simplified than using a computer. Anyone who can read can basically find no problem touching the screen and managing the online pages of their smartphones. If women in rural areas can benefit from their spare time and participate in adult education, this may

significantly achieve the target of developing personal interest, one of the three purposes of adult education put forward by Spencer and Lange (2014). On the other hand, for the economy reason, since poverty still hinders women's participation and equal access to adult education, taking free or inexpensive online courses may not noticeably aggravate their financial burden. A problem may rise here since women in rural areas are often in a poverty-stricken situation, how come they can get access to smartphones and Internet? This phenomenon may be due to the decreasing cost of smartphones and Internet connection, which makes it affordable for most families to get access to online resources, even in rural areas.

Online courses such as Tencent class or WeChat class (Chinese equivalent to WhatsApp) have emerged rapidly. Among all the paid online courses, language courses have become the most competent one. If we search for online courses online, the first page would be full of online language training programs. This may be because of the popularity of off-line language learning, and also because that language learning seems to be the most practical one to be conducted remotely online. Computer programming and designing is also one of the most popular online courses. Chinese university MOOC, one of the most professional online educational platforms, has also been established to provide the public with the courses from the prominent Chinese universities, fulfilling the duty of delivering open and good-quality open courses assigned by the Department of Education (Chinese University MOOC, 2014). Chinese University MOOC aims to provide more possibilities for people who might not have enough access to higher education. These courses are often offered by well-known university professors or instructors. Various kinds of courses regarding different subjects are given online. People can even complete their degree or obtain their completion certificate online. Courses are digitalized online and delivered throughout China. However, due to the different learning purposes of adult education for women

in rural areas, courses provided through MOOC may not suit them very well. From the successful experience of Chinese University MOOC, we may learn to adopt this system for adult education for women in rural areas.

The Chinese government has also attached great importance to the integration of Internet, big data, and economy. In the Outline of China's Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan, it has been stressed to develop modern distance education, establish the open distance education and public service platform delivered through satellite, TV and internet, and to provide convenient, flexible, and individualized study environment to the learners (Xinhua Press, 2010). Additionally, distance education has also been emphasized to construct a flexible and open life-long learning system. The government will continuously advance the distance education for primary and middle schools in rural areas, and provide outstanding educational resources to residents in rural and remote areas. Furthermore, the government will accelerate the popularization and application of information technology. Based on these efforts made by the government, to promote adult education among women in rural areas through distant teaching and learning will be easier.

Teaching resources, like other social resources, can be unequally distributed. In China, the general situation of education distribution is that the Eastern areas have more access than the Western areas, the more economically developed areas have more access than the less developed areas, and urban areas have more access than rural areas. This trend is also applicable to adult education and distance education. However, distance education can somehow alleviate the inequality in education by its efficient and high-paced transmission of knowledge. For example, distance education can deliver the most-advanced knowledge from the better-developed areas to the rural areas without delay or considerable costs. Besides that, the digitalization of education

and knowledge can largely reduce the cost of education on a long-term basis. There can be less expense to print, or store the physical books, or build libraries with limited access. Thus, distance education can largely remove the blockages of adult education for women in rural areas.

Though there are many online education platforms available, it is still hard for women in rural areas to participate effectively into them. The blockages discussed above of rural women's participation in adult education, meaning the political reasons, traditional mindset, health problems, and economic problems may still apply to distance education. For the political reasons, more efforts and attention are paid to the formal school education. Though life-long learning has been put forward in the Outline of Education Reform and Development Plan, formal education is still generally acknowledged as the most important form of education. As for women who suffer from health problems, they can still be affected by the same factors in distance education. The traditional mindset of gender difference and discrimination, and health problems can limit people's access to distance education, and women will be generally affected the most. In terms of economic problems, some distance education programs are only accessible for people in certain areas. The completely open and equal educational access cannot be achieved within a short period of time. Moreover, to participate in distance education, women have to learn how to use the facilities and access to the online programs. However, distance education can somehow in turn remove these obstacles through its unique way.

Among all of the Internet users, 20.1% of them had experience in online education, reaching 155.18 million by December 2017(China Internet Information Center, 2017, p.30). We can conclude that the awareness of utilizing online courses has been significantly raised. Thanks to the increasing access of internet, personal computers, and smart phones, distance education becomes much more feasible and practical. Compared with the prerecorded courses, recently, the

focus of developing distance education can be shifted from platform establishment to the research and development of teaching materials, teaching methods, and to the advancement of the proficiency of education practitioners.

The courses offered online by private companies or individuals are a general introduction of some subjects or skills, often with a purpose of advertising. Normally, the first several classes of a program are free while access to the later courses has to be paid. If rural women have to spend extra budget on these courses, they will probably be under more financial pressure. Besides that, the content of these private online platforms is usually unsystematic and inconsistent. While for the Chinese University MOOC, courses are often too professional or specialized for the general public, especially for women in rural areas. They may find them not suitable or too difficult to learn. Course design and teaching method thus become the priority for distance education for women in rural China.

### **Interpretation of Education Informatization 2.0 Action Plan in China**

China's Department of Education issued "education informatization 2.0 action plan" (hereinafter referred to as "the action plan") on April.3, 2018, to upgrade education informatization. The action plan is the actual implementation of promoting education plus internet. The action plan illustrates eight detailed explanations of how to implement it. The third explanation is to foster wisdom through internet, which is to particularly develop the education informatization in the deeply poverty-stricken areas represented by "San qu san zhou (three districts and three counties)", to promote the fairness and balance of education development," and to serve the national poverty alleviation strategy (Department of Education, 2018). This action plan can on the one hand, demonstrate the government's efforts to alleviate education inequality, and on the other hand, alleviate poverty. Poverty and lack of education can foster a

vicious circle. Lack of education may limit one's vocational performance and personal development, thus may lead to further poverty, and poverty can in turn result in lack of education. This vicious circle can be particularly applied to women in rural areas, who suffer from gender inequality in addition to education inequality. On the other hand, once this action plan is implemented, it can alleviate education inequality and poverty at the same time.

Based on the action plan, it is possible to eliminate the three-layer gap at the same time (Feng & Ren, 2018, p.22). The three-layer gap has been named as "facility gap," "skill gap," and "mentality gap" (Feng & Ren, 2018, p.23). For "facility gap," it can be interpreted as the access to information and information processing tools. This gap exists between those who have access to information technology based education and those who do not have. This gap can be linked to the blockages that I discussed as economic problems. Economy plays an essential role to acquire education facilities of and access to adult education for women in rural areas. This gap is linked with the difference between the rich and the poor. The second gap is called by Susan P. Grawford "new digital gap," which is interpreted as the difference between students to make use of digital tools to transform and complete their study, and the third gap is the difference between different people to make full use of internet skills and develop themselves based on the pace of social development (as cited in Feng & Ren, 2018, p.23).

### **The IDEAL Project: Impact of Distance Education on Adult Learning**

The International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) have jointly published a report on the impact of distance education on adult learning (hereafter referred to as “IDEAL”) in 2015. This is one of the international researches on the relationship between distance education and adult learning. This report can be helpful for my research since the two organizations are the leading power in the academia of distance education and adult learning, regardless of its focus on distance education in European higher education. ICED is organized to develop open, distance, flexible, and online education, with members from institutions, educational authorities, commercial actors, and individuals, while UIL is established to promote all kinds of formal, non-formal, and informal education (Boampong & Holmber, 2015, p.3).

