

LUND UNIVERSITY • CENTRE FOR EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ASIAN STUDIES

# China's (gender) equality challenge

A study on the development of gender equality  
in China since the 1980s

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# Abstract

Starting in 1980, this study explores the development of gender equality in China through an intersectionality theory and perspective. In this thesis, three definitions of gender equality are used to examine China's gender equality development. The intersectional theory is applied as a way of highlighting the complexities of society and academics, for example the issue of categorization. This study also relies heavily on the data set "Quality of government" and its time-series data. The progress is demonstrated through charts and diagrams created by the author. This study concludes, through its analysis, that intersectionality may highlight reasons of (lack of) development that otherwise would be ignored.

**Key words:** China, gender equality, women, development, rights, representation, intersectionality

**Word count:** 14 192

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# 1 Introduction

China has developed in a fast speed over the last decades and is now the largest economy in the world when measured by GDP in terms of purchasing power (Business Sweden). China, with its history of brutality and harassment, has developed powerfully and is expected to become the next super power. While this is all positive news from a Chinese perspective, experts claim that the economic development is progressing so much faster than the rest of society, leaving China in an unbalance between economy and society. One of the more popular arguments is that China is not free nor a democracy, and that few, or no, countries have become fully developed without a democratic regime. Political regimes aside, what is the most significant development for the Chinese society? In this thesis, I explore the development of gender equality in China. The Chinese scholar Ke Qianting claims that “[w]omen’s liberation not only brings benefit for women themselves, but also acts as a driving force for social development” (Ke 2012). She goes on by stating:

“If women’s potential and capabilities can be viewed as important human resources for national development, there will be more men supporting the struggle for their rights” (Ke 2012). However, Ke Qianting’s statement only includes the argument that women’s rights are to be leveled with men. I find that speaking solely of rights is a common error in gender equality debates. I argue that gender equality is such a broad term that it ought to be given a more extensive definition. Therefore, I aim to examine gender equality in China in terms of three different dimensions of the term.

The year of 2015 was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nation’s Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. In honor of this anniversary, many publications on the development of gender equality and women’s empowerment

were published ([#Beijing20](#)). Among these are international researchers as well as the State Council of the People's Republic of China. The State Council claims that China is considering gender equality as a constitutional principle and state policy which creates a base for promoting progress in society (State Council People's Republic of China 2015).

Chinese women make up one fifth of the world's total female population. Gender equality and women's development in China not only give expression to China's own progress, but also constitute a historical contribution made to global equality, development and peace.

State Council People's Republic of China 2015

The thesis consists of secondary data displaying development through three dimensions, by variables of laws and regulations, government participation, and education. This is analyzed through China-related explanatory factors such as son performance and sex ratio and an intersectional perspective. How has the development been for 20% of the world's female population?

## 1.1 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to present the development of China's women and gender equality progress using basic graphs. Furthermore, an intersectional approach is applied in the analysis of this data with the aim of contributing to a more in-depth debate on gender equality and other equality challenges in China. Why is a gender balanced society the aim of a society? In a socialistic country, any form of equality ought to be one of the main aims. This is also true for a democratic society. Thus, no matter if one wishes China to continue with their socialism with Chinese characters or want them to democratize, equality still remains one of the key features of society.

### 1.1.1 Research questions

Hudson claims that one cannot simply look at one aspect of women's life in order to evaluate the condition of women (Hudson et al. 2012: 68). Thus, above mentioned aims lead to the following research questions:

- How can the development of gender equality in China since 1980 be described through the intersectionality theory?
- Based on the question above, what explanatory factors does the intersectionality theory detect for explaining this development?

The first question is explored through secondary data and literature on gender and societal development in China. The second is studied by literature on gender equality and intersectional analysis.

## 1.2 Relevance

The dynamics between economic development along with the current political and societal changes make China an interesting and relevant topic. Gender equality is an important part of both democracy and human rights, but instead of focusing on those broader phenomena, this thesis is concentrated on the more narrow society phenomenon gender equality. The reason for this is that regime type is not always the most significant indicator for a well-functioning society: A democracy in an unequal society is not ideal and it is definitely not free. Here one could argue that all democracies lack full gender equality. However, "democracy is rooted in the character of gender relations" (Hudson et al 2012: 4). Furthermore, equality and democracy are strongly linked as the purpose of modern democracies is to represent the entire population (Freidenvall 2011: 163). But why should China start focusing on this? In fact, China's societal development has in general been created in a different order from the normal development. That is why I argue that it is important to examine development of gender equality in China.

Furthermore, China's domestic and international behavior will affect the entire world- just look at the American influence in economic policies, culture and ideologies. This role might soon be China's, and if that is true then they really ought to start dealing with their domestic problems, unlike the current one.

Like mentioned above, this thesis does not subscribe to the notion that women's rights is the only important dimension for gender equality. To include other dimensions in the gender equality-definition is one of the contributions of this thesis.

Gender equality research has a tendency to focus on women and not men. This thesis has a clear focus on included both sexes. This is partly because the category of men provides a natural comparison for the category of women. Mostly, however, both sexes are included because I find it important to include both groups as gender equality is not relevant for women only. The tendency that only female scholars focus on gender equality, that only female workers focus on gender equality in the work place etc. is not beneficial for gender equality as it creates the illusion that gender equality first and foremost is a women's issue when in fact it is a societal issue. That is one of the most important contributions this thesis aims to make.

### 1.3 Limitations

This thesis focuses on presenting gender equality from 1980. The fact that China is the only country is a limitation in itself, as the evaluation can be deceiving without other countries to compare the development with. However, the purpose is to compare differences and progress within China and draw conclusions from societal developments. That leads to the second limitation which is lack of data which resulted in a starting point of 1980. It would have been interesting to



include years before China's opening up in order to compare the progress. Still, data from 1980 to around 2015 result in 35 years, which is enough to examine development.

## 1.4 Disposition

This thesis consists of six more parts. The following chapter includes the theories chosen for the thesis. The third part relays the chosen methods. The fourth part is where the development is presented by graphs and figures, which also includes interpretation and analysis of the results. Thereafter follows a conclusion dedicated to answering the research questions and summarizing the thesis. The thesis ends with a bibliography.

## 2 Literature review

This section is devoted to discussions and presentations of research on gender equality in China. The first section is a literature review. This is followed with a section on the perspective and research area this thesis applies to. Thereafter is a section on critical source treatment, which should be used as an important addition to the literature review section. Naturally, all research on the subject cannot be covered in one section. Therefore it is important to stress that the selection made here is marked by the views of the author. It is not possible to objectively present previous research in this field. Furthermore, theories and methods always contribute to the individual and uniqueness of every type of research, making it impossible to decide where the relevance of previous work for this thesis is fulfilled.

For above-mentioned reasons, I have chosen to include research from four prominent researchers, all representing different angles while still contributing to the field of gender equality development in China. My ambition is that by choosing a broad sample, the range of the research field will be easier to detect. That said I have still chosen to favor research that more than being cutting-edge have made contributions in the field and that are relatively well-known.

Isabel Attané is a Demographer and Sinologist at the French National Institute of Demographic Studies (Institut national d'études démographiques). Her research on demography of gender has resulted in for example the article "Being a Woman in China Today: A demography of gender". The conclusion of the publication is that gender-based discrimination is linked to demographic discrimination of gender by the micro level. This in turn is brought on by rapid economic and social transformations resulting in further discrimination against women, which constitutes a permanent minority group in modern day China. Attané's approach with demography and Sinology is very relevant for this research. She also applies

deep analysis on her findings, some of which I have chosen to include as quotes through out the thesis.

