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GENDER INEQUALITY IN CHINESE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The constitutional provisions of the People's Republic of China enshrines the principle of equality among women and men in all spheres of life. However, while there have been some significant improvements for Chinese women in many areas since 1949, their status remains far short of the egalitarian ideal. This article examines one important aspect of the public sphere--the status of females in education from 1949 to present--and reveals the limitations and inequalities experienced by females in the Chinese educational systems. This analysis of the determinants of gender inequality in Chinese education emphasizes the influences of the traditional Chinese culture, attitudes engendered by the Chinese Communist Party, institutional discrimination, and the relative aspirations of women versus men.

INTRODUCTION

"Women hold up half sky," a popular slogan heard in communist China, reflects the high expectations that Mao Zedong enunciated for women in the transformation of Chinese society. Mao asserted that "When women all over the country rise up, that will be the day of victory for the Chinese revolution".

Nearly fifty years have passed since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Do women really "hold up half sky" and enjoy rights and status equal to those of men in all public spheres in Chinese society? The answer is a resounding no! One method that can evaluate why Chinese women have not achieved the aspirations that Mao Zedong held for them is to analyze the gender variable in education. While the attainment of equal educational opportunities is not a sufficient condition for women to achieve equality in the public sphere, equality of educational opportunity is a necessary condition for equality of public participation. This paper examines continuing gender disparities in education in People's Republic of China and the reasons for them.

Current Situation

The data in the following tables provide an overview of the participation of Chinese women in the educational systems. Table 1 shows the proportion of males and females in four national population censuses. Table 2 illustrates the percentage of female students enrollment in school from 1949 to 1994 at all three levels. Table 3 displays proportions of illiteracy and semi-illiteracy in both males and females aged 12 or above (1982 and 1987) and aged 15 or above (1990) respectively.

From these data, we discover, first, that the proportions of men to women in the general population have remained almost stable from 1953 to 1990, with a larger number of males, ranging from 3.2 percent to 2.6 percent. Compared with these proportions, there have been consistently fewer females than males at all level of education in this same period, especially at tertiary level. Moreover, the cumulative effect of the continuing gender imbalance at the primary level is correlated with the literacy statistics for people educated since 1949. Table 3 shows that there are 745,927,105 people aged 12 or above in 1982 with 51.23 percent of males and 48.77 percent of females. Among the females, 45.23 percent are illiterate or semi-literate. In marked contrast, only 19.15 percent of males are illiterate or semi-literate. Although the 1990 Population Census shows that the illiterate and semi-literate of the general population aged 15 or above are reduced to 22 percent, the percentage of females remains much higher than that of males with 32 percent and 13 percent respectively. Another interpretation of these data suggests that 70 percent of the illiterate population across the country are women (*Women of China*, 1/1996). In the remote areas and the countryside, the percentage of illiterate and semi-literate females is higher yet.

Secondly, female consistently constituted a declining proportion of the student population from elementary level to tertiary level. In 1951, females comprised 28 percent of primary school students, 25.6 percent of secondary school students and 22.5 percent of tertiary students. In 1994, comparative date were 47.1, 44.3, and 34.5 percent, respectively, reflecting a trend seen consistently in each year since 1949.

TABLE 1
Percentage of Males and Females in Four National Censuses

		Male	Female
Year	Total	%	%
1953	567,446,758	51.45	48.55
1964	694,581,759	51.33	48.67
1982	1,003,913,927	51.32	48.68
1990	1,130,510,243	51.60	48.40

Source: China Population Yearbook 1985, *China Population Yearbook 1990*, and *China Statistical Yearbook 1993*.

Thirdly, female participation, while not reaching that of their male counterparts, has increased over the period as a whole. Thus, while only 28.0 percent of primary school students were female in 1951, the proportion increased to 47.1 percent in 1994; for secondary school students from 25.6 percent to 44.3 percent, and for tertiary students from 22.5 percent to 34.5 percent.