According to the IDEAL report, distance education, along with other forms of learning play an essential role in facilitating adult learners to participate in higher education (Boampong & Holmber, 2015, p.34). Adult education, targeting at adult learners, who usually have access to internet and different platforms of distance education, can take advantage of distance education. Though distance education seems less expensive and more convenient for learners, there are some barriers to people’s participation in distance education. Based on the online survey conducted in the IDEAL project, costs, technology, requirements of previous education, time, and some other factors are presented by potential students are barriers to their distance education, among which the most important factors are costs and time by 29% and 22% respectively (Boampong & Holmber, 2015, p.27). Compared with the blockages of adult education for women in rural areas, the hindering factors of distance education demonstrate a similar tendency, with economic factor ranking No.1 barrier. However, online platforms in China such as the

Chinese University MOOC or the Open University of China can somehow alleviate this problem by offering free and open-access online courses, but the condition is that students should have facilities and access to internet. The current situation is that equality in adult education is still confronted with the imbalanced development of different regions and technologies.

Due to the lack of statistics of distance education research in China, I will adopt some research results from the IDEAL project and analyze and compare them with the current situation in China. Statistics in the IDEAL report show that the major group of participants in distance education in Europe are women, who tend to be more bound to their work and housework responsibilities, followed by retired people. In addition, potential students in distance education are averagely employed people from 25 to 34 years old. Among the five countries that are surveyed in the IDEAL project, except the fact that all the potential students come from the similar age group the social profile of potential students in each country display particular characteristics. For example, potential students in distance education in Finland and Hungary are slightly or more educated and have higher income than traditional students, while in Germany, more potential students in distance education are from a lower socio-economic background.

Compared with adult women in rural areas in China, participants in the IDEAL project are often better educated and have more access to distance educational resources because of different socio-economic context. Consequently, the barriers to distance education for women in rural areas in China can be aggregated more deeply. In terms of the age range of potential students in China, it may be inferred that it will demonstrate a similar tendency with Europe, based on the statistics in 2017 that the number of Chinese netizens from 20 to 39 years old ranked the top by 53.5 % (China Internet Information Center, 2017, p. 25).



This first chapter attempted to place the adult education participation for women in rural areas in context, based on the existing literature as well as the telling of some stories illustrating a few successful and diverse examples known to the researcher. Based on these insights questions were prepared for the one on one interviews with four women from a specific rural area in China. The researcher is native of this area. In Chapter 2, I will present the design of the study, the process of interviewing four voluntary participants and the data obtained from each of them.

## Chapter 2:

### Study Design and Presentation of Data

This chapter presents the methodological approach that I used in this study. It first explains the way I designed the research. Then it explains the way data was collected and presents the results obtained from one on one interviews of four voluntary participants.

This research is designed to be an exploratory qualitative case study of a specific area in rural China. As Anderson (2005) said, we use qualitative approach because we want to know how people feel and gain insight into the underlying phenomena (p.99). The aim of this exploratory study was to find out the factors that can hinder women's participation in adult education in rural areas in China. This research project also aimed to ask the participants to consider the meaning of adult education and reflect on their participation in adult education. Thus, interviews and story-telling have been employed in this research because narratives help people to understand, accept and, perhaps, even embrace events that happen in their lives (Strong, Lagerwey, & Shaddend, 2018, p.464).

The research study consists of three procedures, the open-ended questions, questionnaires, and one-on-one interviews for inclusion of these stories in my thesis. I will also indirectly refer to my own story to make clear my own positionality, since as Bauman suggests, stories are oral literature whose meanings, forms and functions are situationally rooted in cultural contexts, scenes and events which give meaning to action (as cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p.394).

Growing up in Western China, often with few and poor quality educational resources, I have observed the way some women overcome difficulties and disadvantageous learning conditions to achieve better self-fulfillment. I have also witnessed how women in rural areas

have suffered from lack of access to education. This personal experience and the three stories presented in Chapter 1, are good illustration of informal and non-formal adult education practice and they can provide us with a more profound perspective to explore adult education, especially for women in less developed areas.

The whole process of research was conducted online through Wechat. The first two open-ended questions were designed to collect people's initial responses and understanding toward adult education prior to the semi-structured interviews, in order to avoid them being influenced by the interview questions. The two questions also provide the participants a general idea of what this research will be about. After that, we moved to the background information questionnaires. This part was designed to analyze the way demographic difference can influence people's viewpoint of adult education. The third procedure consisted of one-on-one online interviews, audio-recorded, transcribed, and eventually analyzed. To better present the opinions of the participants, I tried to give them enough time to respond to the questions during the interview and encourage them to use whatever language they prefer, either the local dialect or the standard official language.

The demographic information in the questionnaires and the interview questions are designed to address the research questions. I include the education history, distance to community schools from their households, way of commuting, experience in community training programs, and access to internet into the questionnaires. Education history might influence people's awareness and necessity to continue their education after their formal study. Distance to community schools from their households, way of commuting, and experience in community training programs are asked to collect data about the popularity of and people's attitude toward adult education programs in rural areas. Since I also wanted to analyze the way technology

innovation, especially distance education, can change adult education, I asked participants about their access and tools to use the internet.

Nine questions are included in the interview. The first, the fifth, and the seventh questions are designed to find out people's attitude toward adult education. The second and third ones are designed to explore people's understanding of gender difference and how it may influence people's education. The fourth question is asked to examine if economy such as income can hinder people's participation in adult education. The sixth question aims to find out how health can block women's participation in adult education. The eighth and the ninth questions are designed to explore the relationship between adult education and technology innovation, such as distance education.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

As noted above, this research is designed to explore women's participation in adult education in rural areas in China. It aims to find out the blockages to adult education for women in rural areas, so it is important to know the perspectives of women. I recruited four women above 18 years old who lives in Qianjiang, a rural and poor minority area in Chongqing, Western China. I interviewed four women in this research. To examine women's participation in education in rural areas, I interviewed four women with a rural "Hu Kou" or used to have a rural "Hu Kou", which is a Chinese official statement of identifying the holder as a rural resident. Some participants in this research project are my friends and acquaintances. Other participants are referred to me by my interviewees. The interview was originally designed to be conducted in Mandarin, the standard official language, which I then was planning to transcribe and translate. The interviews turned out to be conducted in Chongqing dialect, which is the main language for daily conversations in this research area, because my participants found it more comfortable to

express themselves during the interview. Being a native of this area myself, I was comfortable in the use of Chongqing dialect for conducting the interviews to accommodate the preference of the four participating women.

The four participants were chosen from this area because I was born and raised there. I could incorporate my personal experience into my research. Since this is an exploratory study, by starting with people I am familiar with, the expectation was to trigger more authentic reflection to analyze the current situation of adult education. Another reason of choosing participants in this area is the fact that this area is economically under-developed. Poverty or economic hardship, which could greatly affect education and gender equality, was a significant factor I wanted to examine in my study.