Another recent publication is Ke Qianting's policy research on gender development. Ke Qianting is an associate professor at the Department of Chinese at Sun Yat-sen University and her research often revolves around China's gender culture. The publication is entitled *Women and development in China since 1995 – policy research from gender justice perspective*. Ke chose 1995 as a starting point of his research as that year marks a significant step within policy gender in China. In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. The main focus of the publication is the way different policies have formed the development of gender equality while still factoring in the effect of structural norms that also slow down the development. In a sense, Ke is aiming to define the development of gender equality since this conference (2015).

Dr. Lanyan Chen is a professor at Nipissing University's School of Social Development and Family Studies in Canada. She has a clear China focus in her research and uses parameters of societal development to explore development on gender equality. Her book *Gender and Chinese development: towards an equitable society* was published in 2008 is within the field of feminist political economy. Thus, it is mostly focused on political and economical reforms in relation to gender equality. She focuses on the rural development, the industrial reforms, and the family planning policy that includes the much-debated one-child policy. She also presents data on the female representation in all levels of governance. The research aims to contribute not only to the field of China scholars but to scholars within development studies as well. This is in itself is proof that Chen does not differentiate gender equality development from societal development; consequently she becomes one of the most significant academic influences for this thesis. Chen herself explains her feminist political economy framework as follows:

This feminist political economy framework is meant to be interdisciplinary, encompassing the study of society as a totality which includes the political, economic, social, and cultural, as well as sexual and gender, all of which are mutually interdependent.

Chen 2008: 3

Chen has also written an article that explores the rural Chinese women: “Rural China’s Invisible Women: a Feminist Political Economy Approach to Food Security”. This article interestingly highlights the intersections of two major inequalities in China: rural population and the female population. Naturally, this is also related to social issues Chinese women face in urban and rural areas, such as having to struggle against the one-child policy. Her approach is thus more intersectional than previous mentioned publications. A more recent publication by Chen is a chapter in the Oxford Handbook on Transnational Feminist Movements. Her chapter “From Chinese State Capitalism to Women’s Activism: The Implications of Economic Reforms for Women and the Evolution of Feminist Organizing” focuses on the history and development of the women’s movement in China.

Lastly, Chen’s article on gender statistics from 2015 entitled “Gender Statistics and Local Governance in China: State Feminist versus Feminist Political Economy Approaches” is also part of the gender development research field. It explores the possibility of gender statistics as a solution for gender equality in terms of political power and resources. Chen makes the argument that China’s lack of existing gender statistics, as well as lack of interest in conducting gender statistics, is partly the reason for the gender inequalities within local policymaking in China (2016).

In an article from 2011, Donchao Min examines women’s political empowerment. The article “From Men-Women Equality to Gender Equality: The Zizag Road of Women’s Political Participation in China” includes the argument that gender equality in China is important in terms of the current globalized world in which China interacts (Min 2011). Thus, female empowerment within the political arena is one of the most important fields of empowerment for women. Min also applies an intersectional perspective in terms of gender and class (Min 2011: 19-20).

## 2.1 Perspective and research area

I find that it is more interesting to define ones perspective and research after the research questions and literature review are presented. That actually provides information and examples of the perspective and research of the author, instead of including this section very early. This thesis is conducted from the perspective that gender and other groups are socially constructed. That relates to a Post structural feminist standpoint. This standpoint, however, might more often be performed through discourse or textual analysis, due to its concrete focus on gender discourses. Here, the approach results in a brief presentation, an overview, followed by more in-depth analysis and discussion from a Post structural feminist standpoint.

Within feminist research, quantitative methods are often produced by liberal feminist scholars whereas the rest of the feminist perspectives tend to use qualitative methods (Freidenvall & Jansson 2011: 163). This division is so clear that if you see a feminist thesis using quantitative methods, then you would be fairly safe in your assumption that this it is written from a liberal feminist perspective. However, the factors causing a particular reality are essential for our understanding of the issue; one cannot solve a problem by merely increasing the number of underdogs in a particular field - the underdogs actually have to achieve empowerment. Therefore, counting women in a parliament is only interesting if the analysis that follows actually tempts to explain the phenomena. That is why a Post Structural perspective is important in order to discuss the underlying explanatory factors.

When applying a feminist perspective, it is custom to have the researcher's voice clearly visible. The fact that I am woman and a Westerner should be stressed because the background of the researcher is relevant for the entire research. It is important to remember these attributes when assessing the information, as no researcher is impartial. That is not something one can change, but being open about ones own background at least reduces the damage. Otherwise, sections on critical source treatment are not useful. I am aware that I make comparisons with other countries in general, and Sweden in particular, and therefore I attempt to highlight these comparisons whenever relevant, instead of trying to hide them throughout the research.

In relation to the literature in the review, my research provides a number of new angles in which to study gender development. Moreover, like mentioned above, it is often the unique combination of angles within research that result in a new study that drives the research field forward. Firstly, this research is examining gender development through three different spheres. Secondly, the starting point of the research is the 1980's. Contrary to for example Ke Qianting's publication on women and development within policy, I did not wish to start with the year of 1995. Granted, the year of 1995 marks a significant historic event for gender equality in China, however I thought it more interesting to be able to examine the differences before and after this stepping-stone. Naturally, even Ke makes this comparison, as it is impossible to ignore the effect the history before 1995 has had on the development thereafter.

As discussed above, the quantitative approach is mostly used within liberal feminist scholars, whereas this thesis, written from post-structural feminist perspective with an intersectionality method, uses figures and secondary data to produce an initial overview of the development for the different variables. It is also relevant as the method of simply displaying graphs should not decide the focus or perspective of the thesis.

## 2.2 Critical Source Treatment

As mentioned above, the standpoint of the researchers is important in order to understand the information given. Therefore, this thesis consists of established and well-known scholars.

These scholars derive from different fields, as it is important to achieve a diverse information base in a critically oriented and analytical thesis. For a thesis within area studies, it is not necessary to include scholars within that field as it is defined as an interdisciplinary research field. However, in-depth knowledge of the area, or

country, has to be the main theme. For the Chinese scores, I have tried to present different types of arguments as well. For example, the Chinese scholar Ke Qianting offers a more critical approach to Chinese policies whereas the State Council obviously presents a positive and optimistic view of its own work. The magazine by the national organization the All-China Women's Federation (中华全国妇女联合会), "Women of China" is also included as a source.

The All-China Women's Federation, while being the largest women's federation in the world, is still struggling between following the agenda approved by the Chinese government and their intolerance they have towards radical proposal, and their mission of improving gender equality in China.

Thus, it is important to remember that the government restricts the All-China Women's Federation, but it is still interesting to include national sources other than the State Council.

# 3 Theory

This chapter includes a general discussion on the usage of theories. That in turn leads to a presentation of the theory chosen for this thesis, the intersectionality theory. That follows with a sub-section on the lack of focus on men within gender equality research and a section on ethical considerations in relation to the thesis and research.

In “One world many theories”, Stephen Walt argues: ”We need theories to make sense of the blizzard of information that bombards us daily” (1998:29). He claims that everyone uses theories- whether they are aware of it or not (ibid.). Even though Walt’s publication focuses on international relations, it still applies to this, more domestically focused, research.

Walt’s also claims that we are better off with a “diverse array of competing ideas rather than a single theoretical orthodoxy” (Walt 1998:30). It is not only for the sake of understanding a complex society, it is also beneficial for theory developing: “Competition between theories helps reveal their strengths and weaknesses and spurs subsequent refinement, while revealing flaws in conventional wisdom” (ibid.). The fact is that even when only applying one theory one still has to use competing theories in order to challenge it. This might be done implicitly, like Walt suggests but is nevertheless an existing development.