Although the participation of females as students has increased greatly since 1949, they have not obtained equal educational opportunity, especially in admissions to universities and colleges, as Zhou Qingjun, President of China National Institute for Educational Research, admitted at the Workshop on Women's Higher Education in China of the Fourth Conference on Women in 1995 (Chen, 1996). Female students are clustered in the lower status, especially "normal" colleges or universities, with less representation at "key-point" universities--institutes that have priority in selecting students nationally (Ju, 1993). For instance, females comprised only 16.5 percent of students at Qinghua University in 1982, the nation's most prestigious technological university. The white paper "The Situation of Chinese Women," an official document published for the Fourth World

TABLE 2
Gender Inequality in Chinese Education

Female percentage of Total Students 1949-1994

Year	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
1949	---	---	19.8
1950	---	26.5	21.2
1951	28.0	25.6	22.5
1952	32.9	23.5	23.4
1953	34.5	24.2	24.3
1954	33.3	25.0	26.3
1955	33.4	26.9	25.9
1956	35.2	29.3	24.6
1957	34.5	30.8	23.3
1958	38.5	31.3	23.3
1959	39.1	31.2	22.6
1960	39.1	31.2	24.5
1961	27.5	32.2	24.7
1962	34.8	34.1	25.3
1963	---	34.0	25.8
1964	35.0	34.1	25.7
1965	---	32.2	26.9
	no data available		
1973	40.7	33.0	30.8
1974	43.7	38.1	33.8
1975	45.2	39.3	32.6
1976	45.5	40.4	33.0
1977	45.2	41.7	29.0
1978	44.9	41.5	24.1
1979	44.9	40.8	23.4
1980	44.6	39.6	23.4
1981	44.0	39.0	24.2
1982	43.7	39.2	26.2
1983	43.7	39.5	26.9
1984	43.8	40.0	28.7
1985	44.8	40.2	30.0
1986	45.1	40.7	25.5
1987	45.4	40.8	33.0
1988	45.6	41.0	33.3
1989	45.8	41.4	33.7
1990	46.2	41.8	33.7
1991	DATA NOT AVAILABLE???		
1992	46.6	43.1	33.7
1993	46.8	43.7	33.6
1994	47.1	44.3	34.5

Sources: *Chinese Educational Yearbook* 1949-1981; *Chinese Statistical Yearbook*, 1982-1989; *Chinese Yearbook*, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995.

Conference on Women, acknowledged that women accounted for 27 percent of engineering college students (*Women of China*, 11/1994). Ye Lan, Vice-President of East China Normal University, stated that the problems in women's higher education were manifest in the imbalance in enrollment between the humanities and science. There are more women students in higher education in the humanities and related disciplines than in science and engineering (Ju, 1993; Chen, 1996). In 1990 Croll found that female students accounted 24.7 percent in science and technology compared to 53 percent in medicine 42 percent in teacher training and 53 percent in foreign languages (Croll, 1995).

These statistics partially reveal gender variables in educational participation. Females in the countryside enroll in educational institutions at a much lower rate than rural males and than women in the cities. According to the tabulations of China 1% Population Sample Survey in 1987, females with college degrees were more likely to be urban (30.81 percent); less likely to be from towns (19.93 percent); and least likely to be rural (11.02 percent). This trend is apparent for primary and secondary school graduates. Among urban women 47.32 percent held high school diplomas while these percentages slipped to 40.32 in towns and 28.34 in the countryside. Females with junior high school diplomas declined from 44.42 percent in cities, 42.04 percent in towns, to 35.31 percent in the countryside. The results of this statistics reflected the current situation of enrollment of all schools.

In comparison with developed and other developing countries, China lags behind in the provision of secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for females (Table 4). European and Northern American females had accounted for more than 50 percent of students at secondary level by 1980, but in China, the percentage was 39.6 percent. Although the percentage of female enrollment reached 43.7 percent in 1993, it is only little higher than those of Arab countries (43 percent) and slightly lower than African countries (44 percent). In higher education, by 1985 female students of European and Northern American countries comprised at least 50 percent (UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1995), and in the same year China was only 30 percent. In 1993, females comprised 33.6 percent of higher education students in China, which is slightly higher than African countries (32 percent) and a little lower than Arab countries (35 percent). Another survey of the proportion of higher education participation showed

TABLE 3
Percentage of Illiteracy and Semi-literacy between Males
and Females
(in 1,000)

	Population		I & S.L. %	Male %	Female %
		Above 12			
(1982)	745,920	237,720	31.87%	19.15	45.23
(1987)		222,270	26.77%	15.79	38.05
		above 15			
(1990)	817,500	186,090	22.21%	12.98	31.93

Source: 1982 *Population Census of China*, p. 32-33.
1987 *Tabulation 1% Population Sample Survey*.
1993 *Population Statistics Yearbook*.