Located in southwest China Chongqing is part of an area that used to represent one of the most backward economies in China. However, since 1997, Chongqing was selected to be the fourth municipality directly controlled by the central government, which affords better opportunities for economy development. The downtown area in Chongqing is economically more developed than rural areas like Qianjiang, one of the poorest counties in China. In the following map, Qianjiang is located in the area of vii, which was marked as poverty-stricken counties. Participants were chosen from rural areas of Chongqing to illustrate the way economic conditions can affect women's education. When I recruited participants, I intentionally recruited people with diverse backgrounds, such as different age groups, different professions, and different education history, to find out their particular attitude toward adult education.

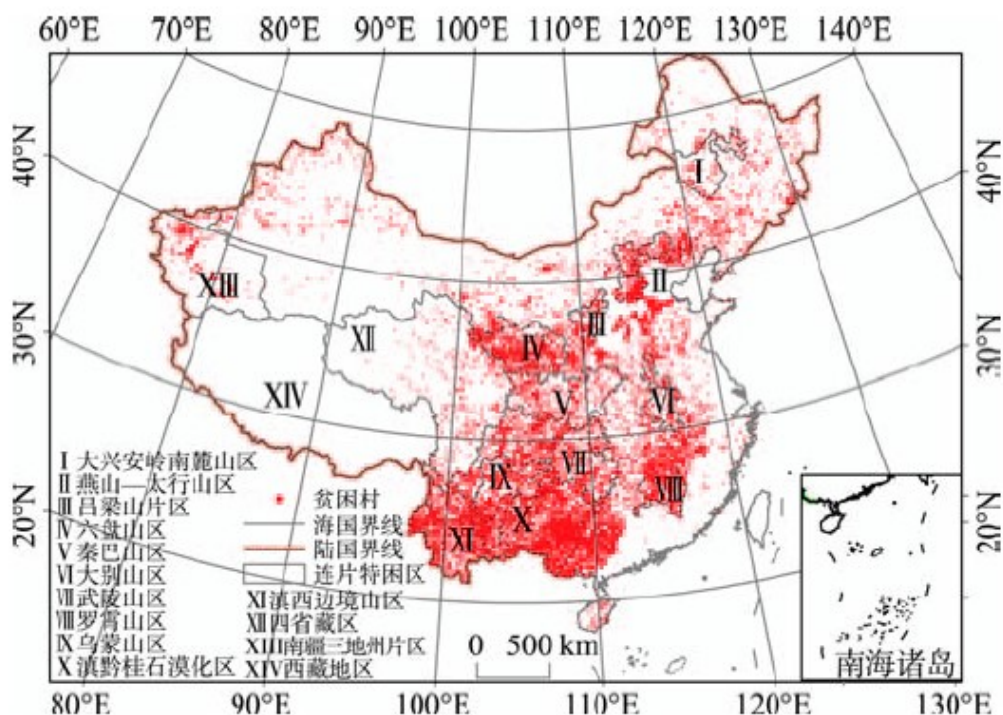


Figure 2. The spatial layout of poverty-stricken villages in China

[[http://www.dlyj.ac.cn/article/2016/1000-0585/1000-0585-35-12-2298.shtml#outline\\_anch](http://www.dlyj.ac.cn/article/2016/1000-0585/1000-0585-35-12-2298.shtml#outline_anch)]

## Data Collection

This research took place in early August 2018. The whole procedure of the online qualitative interviews, which was outlined in appendix A, was divided into three parts, 1) participants' responses in writing to the open-ended questions related to education, 2) semi-structured background information questionnaires, 3) one-on-one online interviews. All the data in this research were collected online, including participants' consent form and invitation letter. This online approach becomes possible thanks to the popularity of internet and smartphones, which have largely simplified the way of contacting the participants and increased the efficiency of the research. To ensure the completeness of this study, all the online interview calls were

audio-recorded, and then transcribed and analyzed, with the consent of all the participants. This research recruited four participants who are over 18 years old, the minimum age recognized as an adult in China. Four adult women from rural areas in Qianjiang participated in this study. Their pseudonyms are: Fang Fang, Yan zi, Jing Xia, and Xiao Hua. Since most of the questions are open-ended, and my participants are worried about not offering a satisfactory response, they asked me to send them the questions before the interview so that they can scan them and prepare in advance. To avoid that the participants perform a thorough research online or be influenced by other information, I started the data collection process a few minutes after I sent them the questions. To enlighten participants' thought about adult education, two open questions about education and adult education were asked and responses were mostly offered in writing. However, there was one participant who found it easier to orally present her ideas for the first two questions as well as the questionnaires. After that, online questionnaires containing background information were distributed and collected, and interviews about traditional mindset, community school programs, income, attitudes toward adult education, technology innovation, and health, finally took place. Since all the participants are the researcher's friends and acquaintances, they tended to talk about their personal life and recent experiences, once in a while during the interview, resulting in the interruption of the interview. So, during the data collection period, only conversations relevant to the research questions were recorded.

## Results and Analysis

### Demographic Data of the Participants

Participant	Education background	Distance to residents' center (community activities center)	Frequency of internet use	Way of Commuting	Tools to search internet
Fangfang	Middle school	100M	everyday	bus	Smart phone
Yanzi	High school	Several hundred M	everyday	taxi	Smart phone
Jingxia	Undergraduate	5 minutes' walk	everyday	car	Smartphone/laptop
Xiaohua	Undergraduate	300M	everyday	Bus/car	Desktop & smart phones

Figure 3 The demographic data of the participants

Fangfang graduated from middle school. She lives 100 m away from the community activities center. She normally takes bus to go to work. She surfs the internet everyday through her smart phone.

Yanzi graduated from high school. She lives several hundred meters away from the community activities center. She takes the taxi to travel. She uses internet through her smart phone.



Jingxia has completed her undergraduate education. Her home is five minutes' walk from the community activities center. She drives her car to go outside and she uses smartphone or laptop to connect to the internet on a daily basis.

Xiaohua has also finished her undergraduate education. She lives 300m away from the community activities center. She chooses either bus or car as the main transport means and she gets access to internet through desktop or smart phone on a daily basis.

**Table 1**

Data contributed by Fangfang

<b>Questions asked to Write down Before the Interview</b>	<b>Responses</b>
1. What is the purpose of education for children?	I think he can learn some knowledge from life, and also learn some skills in life. Education can develop children's good habits.
2. Is it necessary to continue education after adulthood? why?	Yes. We should continue our education. As the proverb goes, it is never too old to learn, life skills should be accumulated gradually.
<b>Interview Questions</b>	
1.As a Chinese saying goes, "Huo dao lao, xue dao lao" which means you should not stop learning till you die. Do you think you are still learning some skills in your adulthood?	Yes, I have been learning new skills, such as how to use smart phones, computers, and satellite TV. All these were not taught in the past.