I initially disagreed with these arguments as I claimed that the theory is the way we choose to look at something within a research. However, I then thought that it is impossible to truly use only one theory for every academic work. Previous knowledge and publications will inevitable alter your understanding of the theory. And maybe that fact that one still considers the paper to be written merely through that theory actually lowers the inner validity for the paper. Therefore, this thesis applies the somewhat abstract and complex theory of intersectionality.



Intersectionality is a study where minorities or other groups are analyzed in terms of their uniqueness (McCall 2005: 31-33). For example, instead of analyzing an African-American woman and in terms of her rights as a woman and her rights as a minority group, one instead acknowledges that these two components constitute a special social position for set individual. Thus, intersectionality analysis look at the intersection created by these different dimensions (ibid.). It derived after feminism was accused for having gender as the only category of analysis (McCall 2005: 31). By adding more categories, however, undoubtedly results in more complexity in terms of methodology (ibid.). Leslie McCall, an American Sociologist, argues that the intersectionality approach is a very important contribution to academic research, but that its methodology is not fully developed. It has instead created new methodological challenges and a need for development of traditional methods (McCall 2005: 31).

Actually, it can be seen as theories or it can be seen as definitions and critical perspectives as well. However, this intersectionality theory is deeply influenced by the way of dealing with categorization.

Due to its complexity, intersectionality analysis does not focus on answers but rather on asking questions. For example: What is left out of a study, e.g. What is silent? This form of analysis combined with pure statistics results in a dynamic research. Different methods result in different kinds of knowledge (McCall 2005: 32).

There are two reasons for why I wish to apply this perspective. First, gender equality is part of societal complexity. Meaning that there is, in my opinion, no way of distinguishing it from other societal factors and unique attributes within individuals. The second is that China is a country with numerous challenges. Apart from the gender equality challenge, problems concerning the environment and other inequalities are apparent in China today. The former is unfortunately not included in this thesis. The latter, however, applies to the core of China's societal challenges: The societal gaps are not only detected in terms of gender but between classes. For example, the differences between urban and rural population has increased exponentially in China over the last decades (Wang 2010: 81-83).

Leslie McCall claims that main debate is that women are not a homogeneous group. Nor are men or any societally constructed group (2005: 34). Then why does academic scholars insist on using, and drawing conclusions from, these social categories? Because it is sometimes imperative to use categories in order to demand rights for discriminated groups. The right to vote, right to education, to own property are battles that have been fought by various political minorities in history – and some are being fought are yet to be fought. That would not be possible without using these categories: women, ethnic minorities etc.

According to McCall there are three different approaches to categories:

The first is inter-categorical complexity which means that the study temporarily takes use of socially constructed categories in order to identify inequalities between and within these groups (2005: 31-34). The second is the anti-categorical complexity where the scholar does not recognize any socially constructed categories as it is considered to further create inequalities and differences (ibid.). The third is a combination of the above: Intra-categorical complexity does not completely exclude the use of categories nor uses is strategically. Instead, this approach recognizes categories as stable and durable option for analysis while still applies a critical approach on strict categories and focuses on the intersections between, and within them (ibid.).

In general, intersectionality and many feminist strands believe that deconstruction of categories is important for deconstruction of the actual inequalities (McCall 2005: 32). It is imperative how one decides to examine a problem and how one decides to solve it (McCall 2005: 31). Iris Young, an American Political Scientist, subscribes to the anti-categorical approach in her feminist research. Instead of focusing on the people who are being discriminated, she focuses on the violence and oppression that is cause it: According to her that is the more relevant information and a more equal method (Young 2000: 50-52).

Sometimes research and even language use re-create and nourish categories rather than the other way around. Furthermore, categories lead to delimitations that in turn leads to inequalities. However, one cannot completely disregard the limitations of language and societal norms, as any new classification would produce new relationships between power and knowledge. Instead one can use the existing categories as a tool for political incentives (McCall 2005: 36).

One of the most Important matters within academic research is definitions of key terms. This is something that intersectionality as a theory might complicate even more. However, like mentioned before, it is important to embrace the complexities of society within research as well. This does not only apply to the number of theories used, but also to the extensiveness of ones key term definitions.

Gender equality is a very broad term and is often used in a general manner explain inequalities in terms of gender; everything from direct discrimination, to division of home labor, to lack of representation in political and financial sectors. Hudson maintains that gender inequality is a form of violence that creates a generalized context of violence and exploitation at the societal level (Hudson et al 2012: 5).

The theory of defining terms used in this thesis tempts to factor in the complexities within society on many levels, as well as the complexities of language use. The Swedish Professor in Political Science, Björn Badersten, claims that one ought to be divide complex societal terms into more precise definitions (Badersten 2006: 36-37). In my previous research I have therefore used Björn Badersten's definition about gender equality as absolute numbers, meaning equal representations, equal opportunities, and equal possibilities (ibid). The difficulty with these categories, or dimensions, is that the latter is difficult to measure, and thus problematic to use for a master thesis. Badersten's research is often built on methods of normative discourse analysis and focused on Political Philosophy.

Last year, Sweden presented a new strategy within international politics, a "Feminist foreign policy". What this entails is difficult to grasp as international relations usually does not function on the individual level, and therefore foreign

policies has not traditionally been incorporated with a gender perspective. The main result of this seems to be the adoption a tool in order to examine the state of gender equality within states. The categorization of this tool is similar to Badersten's classification. It is called "the three R's" and includes rights, representation and resources (Regeringskansliet): "Do women enjoy the same legal platforms and the normative framework that you need in any country? Are they represented among those who take the decisions? When we distribute even development assistance, how do we distribute it? Do we direct it also to women's projects?" (ibid.).

This tool is therefore useful to compare with when operationalizing Badersten's definitions. Based on the theories presented above, I apply this consciousness whenever these crucial terms are used.

### 3.1.1 ...But what about the men?

What about the men? In gender equality research, the focus often lies on women and excludes men. Due to the intersectional perspective applied in the analysis, it is imperative to discuss rights and empowerment for the Chinese men as well. That said, one could argue that there is a question of majorities and minorities. In gender equality discussions, women are often labeled minorities in the sense that they have lesser possibilities than men. In China, where the population ratio is in fact imbalanced, women are in fact minorities. The focus is still on the situation of women as it is the portion of the population that is to acquire improved status in order to achieve gender equality.

It is important to remember that men do not represent the problem. Firstly, gender equality and feminism is based on the notion that everyone should be equal. Secondly, men are not the individually responsible for systematically reducing women's self-confidence or freedom; instead one should focus on the patriarchal and traditional society in China. However, individuals indirectly reproduce these norms by following or even encourage them. But that is not necessarily men: "In many traditional patriarchal societies, the person a young woman fear the most is

not male but female: her mother-in-law, who may have the power to make her life a living hell” (Hudson et al. 2012: 18).

The biggest issue and contribution of this thesis, however, is that intersectionality is brought into the perspective of gender analysis. This thesis acknowledges that, while gender might be one of the most important inequalities, it is not the only inequality within Chinese society.

## 3.2 Ethical Considerations

This thesis is not conducted through fieldwork but through secondary data. Thus, the aspects of ethical considerations do not have to be considered in the same manner as for interviews etc. Instead, the ethical considerations apply more to the aspect of Western analysis of other cultures. The risk is that these analyses start to resemble a bundle of judgments from a superior culture. In order to avoid this, I apply my China specific knowledge which enables me to somewhat understand the underlying factors for certain occurrences. Still, as mentioned in the previous section, one should keep in mind that this research is nevertheless produced from a Western perspective.