TABLE 4
Growth in Percentage of Females in Total Enrollments, 1965-93

	Primary Education			Secondary Education			Higher Education		
	65	80	93	65	80	93	65	80	93
<i>Developed countries</i>	49	49	49	50	51	50	38	47	52
<i>Developing countries</i>	41	43	46	32	39	43	27	34	38
<i>Africa</i>	40	42	45	35	38	44	26	32	32
<i>Arab states</i>	35	41	44	27	37	43	20	31	35
<i>Latin America</i>	49	49	48	48	51	52	33	42	49
<i>Europe</i>	49	49	49	51	52	50	39	46	51
<i>Northern America</i>	49	50	48	50	50	50	39	51	53
<i>China</i>		45	47	32	40	44	27	23	34

Source: UNESCO, *Statistical Yearbook*, 1982 1995.

that China was listed 121th out of a total of 130 countries in the world. Females accounted only one fourth of total college students (Chang, 1988, p. 105). Female participation in tertiary education lagged behind that of Taiwan, where the same culture but a different political system and economic situations exist. UNESCO (1990) showed that Taiwanese females comprised 46 percent of the tertiary student population while in mainland of China the percentage of female students was 33 percent.

Historical and Cultural Impediments to Female Access to Education

The reasons for gender inequality in a society where the government so vocally praises the role of females are various: geographic, historical, cultural, socio-economic, religious, and political. I would argue that for China, the central reason is related to traditional Chinese culture and society.

Few societies in history have prescribed for women a lower status or routinely treated them more brutally than Confucian China. Confucius is believed to have argued that while "Women indeed are human beings, ... they are of a lower state than men and can never attain to full equality with them." The *Book of Rites*, compiled in the second century AD, contained rules of correct conduct, and "to be a woman meant to submit."

Belief in the interaction of principles of yin (dark, earth, cold, negative, death, the north side of the mountain) and yang (light, heaven, warmth, positive, life, the south side of the mountain) formed the basis of an ancient Chinese cosmology which presented an essentially and misogynous vision of the universe. However benign the origin of the notion, the Confucianization of ancient Chinese cosmology assigned yin to female, yang to male and freed them in a rigid hierarchy of submission and dominance, passivity and activity, weakness and strength. This hierarchy fundamentally permeated dominant Chinese culture and religion for nearly two thousand years.

Classic Confucian texts submerged women's personalities and lives under the weight of the Three Bonds of Obedience: to obey fathers when young, husbands when married, and adult sons when widowed. For centuries, treatises, memorized and recited, exhorted females to servility, passivity and self-effacement. Throughout their lives, women were only slightly more than chattel, routinely bought and sold in marriage.

concubinage or outright slavery.

While women's status has greatly improved since the founding of People's Republic of China, especially in urban areas, their educational careers and opportunities remain limited and fail to approach the espoused egalitarian ideal. Women are perceived to be inferior to men and are treated accordingly (Croll, 1983 and 1995; Honig, 1988; Li, 1988; Stacey, 1983; Wolf, 1985). The inhumane practice of purchasing women has not ceased (*World Journal*, June 20, 1991. p. 19) and contemporary accounts suggest that "more and more women ... are being bought and sold as wives, ... primarily in rural areas." (*New York Times*, July 28, 1993. p. A6) *The World Journal* reported that more than 54,000 people were arrested for buying and selling women, and several tens of thousands of women were rescued in 1990 (*World Journal*, March 8, 1995. p. A17). According to Su (1988), in rural Honan province, women dare not to go out even during the day for fear of being kidnapped and sold. In this area, the exchange of daughters as wives still prevails. When women escaped and asked for help, local officials ignored their pleas, thinking it natural and regarding their dilemma as domestic affair (Su, 1988. p. 52-66). The continued existence of female infanticide reflects the strong influence of traditional Chinese culture (Croll, 1995). It is estimated that about 70,000 newly-born female children were missing every year (*World Journal*, April 11, 1993), and abandoned female babies were available for the foreigners to adopt (*New York Times Magazine*. April 1993). The Chinese government has felt compelled to intervene, and the People's Congress of China enacted a law regarding the Severe Punishment of Criminals Who Abduct and Traffic in or Kidnap Women or Children in 1991 (*Women of China*. 12/1994). Jiang Zemin, President of People's Republic of China, asserted that "Respecting women and protecting women is an important sign of social progress" (*Woman of China*. 5/1995). However, critics suggest that "since the law has no mechanism for enforcement, it will be effective mainly as a tool for educating women, particularly in the rural areas (*New York Times*, July 28, 1993. p. A6).