<p>2. How do you think of “a married daughter-spilled water”?</p>	<p>How to respond? I don't think this is a proper statement. We cannot compare daughters to water, because spilt water will never be back. But married daughter, it is more like, when people are old enough, they should get married.</p>
<p>3. If there is an opportunity for only one person in your family to learn new working and living skills for free offered by the government, who do you think will get this opportunity in your family?</p>	<p>Whoever is suitable for the job, should take this chance. Technology training should be like this.</p>
<p>4. Do you think income can affect people's access to education?</p>	<p>Of course. If I can make 10000yuan (per month), I can afford some extra classes more than school, such as some hobbies class.</p>
<p>5. What aspect of knowledge do you expect to obtain in the community training program?</p>	<p>I think every aspect is important. Life skills, for example, because nowadays, children are taken best care of better than before. In terms of training for children, I think life skills are good.</p>
<p>6. How do you think health can affect your education after adulthood?</p>	<p>Health is the best. Your health means happiness in your family. If you were not healthy, it may bring too much trouble and sufferings to your family.</p>
<p>7. What do you think is the meaning of education?</p>	<p>To make him learn new knowledge and life skills, and to develop his good habits. It is impossible that children do not go to school and wander in the society.</p>

<p>8. What has become different in education, compared to that in your parents' generation?</p>	<p>Education has changed tremendously. In the past, when I was at primary school, we only had two subjects, Chinese and Math, and we were taught by the same teacher. From my children's generation, they started to learn English since primary school, and each subject was taught by different teachers, not like us. And the knowledge is also different, we were taught by Sichuan dialect (the local language in this area). The teacher taught us in whatever language he/she can speak, now all are taught by standard language (mandarin). Our teacher was substitute teacher, he/ she did know how to teach in mandarin.</p>
<p>9. How do you think technology innovations, such as computers and smartphones can affect people's life? How can they change our education?</p>	<p>Technology innovation? nowadays, plants are polluted, without technology innovation, more and more people will get sick. For example, there is air purifier to deal with air pollution, and water filter to deal with water pollution. How technology influences education? In the past, we can only get information from the teachers. Nowadays, we can learn from computers. It can improve our study. Besides that, children like to surf the internet. When they come back home, they can surf the internet for fun and for study, without ignoring either. Ways of learning have become diverse. In the past, if you did not understand, you can look for them in the dictionary slowly, but now you can click the button on the computer and it will come out.</p>

According to Fangfang, education plays an important role in nurturing children's behavioural habits and preparing children with technical skills. In terms of continuing education, Fangfang believes that people still need to gradually learn new skills in their life. Fangfang still learns new skills after her adulthood, such as how to use smartphones and computers.

In terms of the traditional mindset of gender difference in education, Fangfang seems quite progressive. She believes it is inappropriate to compare daughters to spilled water and her idea about who might get the only training opportunity differs from what I expected.

With respect to the relationship between technology and education, Fangfang illustrates her idea by giving many examples. She believes that computers can benefit our education and can provide more fun and efficiency to children through their study online.

### Data Contributed by Yanzi

<b>Questions asked to Write down Before the Interview</b>	<b>Responses</b>
1. What is the purpose of education for children?	Children have to receive education to develop a sound value system. They will know better about their inner needs, and establish their worldview, and become more important to our society.
2. Is it necessary to continue education after adulthood? why?	I think kids need to continue their education when they enter their adulthood, because only with continuous education and new knowledge, we can keep improving ourselves and respond to changing times, and better fulfill our dreams.
<b>Interview Questions</b>	
1. As a Chinese saying goes, “Huo dao lao, xue dao lao” which means you should not stop learning till you die. Do you think you are still learning some skills in your adulthood?	I think so. For example, I have learned new skills after I started to work. I have learned baking and I have also opened my desert studio.

<p>2. How do you think of “a married daughter-spilled water”?</p>	<p>I am not in favor of this idea. I am married now, and I even have my child, my parents treat as well as before. I think this idea is outdated. Or probably in some distant areas, this fact may still exist.</p>
<p>3. If there is an opportunity for only one person in your family to learn new working and living skills for free offered by the government, who do you think will get this opportunity in your family?</p>	<p>Probably I will take it. My husband has already learned a lot and he has obtained enough skills. I lack some experience from this aspect. And my schedule is more flexible.</p>
<p>4. Do you think income can affect people’s access to education?</p>	<p>Children in the first-level cosmopolitans, can receive different education since childhood. They started their education much higher than us, so I think income can influence education.</p>
<p>5. What aspect of knowledge do you expect to obtain in the community training program?</p>	<p>In fact, I pay much attention to health. I would like to know more training about healthy lifestyle.</p>
<p>6. How do you think health can affect your education after adulthood?</p>	<p>Health is the basis of everything. A good health and a healthy body will facilitate continuing education.</p>
<p>7. What do you think is the meaning of education?</p>	<p>Education can broaden our horizon. It will not lock you in your world. It can make you understand that you are a member of this society and thus you will know better about our society and you will develop better.</p>
<p>8. What has become different in education, compared to that in your parents’ generation?</p>	<p>For our parents’ generation, they had few opportunities to receive education. Back then, due to the backwardness of science and education, they did not have good opportunities to get education. Nowadays, we have many ways to access to education, and it’s more convenient. For example, compulsory education (the nine-year compulsory education policy), our parents did not have it. Besides that, we now have internet and we can self-study.</p>
<p>9. How do you think technology innovations, such as computers and smartphones can affect people’s life? How can they change our education?</p>	<p>Technology innovation makes everything more convenient, and it enables us to know what is happening around the world. Technology can also promote social development, and make our country stronger. For example, there are</p>

	many kinds of online courses and lectures. We can know things and study through internet, and we can learn something that is not available in the classroom.
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When asked about the purpose and necessity of education and adult education, Yanzi seems to mainly emphasize education for children. Yanzi admits that education can significantly facilitate the development of children's worldview. Yanzi also believes that education after adulthood can make people better adapt themselves to the changing society.

Regarding the community training opportunity, Yanzi thinks that this opportunity would go to her because of her flexible schedule. She also believes that she needs to take the opportunity to attend the training school because she needs more experience than her husband. In terms of the teaching material in community training programs, she says that she is more interested in knowledge relevant to health.

Additionally, Yanzi thinks that technology innovation can make education more convenient and accessible. For example, she believes that technology can offer many ways of education such as online courses and lectures. She adds that technology innovation makes our education more diverse.

#### **Data contributed by Jingxia**

<b>Questions asked to Write down Before the Interview</b>	<b>Responses</b>
1. What is the purpose of education for children?	People do not know anything when they were born. We often compare infants and children to a piece of blank paper. From the aspect of a parent and a teacher, when children are on their way to explore the world, we are obliged to give them correct direction of knowledge, nurture their good moral values and learning habit. We make our utmost to paint a colorful picture on the blank paper.

<p>2. Is it necessary to continue education after adulthood? why?</p>	<p>It is necessary to develop their education, no matter it is formal degree education or informal education. Because different education can often lead to different salary and welfare in enterprises and public institutions.....In addition, I ignored the fact that there is indeed much knowledge that cannot be learnt on campus and from books, until I started to work.</p>
<p><b>Interview Questions</b></p>	
<p>1. As a Chinese saying goes, “Huo dao lao, xue dao lao” which means you should not stop learning till you die. Do you think you are still learning some skills in your adulthood?</p>	<p>Yes, do I need to elaborate? For example, I learnt English in my university and all the education I received was about English knowledge. Besides that, in China, we normally learn technical knowledge. Comparatively, I lack skills about interpersonal relationships or some other skills. Personally speaking, I do not work as a teacher, I am also responsible for office paperwork. I have been learning Word and Excel. Besides that, for example, I have been also learning other things related to organizing meetings and writing skills. I have been learning something new. As the question said, it is never too old to learn.</p>
<p>2. How do you think of “a married daughter-spilled water”?</p>	<p>This is an old saying in China. Based on the current reality, maybe this is going on in some underdeveloped areas in China. Personally, in my family, or in Qianjiang, in Chongqing, the status of women has been rising. This phenomenon becomes very rare. Especially in my generation, due to the only-child policy, my parents have only me, one daughter. Though I am married, I still stay close to my family.</p>
<p>3. If there is an opportunity for only one person in your family to learn new working and living skills for free offered by the government, who do you think will get this opportunity in your family?</p>	<p>Considering my own situation, I should definitely take this opportunity. My father has to work and he could not have time to participate in the training. My mother is getting older and she would not be interested in these things. My husband works in a factory and he is busy having two work shifts. My schedule is more flexible.</p>