## 4 Methods

This section is devoted to the thesis' methodology. The different methods are presented below: First the research method and then the method of analysis. The section on research method is divided into several sections detailing the procedure of the research. Here, the operationalization from definitions to variables is included as well as a discussion on the use of secondary sources.

### 4.1 Research method

The research method of this thesis is of a quantitative character, however it does not produce any regressions or correlations but simply presents development in the form of variables. Data for the research method derives from the Quality of Government's Standard dataset. This is a popular collection of well-known collection of datasets, awarded for its wide range of datasets and detailed information on variables. For this thesis, I have used the Quality of Government's time-series data, where data from 1946 to 2015 are included and the unit of analysis is years instead of countries (Codebook Standard Dataset 2016: 5). Unfortunately, there were a lot of missing data within the relevant variables for China from 1946 to the end of the 1970's. Therefore, this thesis concentrates on the development from 1980 and onwards. 1980 is also coincidentally the year when China signed the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (United Nations Treaty Collection). The convention included 189 parties and China signed in 1980; the first year it opened for signatures (*ibid.*). By accepting the Convention, states promised to implement several acts against discrimination of women in all forms.

Still, as mentioned in the limitations section, the lack of data is unfortunate because a longer period of time would produce more information on the progress of gender equality in China.

The dataset chosen from Quality of Government are the following:

The Ciri Human Rights Dataset, Freedom House, Inter-parliamentary Union Data, and UNESCO. Apart from these, I have used published data from the Asian Development Bank, International Monetary Fund, Grand Thornton as well as the State Council in China. These are not included in graphs but presented in the text.

#### 4.1.1 Secondary sources

This thesis is based on secondary sources. For the statistics, I use the datasets mentioned above. From the results I draw my own conclusions based on collection of theories and empiric secondary data presented above.

I do not see any problems with using secondary sources, instead I view it as a possibility to take part of interesting research that have been carried out by experts with sufficient resources. When it comes to large scale data collections, I prefer to rely on others. Primary data collection is certainly very impressive, but sometimes it is not relevant that the sources ought to be primary sources. For me to try and perform quantitative reports with similar content to that of for example the World Bank would only be a waste. Then it is more relevant to focus that time and energy on drawing unique conclusions and creating new patterns within the research area.

## 4.2 Operationalization

In this section, Badersten's dimensions of gender equality are being operationalized into variables.

#### 4.2.1 Equal Representation

Gender equality as equal representation, or in absolute numbers, are preferably operationalized into variables presenting female representation in various fields. For that reason, I have first chosen one variable from Quality of Government which portrays women's representation in the parliament in China. The variable is originally produced by Inter-parliamentary Union Data and is labeled "ipu\_1\_sw Share of Women (Lower House)" in the Quality of Government's standard dataset (Codebook Standard Dataset 2016: 381). For China, this variable presents the share of women in their national parliament, The National People's Congress (全国人民代表大会). China does not have division between upper and lower house (Inter-parliamentary Union). Secondly, I include published figures from other studies as well. These figures present gendered representation within for example the business sector.

#### 4.2.2 Equal Opportunities

Gender equality as equal opportunities is often operationalized into variables on rights for women as oppose to rights for men (Badersten 2006: 36-37). Rights are often included within laws and regulations and they often target different spheres of society. Hence, I have chosen three different types of rights: Economic rights, social rights and political rights. The variables derive from the Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Dataset, The CIRI Human Rights Dataset (Codebook Standard Dataset 2016: 132).

All variables include a number of internationally recognized rights. For the political variable these include:

The right to vote, The right to run for political office, The right to hold elected and appointed government positions, The right to join political parties, The right to



petition government officials (Codebook Standard Dataset 2016: 137). Women's social rights include:

The right to equal inheritance, The right to enter into marriage on a basis of equality with men, The right to travel abroad, The right to obtain a passport, The right to confer citizenship to children or a husband, The right to initiate a divorce, The right to own, acquire, manage, and retain property brought into marriage, The right to participate in social, cultural, and community activities, The right to an education, The freedom to choose a residence, Freedom from forced sterilization etc. (Codebook Standard Dataset 2016: 137-138). Women's economic include:

Equal pay for equal work, Free choice of profession or employment without the need to obtain a husband or male relative's consent, The right to gainful employment without the need to obtain a husband or male relative's consent, Equality in hiring and promotion practices, Job security (maternity leave, unemployment benefits, no arbitrary firing or layoffs, etc...), Non-discrimination by employers, The right to be free from sexual harassment in the workplace, The right to work at night, The right to work in occupations classified as dangerous, The right to work in the military and the police force (Codebook Standard Dataset 2016: 137).

A report from the International Monetary Fund include similar factors: "Inequality of opportunities, such as unequal access to education, health services, finance, is strongly associated with income inequality – a large part of this inequality is driven by different access for men and women" (International Monetary Fund 2015).

The variables are measured from the scale 0-3. A score of 0 means that women's rights were not guaranteed by law and that systematic discrimination based on sex may have been built into law at the time. A score of 1 means that women's rights were guaranteed in law, but were prohibited in practice. A score of 2 means that women's rights were guaranteed in law, but were still somewhat prohibited in practice and certain discrimination against women were still present. A score of 3 means that the political rights for women were guaranteed in both law and practice (Codebook Standard Dataset 2016: 137-138). In order to make it more coherent, I have constructed an index containing all these variables when

presenting them.

### 4.2.3 Equal Possibilities

The third category is the most important one but also the most difficult variable to operationalize and therefore measure. This is the reason why this thesis is only partly reliable on statistics, qualitative methods has to be consulted. There is no obvious demarcation for gender equality as equal possibilities. Still, to capture inequalities in more developed countries is more difficult. That is why one should not only discuss gender equality in terms of rights. A state can have implemented full rights for everyone and still inequalities exist. In developed economies, for example, women have the right to vote, to become presidents or CEO's. But how come so few women hold these positions? Due to its economic progress and rising standards, a more abstract definition of equal possibilities is vital in terms of explaining these occurrences in China as well.

In this research, the third category is not calculated or measured to its complete; it is merely being analyzed through the method of analysis. However, it is still equally important for the third category to be included in the methodology as it function as the desirable outcome between, or along side the other two categories. Finally, I choose to operationalize one dimension of equal possibilities in terms of education. One might have noted that "the right to an education" is already included in the variable of social rights. However, the right to an education can mean a range of different scenarios. How many years of school is needed for it to be classified as a full education? When it comes to equal possibility, it is interesting to follow up the rights of an education with the proportion of women to girls in schools, and with how many years girls attend school as opposed to men. Therefore, six variables on education are included. Four of them show the share of women in different levels of education. The last two shoe the number of years of schooling for men and women respectively (Codebook Standard Dataset 2016: 583). The variables are produced by UNESCO's Institute for Statistics UIS Data Centre and collected from Quality of Government (ibid.).



## 5 Development of gender equality

This section of the thesis is where the figures of development are presented through graphs. There is also already published statistics included along in text for the purpose of diversifying the findings. Furthermore, empirical information is being used while comparing and explaining the graphs.

According to many scholars, among them Attané and Ke, as well as the All-China Women's Federation, The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was a turning point for gender equality in China (Women of China 2015, Attané 2012: 6-7). For example through *The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action*, which was adopted by 189 countries (ibid.). Since 1995, focus on women's development and gender equality progress has increased, partly through three programs for women's development that the Chinese Government implemented (ibid.). The State Council of China published the National Human Rights Action Plans of China and the so called and also white paper on Progress in China's Human Rights in 2013 (Women of China).