The cultural subordination of women encourages many parents to place a lower emphasis on their education "since sooner or later they will marry into other families" (*Women of China*. 2/1989). Data for the 1991-1992 school year show that the enrollment rate of school-age children in Qinghai

province was 84.3 percent, but for the girls was 76.8 percent (*Women of China*. 7/1994). In 1993, girls comprised more than two-thirds of the 2.6 million school-age children who never attended school in poorer areas. Thirty-two percent of girls aged 10-14 in Gansu province did not attend school. The rates for Qinghai province and Ningxia autonomous region were 43.6 percent and 27.4 percent respectively (*Women of China*. 7/1994). In a remote county in Szechuan Province, only 20.9 percent of girls were enrolled in schools in 1994 (*China Education Yearbook* 1995. p. 910). Moreover, girls accounted 70 percent of the more than 10 million students between the ages of 6 and 14 who dropped out of schools in 1996 (*China Daily*, April 23, 1997; *Women of China*, 2/1989 and 10/1994). The low esteem for the education of girls is reflected in the views of some parents who have publicly stated that they expected their daughters only need to learn how to read the word "bathrooms" to assist them with their work experience in cities (*China Education Yearbook* 1995. p. 911).

As a result of an enduring popular belief that girls are less capable than boys, female access to education remains limited (Honig 1988. p. 5). According to Wolf (1985), the feudal idea of regarding men as superior to women has resurfaced. For instance, in some places, open discrimination has imposed restrictions on the involvement of women in study and work, and on the selection and promotion of women cadres (p. 262). These deep-rooted in-fluence of traditional feudal ideas reduce females' opportunity in achieving parity with men.

Attitude of the Chinese Communist Party

The attitude of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) toward the liberation of women is a decisive factor of female equality in education. Mao proclaimed that "When women all over the country rise up, that will be the day of victory for the Chinese revolution" (DeFrancis 1975. p. 135). As early as in 1920s, the CCP advocated the liberation of women and organized women to participate in the Chinese revolution. However, their primary purpose was to use women's support to win the national power rather than to effect real emancipation of women.

During the Jiangxi Soviet period (1927-1935), women's support was crucial to the survival for the CCP. From 1937 to 1945, since the communist areas were subjected to severe economic blockade, women's

involvement in the production was vital to provide minimum food and clothes. After the War against Japan, the support of women helped the CCP win the Civil War. In the 1950s, with the development of economy and industry, women's participation in industry solved the human resource shortage.

Yet the CCP advocacy of women emancipation was more pragmatic, helping the CCP to win national governance. Communism is neither equal to feminism nor to democracy. Women emancipation is secondary, a by-product of socialist revolution. When Ding Ling, one of the female intellectuals who went to Yanan in 1940s, published "Thoughts on March 8", which condemned the contradictory demands from the CCP (participation of revolution and domestic role on women), she was criticized severely and publicly. According to Stacey, the Chinese Communists never intended to wage a feminist revolution; nor did they possess a theory of family transformation adequate to the task (Stacey, 1983. p. 194).

TABLE 5
Number of Women in the Political Bureau of the CCP

Year	Congress	No. Female	Total	Percentage
1956	8	0	-	0
1969	9	2	19	.8
1975	10	1	21	.5
1977	11	0	26	0
1982	12	0	25	0
1987	13	0	14	0
1992	14	0	20	0

Source: China Handbook and Yearbook of People's Republic of China.