<p>4. Do you think income can affect people's access to education?</p>	<p>Yes. Higher income family can provide better materials and learning environment to their children. Children born in higher income families, may have access to early childhood education, and they may choose bilingual primary schools. Compared with children born in lower income families, those from higher income families may have better intelligence development and capability. For example, it is generally acknowledged that education is extremely imbalanced between the coastal and inland areas. Economic income can largely influence educational level.</p>
<p>5. What aspect of knowledge do you expect to obtain in the community training program?</p>	<p>Community schools? It seems we do not have it. Does residents' committee count? Activity center for the senior does not suit us. If I had the opportunity to attend the training, I personally wish it is related to life skills, training about life skills. If it is community school, isn't it supposed to be closely related to our daily life? I would like to learn or be trained cooking, housework, some skills like this.</p>
<p>6. How do you think health can affect your education after adulthood?</p>	<p>Good health is the guarantee of everything. If we do not have a good health, or a good spirit, we may not complete continuing education. You can only be devoted to improving your learning capability or technical expertise on the condition that you have a good physical health and positive mindset.</p>
<p>7. What do you think is the meaning of education?</p>	<p>No matter we are an infant, a kid, or an adult, we have something in common. Maybe children may have less knowledge than adults. Adults may know certain aspects of knowledge thanks to their education in primary schools, middle schools, Senior middle schools and universities. But they may still lack some knowledge in certain aspects. The meaning of education, I think it is to offer some guidance to children or adults in certain fields, in which they may lack or are unaware of. Besides that, as I said, it can help form the behavioral habits and personality.</p>



<p>8. What has become different in education, compared to that in your parents' generation?</p>	<p>The first obvious different is the duration of education. For example, my mom got education for primary school, but now nine-year compulsory education is implemented all over China. For kids nowadays, they do not give up receiving education after their nine-year compulsory education. Most of these kids will continue their high-school, or universities. The second difference is that the teaching material has largely changed. For example, as my parents' generation described, the knowledge they learnt was different. Nowadays, more attention is paid to deliver science knowledge. The way of education has also changed considerably, even for me myself, there is big difference between the time when I was a student and nowadays, not to mention my parents' generation. For example, it was the traditional blackboard and chalks, the two main teaching tools, it would be great if there was a sound recorder. While nowadays, even in schools in villages and counties, ban ban tong (literally means to connect each classroom) has been popularized. Ban ban tong is a set of hardware and software that enables each class to exchange information, to utilize and acquire digitalized information and resources, with the purpose of integrating science technology and education. Moreover, in the urban schools in Qianjiang, they have upgraded the ban ban tong, and they have introduced more advanced electronic blackboard. That is pretty much about it, mainly from the above three aspects.</p>
<p>9. How do you think technology innovations, such as computers and smartphones can affect people's life? How can they change our education?</p>	<p>How does technology innovation change our life? Do we have to illustrate it? More than a decade ago, for example, we were using xiao ling tong (Personal Handphone System), or lao ren ji (phones with minimum functions). Nowadays, almost everyone uses smart phones and we can get access to internet whenever and wherever we are. Technology has changed our way of receiving information and living. ....As I answered to question 8, technology has changed our way of teaching, and teaching material. For example, in the past, there were blackboard and chalks, but now based on technology innovation, students can have ban ban tong in their classroom, or electronic blackboard. These are the change of way of teaching. Meanwhile, the teaching materials have been different too. Science knowledge on books was presented by theories. After the technology innovation, or</p>

	technology development, teaching content has been changed, using more scientific, objective, and proper way of teaching.
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When asked the importance of adult education, Jingxia states that adult education, such as some interpersonal communication skills, is a great supplement to formal school education. She gives the example of herself, who has to conduct multi-tasking in her job.

In terms of the traditional mindset of gender difference and people's preference to boys, Jingxia argues that this phenomenon is rare in her hometown. She continues to demonstrate that because of the one-child policy in her generation, her parents, who have only one child, has already abandoned the traditional mindset of their children's different genders.

As for the change of education that has occurred between her generation and her parents' generation, she illustrates from three aspects, the duration of education, the teaching material, and the way of teaching. Based on her responses to the open-ended questions in the interview, Jingxia stresses that technology has strongly changed the way of education. She illustrates that advanced teaching facilities in the classroom such as the electronic blackboard or computerized ways of teaching have changed the way of delivering education.

#### **Data contributed by Xiaohua**

<b>Questions asked to Write down Before the Interview</b>	<b>Responses</b>
1. What is the purpose of education for children?	On the one hand, education can facilitate the development of children's personality and make them more optimistic and happier. On the other hand, by receiving education, children can gain more knowledge and technical skills, and better adapt themselves to the society and fulfil their personal values.

<p>2. Is it necessary to continue education after adulthood? why?</p>	<p>It is necessary to develop their education. As we said, it is never too old to learn, the knowledge that we could learn from books and from the schools is limited and often theoretical. After adulthood and entering the society, there are many problems that could not be resolved by the theoretical knowledge on the books. That is why we need to learn new things at work and in our life.</p>
<p><b>Interview Questions</b></p>	
<p>1. As a Chinese saying goes, “Huo dao lao, xue dao lao” which means you should not stop learning till you die. Do you think you are still learning some skills in your adulthood?</p>	<p>Yes. I am still learning new skills such as some computer soft wares and writing, and etc.</p>
<p>2. How do you think of “a married daughter-spilled water”?</p>	<p>From a legal point of view, married daughters still hold the duty of maintaining their parents, which could not be eliminated after their marriage. From the perspective of affection and love, parents have brought up their daughters. The bond established between parents and daughters will not disappear because of getting married.</p>
<p>3. If there is an opportunity for only one person in your family to learn new working and living skills for free offered by the government, who do you think will get this opportunity in your family?</p>	<p>I will take this opportunity.</p>
<p>4. Do you think income can affect people’s access to education?</p>	<p>Yes. People with lower income pay more attention to their subsistence, they can receive education, but it is often limited, such as limited education time and opportunities, and their awareness of receiving education is less too. Richer groups with higher income, without being bothered by subsistence issues, they have more energy for education, and can pay attention to the quality of education, and invest more into education.</p>