When performing a scientific research, it is important to factor in historical, cultural, societal, economic and political factors that might help explain the findings. Then again, even if gender equality were to be achieved, how soon would the results be detectable? The question of time is an important factor in this research. When analyzing the data, one should be cautious with presuming correlations between statistical indicators and various historical events. Without regression analysis, and often even with regression analysis, it is difficult to prove that a change in statistics is brought on by certain factors. Furthermore, if X (an independent variable) can be assessed to have an impact on Y (a dependent variable), how long is the time-line for that impact? Additionally, how does one exclude the possibility that the independent variable is not in fact the dependent and vice versa? It is also possible that Z is the explanatory variable for X and/or Y

or for something completely different. As Attané puts it: "Since they can prove difficult to interpret, the transformations that have affected China since the 1980's are sometimes perplexing" (2012: 4).

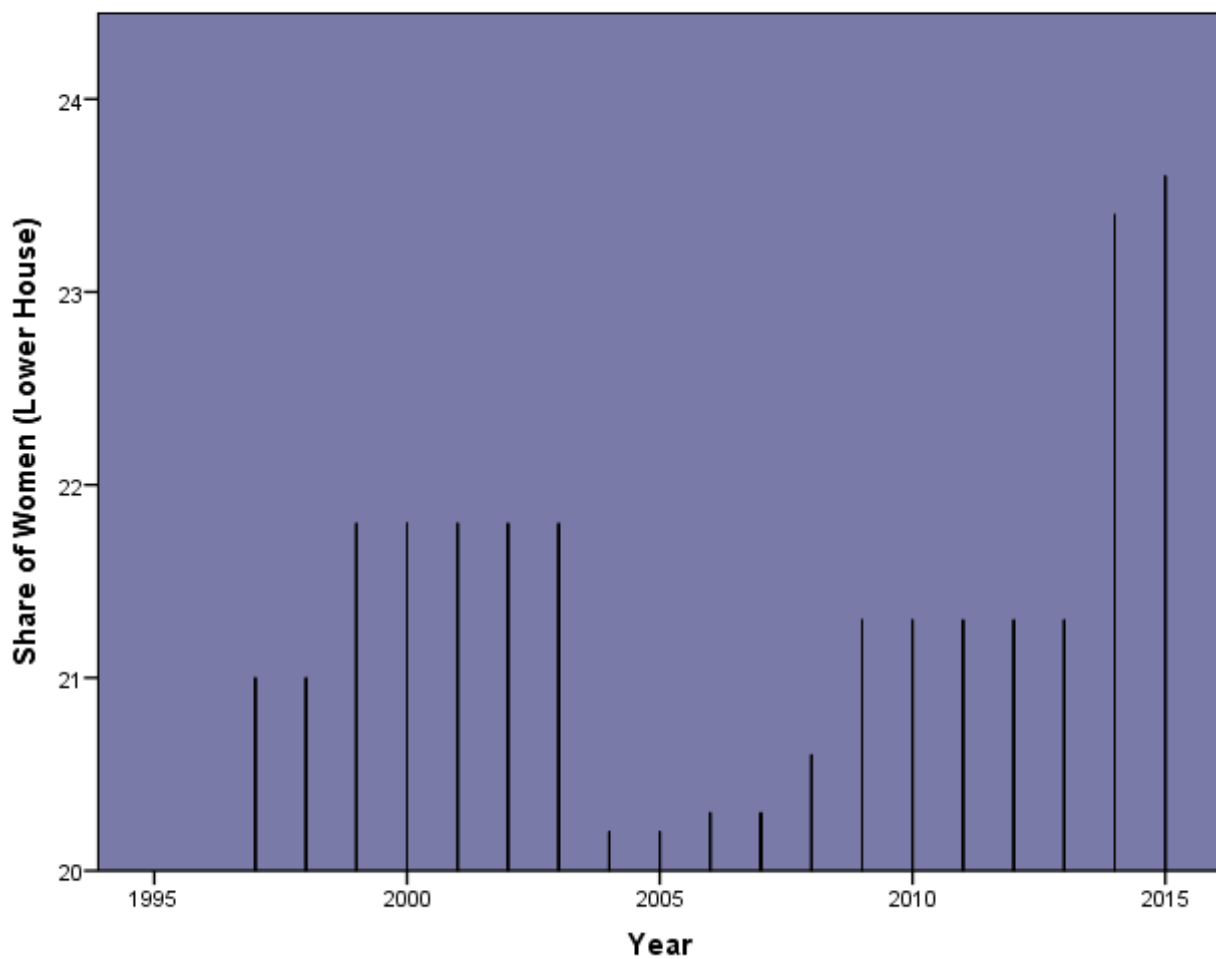
For a single country study, it is important to have pre-determined levels of sufficient gender equality within the society, as there is no comparisons made with any other states. The ultimate gender equal society is of course the one where there are no significant differences between men and women in terms of representation, opportunities and possibilities. Then again, there are different levels of inequality and due to the patriarchal society, a positive progress is more realistic to detect. A comparison would be difficult to make in this situation, as China is unique in its constellation, growth and size. Without a country comparison, I instead study how fast the development has been, and what trends can be detected. If the trend is overall positive, than that can be considered sufficient proof for a positive development. Furthermore, the grading system for example the rights-variables outlined in the methods chapter are useful for understanding how the situation in China can be understood in a larger context.

## 5.1 Women's representation

Hudson argues that policymakers disregard women as important actors when trying to find solutions to problems. The authors call it "half-brain decision making" (Hudson et al. 2012: 45). Research has shown that mixed decision groups are better and therefore the authors argue that it is imperative to take a

gendered perspective to understand various issues (Hudson et al 2012: 5, 47).<sup>1</sup> However, this argument somewhat lacks ground as there is little real evidence for it; not many governments have had significant representation of women in governments (Hudson et al. 2012: 43).

**Figure 1: Share of women in parliament**



Variable: ipu\_1\_sw Share of Women (Lower House). Collected from Quality of Government.

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<sup>1</sup> 1995, Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky's (ultranationalist) responded to the news that Finland had appointed the first female Defense Minister in history: "Any country that would choose a woman for defense minister deserves to be invaded" (Hudson et al. 2012: 41-42).

Unfortunately there is no data available for any of the years in the 1980's or most of the 1990's. That makes this variable one of the weaker ones in the study. However, it is still important that it is included even if it only covers 18 years of China's history (1997-2015). However, data from the State Council propose that there were 2.4 % women in the National People's Congress in 1993 (2015). As noticed on the Y-axis, the fluctuation of share of women in the National People's Congress is fairly low: all years year included are within the range of 20-24 %. Furthermore, the deputies of the National People's Congress are re-elected every fifth year, meaning that the results will only change slightly over every five-year period. From the graph one can still notice a small development: In the election of 1999, the share of women in parliaments increased from previous period but then decreased in the 2003 election. In 2013's election the share of women increased again and in 2015 it reached the highest share of women for the years included, with 24 % of the seats in the parliament held by women.

According to Min, the proportion of women in the Standing committee was significantly lower during the 1980's than in the 1970's (Min 2011: 19). In 1978, the share of women was 21 % whereas 1983 and 1988 there were only 9 and 11.9 % women. Fortunately the share slowly rose during the following years (ibid.). Equal representation truly is an effective measure to bring women's questions and preferences on the agenda. It is also, of course a natural measure for achieving direct empowerment for women. Ke explains that political participation is somewhat restricted for all genders in China (Ke 2012). Interestingly, the share of women within the minority groups represented in the National People's Congress is much higher than for the Han Chinese representatives: 41 % women versus 23 % (State Council People's Republic of China 2015).