The historical foundation of the Chinese revolution was geographically in the rural areas where feudal thoughts had the strongest influences. A majority of communist cadres came from peasants' families, and their educational level was usually low. Although they may think that women should have some equal rights, in their hearts women were always

subordinate to men. We can demonstrate this subordination by reviewing female participation in the Central Committee and political bureau of the CCP.

In the history of the CCP, only two women were in the Political Bureau, the most important organ of the CCP. Both women were in a particular situation: Mao's wife and the wife of Lin Biao, Vice Party Chairman at that time. After the deaths of Mao and Lin, these two women were automatically expelled from the Political Bureau. In the Central Committee, the decision-making institute subordinate to the Political Bureau,

Year	Congress	No. Female	Total	Percentage
1956	8	4	-	2
1969	9	13	170	8
1975	10	20	196	10
1977	11	14	223	6
1982	12	11	210	5
1987	13	16	175	9
1992	14	11	189	6

cc: a Handbook and Yearbook of People's Republic of China.

he percentage of females never exceeded 10 although they comprised 30 percent of cadres in party and government and slightly less than 50 percent of the population. Actually, "the proportion of women in the most powerful positions has declined. Top party and government posts are not only overwhelmingly male but also becoming more so" (*New York Times*, July 28, 1993. p. A6).

At the local levels, women are also under-represented in leadership. A survey in Jiangsu province showed that because of their low educational level women held a very few positions, only 10 percent, in local government, party and mass organizations, and in administrative positions

of enterprises (Chang 1988. p. 97). A 1979 survey of the All-China Women Federation demonstrated that female leaders comprised 5 percent at the county level; 5 percent at city and province levels; and 4 percent at national level. It was reported that in 1990 that women made up approximately 7 percent of the cadres (*Xinhau News*, June 13, 1992). Thus, according to Croll, "in political institutions and organizations, women have most obviously not entered into formal positions of decision-making in proportion to their representation either in production or in population as a whole" (Croll, 1995). "The proportion of women participating in politics does not adapt to the population of women and the number of women cadres at various leading posts is small" (*Women of China*. 7/1992) The attitude of the CCP toward the emancipation of women hindered the access of females to education.

Institutional Discrimination

The influence of traditional feudal ideas is so strong that it goes to every corner of Chinese society. In education, this influence is reflected in different school admission criteria and lower parents' and teachers' expectation of girls, expectations that are reinforced by differential recruitment practices and standards of work.

Overt institutional discrimination occurs in the admission of females both secondary and tertiary school. "Despite uniform entrance examination and rules instituting equality of opportunity, there have been frequent reports of higher education institutes discriminating against women students by demanding higher scores in the entrance examination in order to limit their numbers" (Croll, 1995. p. 134). The female quota for admission to Shanghai technical schools in 1984 was only 28.5 percent of the total enrollment (*Youth Newspaper*, Sept 14, 1984). "Some schools did put up unreasonable gender-differentiating demands, and the schools admitted lower-scoring men rather than higher-scoring women" (Ju, 1993). Thus, while Shenyang technical school requires males to score 173 points for admission, females had to achieve 317 points.

Discriminatory admission policies are justified on two grounds. The first is that examination marks, particularly for entrance, are not accurate indicators of future performance. Many people, including school administrators contend that, while girls mature faster intellectually than

boys, they begin to fall behind at the later stage of junior high or in senior high school. Similar reasoning appeared in the explanation given by key-point middle schools in Guangzhou for their raising admission score for ten points: "After entering middle school the intelligence of girls does not develop as well as that of boys" (Pepper 1984, p. 114). For key-point schools, the most important task is to send more graduates to college. They think that girls have less chances to achieve high marks in examination as they are not as intelligent as boys. Thus preference is given to boys. At the tertiary level, some educators argue, girls might do well initially but tend to fade in the third or fourth year compared with their male fellow-students. In college, they become inflexible in studying and are unable to broaden their view and vision. At best, they will get high marks, but they have little hands-on capability (Jiang, 1992 and Su, 1989). That is why female postgraduate students accounted for 26 percent of the total and women doctoral students accounted only 11 percent of the total (*Women of China*, 6/1995).