<p>5. What aspect of knowledge do you expect to obtain in the community training program?</p>	<p>Community training, I would like to learn some skills about medical care in our household and about problem-solving skills, such as how to promptly deal with diseases or fire and earthquake.</p>
<p>6. How do you think health can affect your education after adulthood?</p>	<p>Body is the basis of everything. An unhealthy person will pay more attention to take care of their bodies and to get knowledge about health. People with unhealthy mindset will have lower capability to receive education than those with a healthy mindset.</p>
<p>7. What do you think is the meaning of education?</p>	<p>For the sake of individuals, education can prepare knowledge and capability for one's personal development. For the sake of the society, education can promote social development.</p>
<p>8. What has become different in education, compared to that in your parents' generation?</p>	<p>We have more advanced tools, such as multi-media, internet, computers, and smartphones. The traditional way of educating has been weakened, such as beating and scolding the children. Nowadays, more communication is added to establish a close relationship with children.</p>
<p>9. How do you think technology innovations, such as computers and smartphones can affect people's life? How can they change our education?</p>	<p>Technology innovation has made our life and communication more convenient, and enlarged our learning horizon. Technology innovation is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it makes education more visual and can assist education to make it more acceptable for children and promote education. On the other hand, numerous electronic items, games and other entertainment products can make people addicted to it. Parents or teachers may thus ignore educating their children, and children's education may also be affected.</p>

Information contributed by Xiaohua illustrates her understanding of education. Speaking generally, Xiaohua believes education, either for children or for adults, can facilitate their personal development as well as social development. Xiaohua is the only person who claims to write down the responses to every question of the interview rather than respond orally. She is

afraid that she may not respond perfectly if she expresses her ideas orally. When I invited her to participate in my research at 11:00 AM Montreal time (11:00 PM Beijing Time), she was still working on writing her report at home. She sent me her responses the following morning, which properly highlighted the responses in red.

She continues to explain that theoretical knowledge that we learned from schools cannot be sufficient to resolve problems in our life and in the real social context. However, when speaking of her efforts to continue her education after adulthood, she still focused on some technical skills such as how to use computer software or writing skills.

With regard to the traditional mindset of gender difference, Xiaohua is opposed to the traditional idea. She analyzes the “married daughter-spilt water” from the legal and emotional aspect. She believes that from both sides, the bonds between parents and daughters do not disappear after their getting married. However, unlike the other participants, Xiaohua does not clearly deny the existence of this idea in her hometown.

With reference to how technology innovation changes education, Xiaohua admits the benefits that it brings to human beings, such as the convenience it may bring. She does not speak too much of the advantages of technology innovation. Xiaohua is the only participant who seems to be somehow critical about the outcomes of technology innovation. She continues to say that technology innovation may affect parents’ educating and the children being educated.

## Chapter 3:

### Data Analysis and Recommendations

This research aimed to explore the obstacles facing women's participation in adult education in rural areas of China. Four major aspects were identified from the experience and information contributed by four female participants in Qianjiang, a rural area in Southwest China. The four aspects examined were: policy, health, traditional mindset, and economic problems. Another important research question is to examine how technology innovation can benefit women's participation in adult education.

In this section, the findings of this research study are discussed and compared to those of the literature review.

**Education change.** Education has changed tremendously in modern China, compared with earlier generations. Teaching materials, ways of delivering education, and the duration of education have become significantly different. For example, more subjects have been included into the curriculum in primary schools, such as English. Teachers' proficiency has been strengthened and technology such as computers have been introduced into classrooms. We would also infer from the responses that people in rural areas can sense the imbalance of educational resources between the rich and more-developed areas and the poor and less-developed areas. Another thing we can find from the responses is the ways that we educate children have changed too. Traditional ways of behaving towards children, such as beating and scolding children have been abandoned, and more communications have been introduced into education. In addition, nine-year compulsory education has been generally acknowledged because of the publicity and continuous efforts from the government. China has achieved great performance in implementing compulsory education, with its incredible depth and breadth.

However, the public attention to education is mainly focused on general education. The awareness of adult education remains low in these areas. Future study is recommended to explore how adult education can draw on the experience that we have gained from the process of implementing compulsory education.

**Policies.** Based on the open-ended questions, questionnaires, and interview questions presented in this study, people find it necessary to participate in adult education and all the participants continue to learn new skills and knowledge after their adulthood, though for different purposes. They believe that education can upgrade their skills and prepare them to adapt to this changing world. However, we also find that adult education is more an individual practice rather than a systematic and organizational one. In fact, informal education is an inevitable and elementary part of people's development in adulthood. In China, formal adult education, especially many continuing degree education or distance education can be conducted among radio and TV universities. Formal adult education is often practiced by pursuing a degree. Generally, people's practice in adult education takes the form of non-formal education, which is usually unsystematic and ineffective. People have a general recognition that more education can bring more benefits to them. However, they do not have a clear clue about what they might want to learn.

Based on the study, all participants continue to learn new skills and knowledge, such as how to use smart phones or how to bake. As the old and popular saying goes: *huo dao lao, xue daolao*, which means "you are never too old to learn," all my participants stressed the importance and necessity of learning new things in adulthood. Generally, this "never too old to learn" is deeply embedded in everybody's mind. However, I also find out that participants with different levels of previous education, expressed their interests in the similar programs of adult education.

For example, all of the participants looked forward to learning something related to their daily life, such as cooking, how to use electronic tools, and how to build better interpersonal relations. Theoretically, adult education is a widely acknowledged idea, but practically, many people, especially women in rural areas, are hindered to put this idea into practice.

Responses and interview transcriptions related to this finding are as follows.

Continuing education or adult education is not popular among my participants. Participants were not familiar with community schools or community training programs. People's awareness of adult education is not as high as compulsory education or formal school education. As Chart 3 shows, compulsory education and normal high school has accounted for 62.14% of the whole population (China Education Newspaper, 2018, Jan. 24). Though my research focuses on adult education, and some of the interview questions are specifically designed to collect information about adult education, participants tended to automatically shift to discussing formal school education and education for children, regardless of the purpose of my research to explore how adult education has been practiced in China.

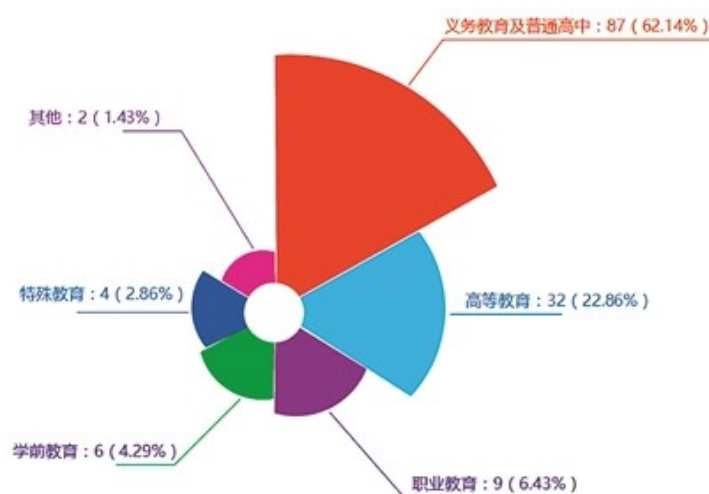


Figure 4 The distribution chart of education in different field 2018



[http://www.jyb.cn/zgjyb/201801/t20180124\\_942883.html](http://www.jyb.cn/zgjyb/201801/t20180124_942883.html)

*[English translation of Figure 4: compulsory education and general high school: 62.14%; higher education 22.86%; vocational education 6.43%; pre-school education, 4.29%; special education 2.86%; others 1.43%]*

For example, when asked what kind of programs do they expect to receive in the community's schools (i.e., senior activities/resident activity center), Fangfang answered that because children do not learn how to do housework or life skills, it is good to provide children with life skills. Whenever people talk about education, they will normally target children. The awareness of adult education and continuing education needs to be enhanced in rural areas, and it stays in the theoretical and governmental stage. It is imperative that we put more efforts to promote adult education and raise people's awareness of life-long learning.