It is important to remember that this variable measures the national parliament of a country. For many countries that would be a reliable indicator as to what extent women are allowed to take part in political decisions. For the case of China, however, this data should be analyzed differently. The National People's Congress is the national parliament of China and consists of 2 987 deputies (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China). It is de jure the main legislative body, but de facto the most powerful legislative organ is often

said to be the Standing Committee (全国人民代表大会常务委员会), only containing 175 members. The Congress only gathers once a year whereas the Standing Committee gathers once every two months (ibid.). Therefore it would have been more interesting to examine the gender divide within the Standing Committee, seeing as they have more political power, however there was no data available.

The Grand Thornton report for 2013 showed that China is actually exploiting the great advantages of having women in the work force in general but also in leading positions specifically. The study presented that China has the highest percentages out of the 44 countries with 51% female leaders within middle to large companies (Grand Thornton 2013). This research is based on 6600 interviews with company leaders (ibid.). The study includes a correlation between representation of women and states' annual growth and concludes that the countries with high annual growth also have relatively higher gender diversity (ibid.). Thus, they also highlight that the "old world economies" in fact are falling behind in terms of female representation (ibid.).

Hudson presents a similar discussion when they debate the correlational direction between "states treating women badly" and "poor countries" (Hudson et al 2014: 2-4). The most common conclusion is that poor states tend to treat women badly and do not invest in their female population. However, there is also evidence that claims that countries investing in their female population (relatively, so they do not have to be rich countries) are more likely to be wealthy and stable (Hudson et al. 2014:3).

However, the Asian Development Bank recently published a study exposing that China has fewer women in their company boardrooms compared to other countries. Even though the situation is improving yearly, the average female representation in boardrooms was only 7,5 % in 2012 (Asian Development Bank 2016). Still, China has the fastest growth of female representation in boardrooms in Asia (ibid.). In the Asian Development Bank report, it was argued that the lack



of gender diversity in the Chinese boardroom is more symptomatic of societal issues than a direct result of hiring decisions (ibid.).<sup>2</sup> The Asian Development Bank also states that China is the country with the most to lose from their lack of gender diversity (ibid). The report blames this lack of women on lack of competent women. In turn, the competent women are few due to lack of education, women's lower wages, infant survival rates and other inequalities (ibid.).

Another survey concludes that women's presence in politics increases the dialogues, attention to social welfare, legal protection, transparency in government and business (Hudson et al. 2012: 43). 80% of those respondents also claimed that women's participation restores trust in government (ibid.). However, in certain countries, the female representation is nothing but a façade; the seats are still controlled by men, for example the women's husbands or family (Hudson et al. 2012: 42).

According to the State Council, female representation on the local democracy levels is improving: In 2013, there were allegedly almost 23 % women in the local governments (2015). This figure is however lower than the current one in the National People's Congress. As a side note, the State Council "...vigorously promotes the development of [...] handicrafts, such as weaving and knitting [...]" as a solution for women who are unable to find occupation (2015). These types of encouragements would not be published in a report on gender equality in Sweden...

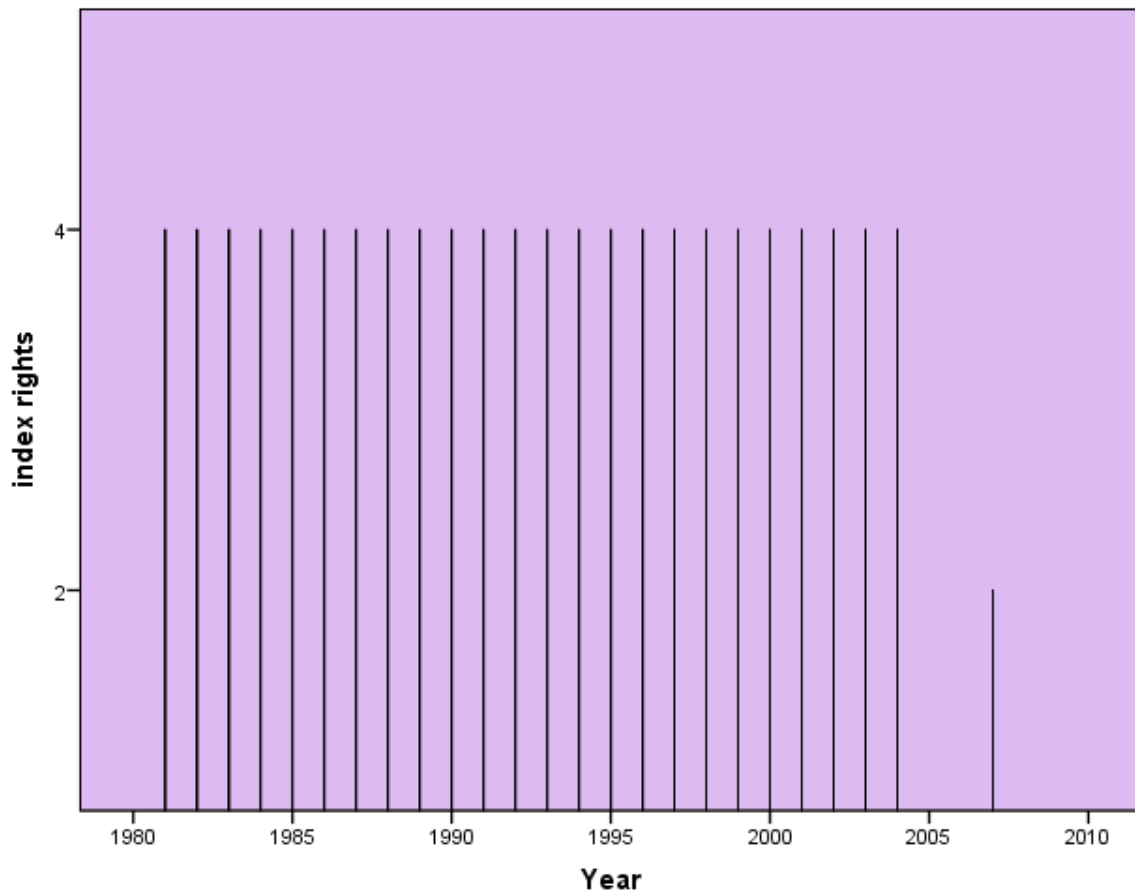
## 5.2 Women's opportunities

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<sup>2</sup> Gender quotas are not very popular in Asia, only Malaysia and India use them in their board allocations, although without effective implementation (Asian Development Bank 2016).

This graph is titled development of women’s rights, but the result rather indicates lack of development. However, this stagnating result still provides us with information on the situation for Chinese women over time. As mentioned earlier, the rights are being evaluated one a scale from 0 to 3. This graph relays all three rights-variables in an index, therefore the total maximum score is 9.

**Figure 2: Development of women's rights**



Index created by author. Variables included: “ciri\_wecon Women's Economic Rights”, “ciri\_wosoc Women's Social Rights”, and “ciri\_wopol Women's Political Rights”. Collected from Quality of Government.