The notion that females are less capable is entrenched in the attitudes of teachers. If girls fail in their tests, teachers think it natural, whereas, if boys fail in their examinations, teachers believe that boys can do better and try to push boys work harder. These expectations of teachers cause different results for girls and boys (Su, 1989). Assumption about intellectual inferiority of women are widely held in academic circle and are based on argument of biological determinism that was have acceptable a century ago but which is unacceptable and without foundation today (Pepper, 1984, p. 113).

The second justification for gender discrimination is reflected in the job placement for female college graduates (Croll, 1995; Jiang, 1992; Su, 1989; Wang, 1992; Xi, 1995; Xu, 1992 and Zhou, 1996). With economic reforms since 1979, female college graduates face greater challenges in finding jobs. A comprehensive survey by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, showed that of the twelve graduates for which the China Law and Government University had no assignments, all were women. Among the graduates of the Chinese People's University rejected by employers, 80 percent were women (*Chinese Education*, Summer 1989). A preliminary count in Shanghai showed that employers rejected the files of 245 female college and university graduates allocated to them, representing 51.2

percent of the total female graduates (Su, 1989). They accepted male students with poor scholastic performance over female students who had distinguished themselves academically. Some employing organizations established informal quota by requiring females to have higher marks in entrance examination (*Women of China*, 7/1992). A 1987 study by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions revealed that 77 businesses required an average recruitment score of 115 for men and 127 for women, and the relative score for banks were 154 and 167 (*Labor Science in China*, 5/1988). Some enterprises publicly claimed that they could take as many men as given but they would take no women (Jiang, 1992). They explicitly stipulated "when hiring that they will only engage males and not females, and that they pass over or avoid interviewing females even when the hiring auditions are a mere formality" (Xi, 1995). In his analysis of the 100 hiring ads in Beijing Daily from January 11th to March 23rd, 1993, Tan (1995) reconfirmed the continued existence of gender-bias division of vocations in China. For high and mid-level executives, sixteen advertisements recruited men only, while two advertisements sought women only. For high and mid-level technicians, nine required men only, while one wanted woman. "Although some ads do not specify gender conditions, by itself the stipulation that the subject must be able to go on frequent business trips in China is enough to shut the door on many women." (Tan, 1995)

The belief that males are superior to females intellectually is one of the important reasons for this skewing of high education and employment in favour of men. A mother of four said: "Of course it is more important to send boy to college. Men can do big things and women can't" (Wolf, 1985, p. 126). A survey in six provinces showed that 8.6 percent of girls never attended school because their parents did not send them, while only 3.0 percent of boys did not go to school for the same reason (San, 1995, p. 139). Secondly, since men hold most of the administrative positions they accept and promote this myth. Males cadres gave preferences to other males. Thirdly, women's roles as mothers and caregivers are considered in a negative way. The Women's Federation in Beijing confirmed that in theory employers are not permitted to discriminate on sex grounds but they invariably prefer men to women. Young women will get married and need maternity leave and child care facilities (Young, 1985, p. 218). Finally, women are considered less committed to and have less energy for their

work because of their domestic responsibilities (Surveys showed despite their participation of work, women spend one and half hours a day more on household chores than men). Because of their domestic responsibilities, women employees are considered to lack the mobility enjoyed by males. As a result, these employment issues further encourage discrimination in the admission of females to both secondary and tertiary education. Whatever the rationalization, the assumption of female inferiority has been built into the enrolment regulations although administrators were unwilling to divulge the details (Pepper, 1984. p. 114).

Moreover, the changing economic structure in China reinforces the institutional discrimination, which is reflected in the job placement of female college students. With the economic reform since 1979, China has reoriented toward a market economy. Administrators in the state-owned enterprises face a dilemma: more power and greater pressure for economic returns. With a labor surplus, potential employers are more selective, and they express an overall preference to males because the working time of five male worker is equal to that of six female workers (Zhou, 1996). Before the economic reforms, the government assigned female college graduates to state-owned enterprises which were "not much motivated by market economy, so that they tended to observe central guidelines against sex discrimination" (*New York Times*, July 28, 1992. p. A6). Since the shift to a market-oriented economy, the government has less control over state-owned enterprises, and administrators reject assignments of women because women do not contribute effectively to economic returns especially in light of their competition for skilled labour with individual and foreign-funded enterprises (Niu, 1996). A 1994 survey by the All-Federation of Trade Unions revealed that "women suffer despite their increasing role in the foreign-funded enterprises (Croll, 1995) and a considerable portion of female students in colleges and universities believe that they are "abandoned by society." Many parents are worried about their daughters' future (Su, 1989).