Community colleges and schools are not as popular in the Eastern coastal areas such as Shanghai. Online statistics show that at Wuxi community college, in Jiangsu Province, located in Eastern China, 52 short-term courses were held, to which 7868 people participated in 2012; 21 degree-training programs were held and 1669 people attended. Even at Wu Chang community college, in Wuhan Province, located in central China, programs such as training migrant workers, the handicapped, the unemployed, and the elderly, have reached great achievement. They also conducted community lectures in July 2012, which covered more than 140 communities within 14 neighborhoods, with thousands of participants (Yi, 2016). By comparison, the implementation of adult education policies in rural areas are not as profound as the coastal areas. Educational policies may take the factor of regional differences into consideration.

Though activity centers for seniors are widely established, the participants are not familiar with community training programs. In fact, data collected from the interviews

demonstrates that almost every neighborhood has its own residents' center. Since activity centers or community colleges are established, it is easier to conduct adult education, especially through distance education.

**Health.** When asked about how health can affect education, all the participants believe that health is the basis of everything. Fangfang believes that health is the root of the family happiness while diseases will bring sufferings to the family. By sufferings, she refers to the financial burden as well as mental stress since in the rural areas, as medical bills may account for a large proportion of their income. In particular, Jingxia and Xiaohua express their understanding of physical and mental health. Jingxia believes that a good physical and mental health can help people to devote time to education. Xiohua also states that education may get affected if people have to pay more attention to take care of their health. She also stresses that people with mental problems may have lower capability than those who are healthier. Based on the literature review, health problems can hinder women's participation in adult education, by affecting them physically and mentally.

**Traditional mindset.** Traditional attitude to gender differences have changed and it may not play such an important role in education equality, in contrast to the research results discussed in the literature review prior to the data collection period.

In terms of the second question, which is to comment on the old Chinese saying, "married daughter, spilt water," all the participants disagree with it somehow and think it outdated or inappropriate, though they do not deny that fact that this phenomenon still exists in some remote and less-developed areas. They think they still maintain a close relationship with their parents regardless of whether they got married or not. Responses to this question can demonstrate a significant change in people's attitude toward gender difference. The third

question in the interview is also designed to detect people's attitude toward gender. Surprisingly, Yanzi, Jingxia, and Xiaohua think that they will get the opportunity to do community training program since their schedules are more flexible. Fangfang says that this training opportunity can be available to whoever is best suited for it.

Their responses are completely different from what the researcher expected; that is, participants did not give responses that suggested they believed in gender differences in education. However, gender equality differs according to which areas you live in China. It is widely acknowledged that social status and decision-making power for women in Chongqing is normally higher than women in other areas in China. According to the research by Chongqing Women's Union, based on their survey from nine aspects including health, education, economy, social insurance, politics, marriage, lifestyle, legal responsibilities and rights and awareness of laws, attitude toward gender, women's social status in Chongqing is indeed higher than the national average level (Chongqing Daily, 2012). My research adds more argument to the previous survey. Since participants were selected in rural areas in Qianjiang, which was only eliminated from the list of China's most poor counties supported by the government in 2017, they can represent the popular attitude toward gender equality in less-developed areas in China (People's Daily, 2017). Based on the information about the traditional mindset, we may conclude that gender equality in China has been largely achieved and the traditional mindset may play a minor role in blocking women's participation in adult education.

**Economic problems.** In terms of how incomes influence education, all the participants believe that income can absolutely and greatly influence education. They argue that low income still largely influences people's education by limiting their opportunities and access to educational resources, and by limiting their energy, time, and attention to participate in education.

However, no remarks are given to illustrate how gender difference can affect people's participation in education because of family income. That is to say, gender does not add inequality in people's education. Economic hardship can limit people's participation in education as a whole, rather than particularly limiting women's education. Unlike what has been discussed in the literature review section, financial problems affect the general quality and access of adult education in rural areas, without specifically affecting participation in adult education on a gender-related basis. All participants pay more attention to the imbalance of educational resources between the first-level cities and less-developed areas, and to the quality of education.

**Technology innovation and adult education.** All the participants think that technology innovation has benefited education, by upgrading the way of delivering knowledge and by providing more convenience and access to education. Technology development can also improve the quality and efficiency of education. Another thing we find is that smartphones and internet has been generally accessible on a daily basis. This development can provide people with more opportunities to distance education and adult education.

In the literature review, Ding and Wu (2009) named the five bases on which distance education can be developed, which are the social and historic motive power (social and historic basis), science and technology basis, theoretical basis, political decision basis, and educational discipline basis (p.9). The data contributed by the participants show that currently, social and historic basis, and science and technology basis have been largely achieved. Distance education now has its realistic platform and feasible way of transmission, without costing extra to the potential participants of adult education. Distance education has started to be utilized by many people and it becomes supplementary and assistance to general education. For those who have not used online formal education, they somehow experienced informal online education, by

searching answers to questions that may confuse them in their study. Based on the concept that adult education consists of formal, non-formal and informal education, distance education has already become an integral part of adult education.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, four participants represent a small sample size. The statistics and literature review presented in Chapter 1 derive from rural areas in Qianjiang, Chongqing, in Western China and may represent better the general regional characteristics. The selected participants in this study may not be representative since they are the friends and acquaintances of the researcher. Therefore, they may not represent the general attitude toward adult education in rural areas or in China as a whole. There are, undoubtedly, more forms of adult education in rural areas in China, especially in the Eastern coastal areas. Due to the time limitations of the present research, many programs of adult education in other rural areas are not discussed in this study. The findings of this research cannot be generally applied to all the rural areas in China.

Secondly, the main obstacles that are examined in this study are based on the result of other research studies found in the available literature and chosen by the researcher based on her understanding of the context. The actual variables within adult education can be much more complicated and abstract. Adult education, continuing education, and distance education are often inter-connected. The simple exploration of adult education may not cover all the aspects.

Finally, though the questionnaires and interview questions are designed to detect people's genuine attitude toward adult education, they are sometimes understood by the participants as general education or education for kids. Since adult education are not popularly acknowledged as compulsory education, the questions should have been designed more specifically and explicitly.

## **Recommendations**

The results of this exploratory study point to the importance of further examination of women's participation in adult education in rural areas of China. Regional and cultural variables on adult education may vary according to people's different experience and background. Comparison between participants in the eastern and western rural areas in China may give more detailed and complete insight into adult education. Future studies should include people from a wider range of backgrounds, such as from different age groups and different professional fields.

Larger samples are also necessary for future research in adult education to look at the different factors that may hinder women's participation. This may also result in a more general conclusion, that may be insightful to policy makers, adult educational institutions, and adult education practitioners. The duration of future research can be lengthened to examine the change of people's understanding and practice in adult education. It can also aid understanding in how certain obstacles to adult education have been removed and what new obstacles continue to emerge. Another direction for future research is to identify how some factors can benefit and promote the programming and delivery of adult education.