Low Aspiration of Females

Due to the influence of traditional Chinese culture and the attitude of the CCP, the aspirations of women are especially low. A survey indicated that among over nine hundred junior and senior high school students (urban,

suburban, and rural) over twice the percentage of males over females wanted to be scientific and technological personnel (16.7 percent to 7.9 percent), while more than twice as many females as males wanted to be teachers (14.6 percent to 7 percent). These preferences were consistent with the comparative proportions of males and females choosing mathematics and chemistry, versus language and history, as their favorite subjects (*Chinese Women's Newspaper*, March 14, 1988 and *Educational Research*, 8/1983). Influenced by the traditional culture, some college women believed that they were inferior to male students both in intelligence and in ability, and saw it as a "normal" phenomenon that male students had a better future than the females. A discussion on the future of college women conducted in a college dormitory found that unexpectedly, as many as 75 percent of the female students held that their future was to become a virtuous wife and a good mother. Their reasons were that "because I am a women" or "the social value of a female college student can hardly be realized." (Su, 1989).

Low female aspirations are a product of a number of related factors. According to Li (1988), the idea "I can not do it" is deeply rooted in females' hearts (p. 204). Low self-image and socially contrived low educational achievement greatly hindered the development of self-esteem among women (Chang, 1988, p. 74). One root of low self-image is the family. From childhood, females are constantly informed that not only are they different from boys but that they are inferior to boys (Croll, 1995, p. 163). In school, teachers and parents expect less of girls and to many parents, educating a girl is a misallocation of resources and effort (*Women of China*, 7/1994), but educating a boy enables him to bring face and fortune to the family (Wolf, 1985, p. 127). If a family in the countryside can only offer the schooling to one child, the son is always chosen (*China Daily*, April 23, 1997.) The inferiority of women is reinforced in the curriculum. Nan Ning (1989) analyzed the national unified Chinese language arts texts from grade one to grade six, and found that men were involved in 93 different jobs while women were only described to hold 20 jobs. In these books, the ratio of male characters and female characters was 82:11. Men are portrayed as professionals and creative persons including scientists, writers and artists. Women are stereotyped in subordinate positions. For example, Deng Ying Chao, who is the wife of prime minister Zhou Enlai and the vice-chairman of the People's Congress, appeared in a

text as a kind grandmother. In one instance, at the request of Premier Zhou, she goes to give a raincoat to a soldier standing sentry. Another time she appeared wearing her reading glasses, sitting serenely in a chair to mend her pajamas. Official and media stereotypes of women's role in the work force condition girls to lower their aspirations. A recent emphasis on women's "special characteristics" has reinforced traditional stereotypes of women in "caring" and "service" occupations, and hence influence girls' choice of school and tertiary subjects. These images have been reinforced by the media including women and youth magazines, which portray women as elementary school teachers rather than as high school or university teachers, as assistants rather than as leaders in a field, and as textile workers rather than as technically skilled personnel. Recently a study reported that in Shanghai the number of male teachers continued to decline in elementary schools, while the numbers of female keep rising (*World Journal*, Sep 5, 1991).

A majority of people believed that boys are smarter than girls; men more intelligent than women (Tables 7 and 8). Young women's educational and occupational aspirations are shaped by the attitude of their male peers in a society in which women still view marriage rather than advanced education and professional employment as the major avenue to upward social mobility. Men prefer to marry women of a little lower educational level. In a 1983 survey of ten higher educational institutions in Beijing, only 28 percent of male students desired their wives to have university education. A striking 50 percent admitted that they agreed with Confucian adage: "It is virtuous for a woman to be untalented" (*Beijing Review*, 36/1983. p. 26-27). Moreover "nearly all the males believe that it is a woman's bound duty to do household chores and raise kids and most of them indicate their preference for a woman, who is gentle, considerate, and good at housework, the type of woman who can be a virtuous wife and a good mother" (Su, 1989). Many males hold a view that the higher education the females have, the less capable they are to be good wives (Du, 1993; and Xiang, 1993). This preference for the less-educated wife may be borne out by a 1987 survey of ten Shanghai tertiary institutions that revealed one-third of female graduate students aged 25 to 35 did not yet have a potential spouse (*Beijing Review*, 35/1987. p. 28).