In sum, women's participation in adult education in China mainly occurs in the form of informal education in the workplace and in rural areas, and in the form of formal education at places such as universities and community schools. The present study contributes to our understanding of adult education and education as a whole. Specifically, I have tried to assess how political efforts, traditional mindset, economic hardship, and health can affect women's participation in adult education in the rural areas in China. Surprisingly, unlike what I mentioned in the literature review, the educational opportunities for women in rural areas in Qianjiang do not seem to be limited by the traditional understanding of gender roles. Though projects of adult

education are taking place in rural areas in China, such as literacy education and farming technologies training, systematic research in theory and teaching materials is still needed. Speaking in general, women's participation in adult education is increasing.

Despite the different purposes of adult education, the purpose of developing economy is gradually becoming the most important and only goal of adult education. Adult education, as an essential part of our life-long learning, should be developed more than it is now. To improve increased participation in adult education for women in rural areas, it becomes important to explore the ways technology innovation can be applied. Since information technologies such as laptops and smart phones are becoming more and more popular in rural China, distance education seems a very feasible way to widen women's access to adult education. Arguably, greater efforts to develop quality adult education programs and disseminate these programs through distance education platforms can promote the general quality of education for all in China, including women in rural areas.

The factors of policies, traditional mindset, health, and economy can largely impact women's education in adulthood. To eliminate these obstacles, efforts should be made jointly by the government, academia, and individuals as well. Women should be guaranteed with sufficient access to adult education and be provided with quality education. The quality and outcome of women's education should be stressed rather than the equal access itself.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix: A**

#### **Open-ended questions to respond in writing, Questionnaire, and interview questions**

**Procedure 1. Questions participants need to respond in writing if possible (speaking response is the second option) before the questionnaire and interviews.**

- 1, what is the purpose of education for children?
- 2, is it necessary to continue education after adulthood? why?

**Procedure 2. General background information (Questionnaire)**

1, what's your education background?

Graduate   Undergraduate   High School   Middle School   Primary School   None of the above

2, how far is it from your home to the community center?

3, what is your most common way of transportation?

4, Has anyone in your family taken part in any training in your community school or village school?

5 how often do you get access to internet, through desktop, laptop, or smart phone?

**Procedure 3. Questions related to adult education (Interview)**

1, As a Chinese saying goes, “Huo dao lao, xue dao lao” which means you should not stop learning till you die. Do you think you are still learning some skills in your adulthood?

2, How do you think of “a married daughter-spilled water”?

3, If there is an opportunity for only one person in your family to learn new working and living skills for free offered by the government, do you think who will get this opportunity in your family?

4, do you think income can affect people's access to education?

5, what aspect of knowledge do you expect to obtain in the community training program?

6, How do you think health can affect your education after adulthood?

7, What do you think is the meaning of education?

8, what has become different in education, compared to that in your parents' generation?

9, how do you think technology innovations, such as computers and smartphones can affect people's life? How can they change our education?

## Appendix B Information and Consent Form



### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

**Study Title:**

Women's Participation in Adult Education in Rural Areas of China

**Researcher: Lihua Tang**

**Researcher's Contact Information:**

[REDACTED]

**Faculty Supervisor: Arpi Hamalian**

**Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:**

[REDACTED]

**Source of funding for the study:**

No.

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

#### A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to explore the conditions and obstacles of women's participation in adult education in rural areas in China.

#### B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to:

1. write one or two paragraphs about questions provided by the researcher (copy attached – about five minutes)
2. fill out an online questionnaire (copy attached – about five minutes)

3. and have an online interview (less than 30 minutes) through WeChat ( the Chinese equivalent to Skype/WhatsApp) , which will be audio recorded. You may choose your preferred time and location to participate as long as you can talk privately with the researcher.

After the interview, a transcript will be prepared and returned to you for editing. You can delete information, you can correct the understanding of the interview or parts of it and you can add information you deem important and had forgotten to mention during the interview. You will then return this edited transcript to me, the researcher of this research project. I will specify the date by which this edited transcript should be returned to me – two weeks after the receipt of the transcript. Up to that date you are free to withdraw from the research project and your data/information provided will be destroyed and not included in the analysis. After you return the edited transcript, analysis of data will start and therefore after that date the information will be merged for data analysis and it will not be possible to retrieve and delete.

The procedure will be conducted within 45 minutes.

### **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

You might face certain risks by participating in this research: If anyone overhears our interview, chances are you may lose your confidentiality. Of course, you are free not to answer questions that you will not be comfortable with in case the answer is heard by third parties beyond yourself and myself, the interviewer. Therefore, it is important that you choose a place and time when you can participate in the Wechat interview that will ensure your privacy and the confidentiality of the interview. The risk of these online interviews is minimized because Wechat software account is connected with each person's phone number. Nevertheless, there is always the potential of the account being hacked or censored. The questions we are going to consider together are attached. You can decide how safe you will feel in case the questions are hacked or the interview censored. The questions go in the sense of the government's efforts to make adult education accessible in rural areas.

There are no potential benefits for you personally. This exploratory study will give us some information about making access to rural adult education programs easier and more affordable to women.

### **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

We will gather the following information as part of this research: [written responses to questionnaires, interview audios, transcripts of the interview audio, and your personal information, as specified under B above]



We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research: myself the researcher and my thesis supervisor Prof. Arpi Hamalian. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be anonymous. That means that it will not be possible to make a link between you and the information you provide unless there is a third party listening on the interview on WeChat or having access to e-mail correspondence between us. Since the interview will take place on Wechat, we trust that you will make sure to find a time and place where the confidentiality of the interview will be ensured.

We will protect the information by storing all audios, questionnaires, including the transcripts and personal contact information securely in a password-protected and encrypted USB key, backed-up in a separate password-protected hard drive and then in a locked suitcase in my home. The information will also be in an encrypted file uploaded to the Concordia University server that only I can access as the researcher.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the date of the thesis hearing.

## **F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before the date when you return the transcript of the interview, which is two weeks after the receipt of your transcript.

There is no compensation for participating in the research.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

## **G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION**

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, [REDACTED]

## Appendix C Invitation Letter

Dear potential participant,

I am Lihua Tang, a graduate student at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, and I am in the final year of a Master's Program in Educational Studies. I am currently working on my research project. This research is approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC) at Concordia University.

My research for my MA thesis will investigate what factors can hinder or facilitate women's participation in adult education in rural areas in China. I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

I am looking for female participants, aged 18 years or older, who lives in rural areas in Qianjiang, Chongqing, China. If you accept to participate in this research project, you must be willing to answer in writing the questions provided by the researcher and fill in a questionnaire. You will then participate in a follow up interview on WeChat (less than 30 minutes) at a time and place of your convenience to ensure the confidentiality of the interview.

Your participation is voluntary. You are quite free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel coerced. Your privacy and safety will be respected at all times and all your information will be kept confidential.

In order to protect your confidentiality, all your recorded audios, written responses, questionnaires, and edited transcripts will be secured in a separate password-protected and encrypted USB key, locked in a suitcase, which I will be the only one who can access. All the electronic data will be backed up in a password-protected hard drive. We will use pseudonyms to replace your name and your identity will not be known by anyone except myself, the researcher and my thesis supervisor. In case you are referred to us by a mutual friend, that friend will know that you may be selected as a participant but will not know for sure whether you were indeed included in the sample of volunteer participants.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me so we can further discuss your participation. I look forward to your contribution to this study.

Thank you,

Lihua Tang  
Graduate student in educational studies  
Concordia University  
[REDACTED]