TABLE 7
Who is Smarter? Boys or Girls

Site	No of respondents	who said boys	who said girls
Fujian	18	13	5
Shandong	11	9	2
Beijing	16	16	0
Shaoxing	34	31	3
Total	79	69	10

Source: Wolf 1985. p. 132

TABLE 8:
Who is Smarter? Men or Women

Site	Number respondents	Who said men	Who said women
Fujina	22	21	1
Shandong	14	13	1
Jiangsu	32	28	4
Shaanxi	50	46	4
Beijing	10	10	0
Shaoxing	31	30	1
Total	159	148	11

Source: Wolf 1985. p. 132.

CONCLUSION

Do women really "hold up half sky"? My analysis of the data and literature suggest strongly that women do not enjoy equal rights to their counterparts in all public spheres in Chinese society and certainly not in education. This conclusion is confirmed by a recent article in *Women of China* that determined "although the Chinese Constitution clearly stipulates that men and women are equal, boys and girls in some areas obviously do not get an equal chance for an education. The lack of education has put these girls of northwest China at a disadvantaged right at the beginning of their lives. It is hard to imagine they can be winners in future competition" (7/1994).

Overall the participation of females in Chinese education systems has increased since 1949, yet significant disparities between women and men still exist. The greatest improvements for females are at the elementary level and low secondary level. Males as students and faculty continue to dominate institutions of higher learning. Compared to the developing countries, the status of Chinese women in education is below the average. The enrollment rate of girls aged 5-19 is 43 percent in the developing countries, while in China the enrollment rate is 38 percent. Moreover, China has the lowest enrollment rate of women aged 20-24 in the world (Zhu, 1991. p. 320). These statistics and my analysis provide evidence that gender inequality prevails in Chinese education.

Gender inequality in education is not a single variable, but one that is related to other forms of sex discrimination in Chinese society. The influence of traditional culture has been and is still an important factor, especially in rural areas where 80 percent of Chinese women reside. While gender inequality in education is mostly prevalent in rural China, it is not strictly a rural phenomenon. The attitude of the CCP toward women is another decisive factor because they can control government at all levels. Since the emancipation of Chinese women should be a product of Chinese socialist revolution, until the CCP delivers on its ideology and addresses the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions within the CCP and in the government, women are unlikely to achieve real equality as their male counterparts. Women in China continue to assume the "double burden" of fulfilling their revolutionary tasks and home chores.

Because of the influence of traditional Chinese culture and the attitude of the CCP, institutional discriminations are popular in education in terms

of admission to key-point schools at all levels and in the allocation of jobs, as well as promotion of social positions. With the economic reform since 1979, women become commodities in market economy (*New York Times*, July 28, 1993, p. A6). Female college students face more difficulty in finding their jobs because women are considered less productive in enterprises and the administrators of enterprises have to get more economic returns. In market economy, the government has less power to assign female college students to the state-owned enterprises and little power to the individual enterprises and foreign-funded enterprises. Thus, economy appears as a new factor relevant to gender inequality. With the Chinese economy moving toward market, the economic factor will exert more influence in education in terms of gender inequality. Under the combined influences of above reasons, female aspirations are usually low, which in return greatly prevented females from achieving equality in public spheres, as well as from climbing up the social ladder.

Gender imbalance in Chinese education has decreased since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, particularly at the lower levels and in some departments of higher learning (such as foreign languages in which females dominate). Although women have approached statistical balance with their male counterparts in some departments, 45 percent of elementary and secondary students are female, the imbalance at the tertiary levels still approach 1:2. Gender inequality in education is related to the status of women in family and in public policy. The social and political emancipation of women will be facilitated by the elimination of gender inequality in education.

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