The collection of data for the social rights variable ended after 2007, which is why the index does not include data beyond that year. The other variables had valid scores for the period of 2008-2010, but without the third rights-variable the index would be inaccurate. I nevertheless take use of the remaining scores for the two other variables when examining the data. The data for mentioned period did not alter much after 2007: both economic and political rights stayed at their levels;

apart from political rights for women which actually received the lower grade 1 in 2007 and 2009. Apparently the year of 2008, when China hosted the Olympic games, the political rights temporarily improved again. That is interesting considering the heated discussions on human rights violations in China in relation to the event. The decision of China as a host for the 2008 Olympic games was announced in 2001, and up until the event news publications argued that Human Rights were worsening due to the pressure of wanting to present a harmonious society.<sup>3</sup>

From the grading system, one can draw the conclusion that all three types of rights are somewhat guaranteed in the Chinese laws. The United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women included the agreement to eliminate all laws that discriminate women, and to incorporate gender equality and anti-discrimination regulations in laws instead (United Nations Treaty Collection). In fact, women were actually granted basic civil rights several decades ago. These include the right to education, work and political participation (Ke 2012). According to the Chinese government, improvement on laws, regulations and public policies that benefit women have even "progressively improved" over the years (State Council People's Republic of China 2015). This might be an overstatement as many of the laws protecting women and ensuring equal protection of the sexes were established in the 1950's. Yet, it is true that many laws have been updated and some new have been implemented. It is true for the number of updates of the Marriage Law, which was the first law passed by the People's Republic of China (Friedman 2010: 151-154). The initial law was directly unfavorable for women, but it has gradually become more equal (ibid.).

This is also true for the new law against domestic violence, implemented 1 March 2016 (Law Against Domestic Violence 2015). That was the first specific law against domestic violence in Chinese history. It also includes more societal groups

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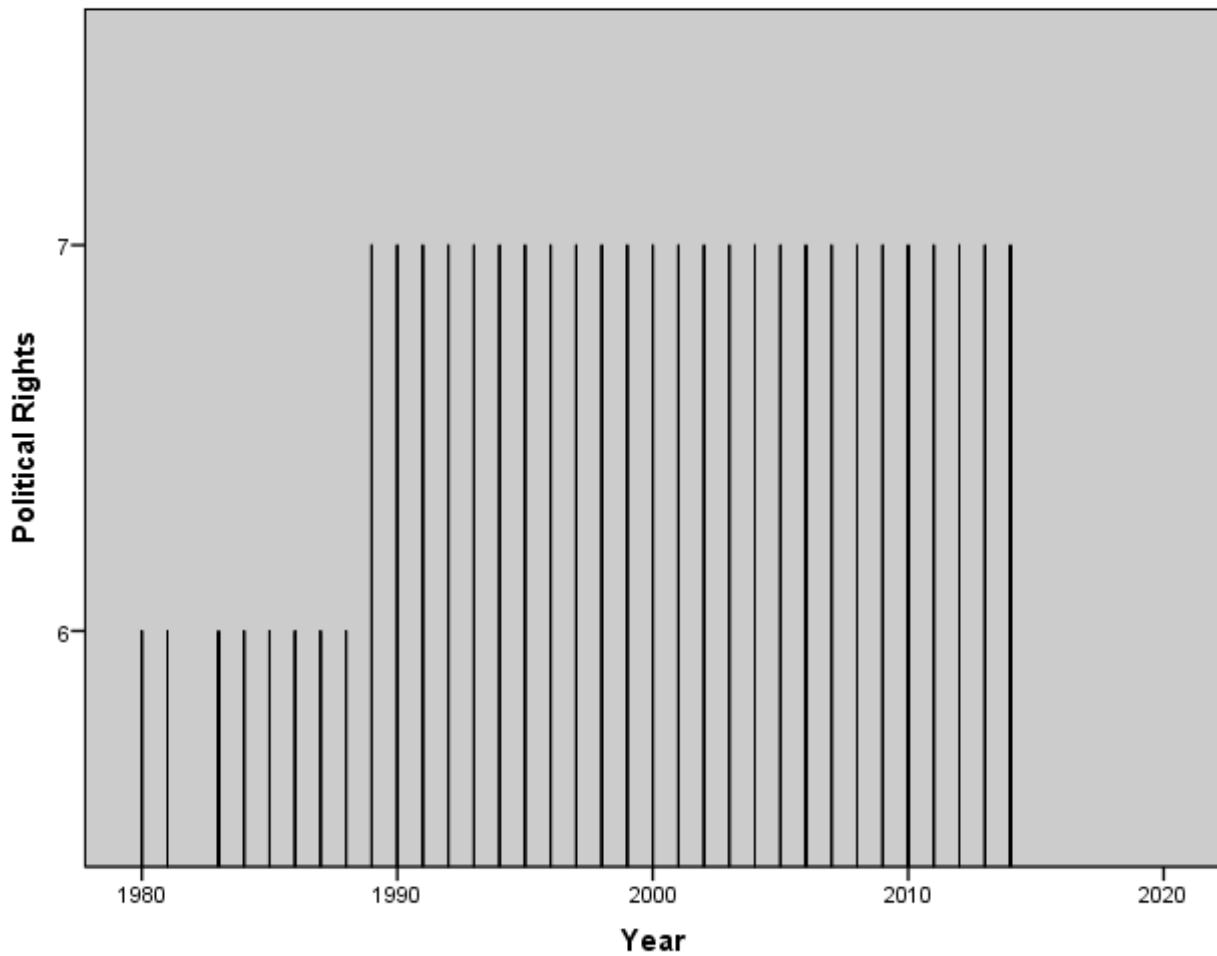
<sup>3</sup> The Guardian <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/30/china.athensolympics2004>, CNN <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/08/12/china.promises/>, BBC <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7529453.stm>

than previous laws; the previous prohibition was only included under laws applicable to for example married couples (i.e. the Marriage Law). This is also true for the labor law protecting female employees as well as the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women (State Council People's Republic of China 2015). There is also supposedly a negative correlation between corruption and the manifestations of women's social and economic rights (Hudson et al. 2012: 43).

All in all, this graph can only describe a slightly negative development. The existing challenges do not necessarily include the quality or scope of the judicial system, but rather the lack of enforcing these rights through these laws.

It is imperative to compare the women's rights with that of the whole population. Therefore I include data on the political rights in China without regards to gender:

**Figure 3: Development of Political Rights**



Variable: fh\_pr Political Rights. Collected from Quality of Government.

Interestingly, neither economic or social rights data are offered for the entire population, only specifically for women. Instead, on political rights by Freedom House has to present general rights. They measure political freedom on a scale from 1-7, where 1 means completely free from political oppression and 7 means not free (Codebook Standard Dataset: 281). Thus, this data is measured in the opposite direction of the index above. Some of the factors included are:

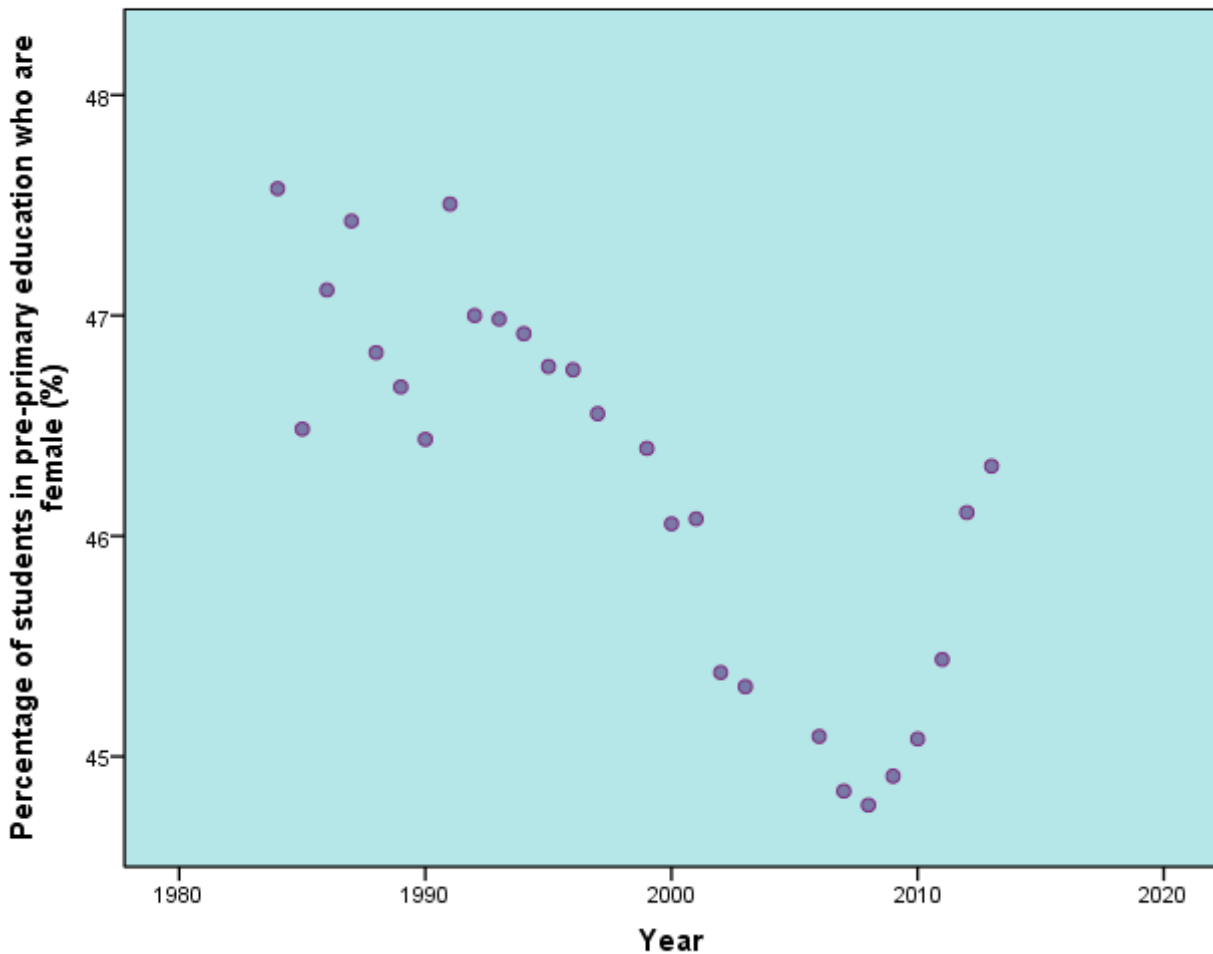
The ability to participate freely in the political process, right to vote freely for distinct alternatives in legitimate elections, compete for public office, join political parties and organizations etc. These factors have varied over the years but of course always apply to political freedom (Code book Standard Dataset 2016: 281).

Between the years 1980-1988 (Data missing 1980) China received 6, but in 1989 it was downgraded to the worst possible score. This might relate to the events following the student protests at Tiananmen Square the same year. Nevertheless, this graph also indicates a negative development of rights. Despite that this data might be based on different methodologies, it still indicates that the political rights in China are not much better for men than for women according to these international surveys.

### 5.3 Women's possibilities

Attané claims that education is one of the most important factors for improving the status of Chinese women. For example, education reduces birth rate and increases women's health (Attané 2012: 7).

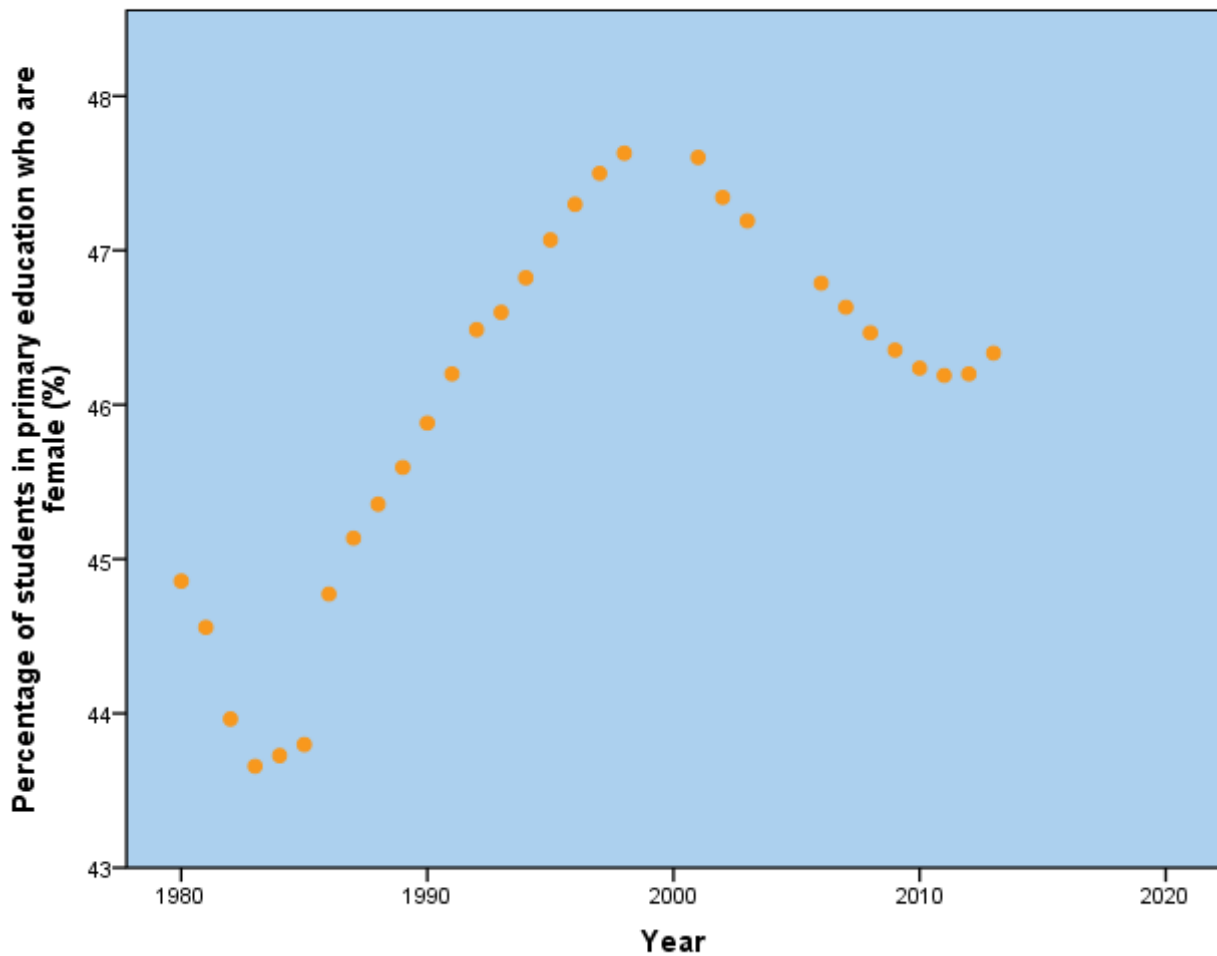
Figure 4: Share of girls in pre-primary education (%)



Variable: une\_pfspp Percentage of students in pre-primary education who are female (%). Collected from Quality of Government.

This graph presents the share of girls within pre-primary education. Data is missing from the following years: 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1998, 2004, and 2005. The result ranges from 45-48 %, meaning that for this period of time there has consistently been more boys than girls attending pre-primary school. The graph shows that the share of women slightly decreased from the beginning of the 1990's to 2008. After that the share increased again, however it still has not reached the levels of the early 1980's. Possible explanatory factors of this development relate more to the share of women in society, as well as geographical accessibility to pre-primary educational institutions, than to the unequal possibilities of acquiring education by gender. However, the imbalanced population in China relates to its unequal and patriarchal society, something which is discussed further in the analysis.

Figure 5: Share of girls in primary education (%)

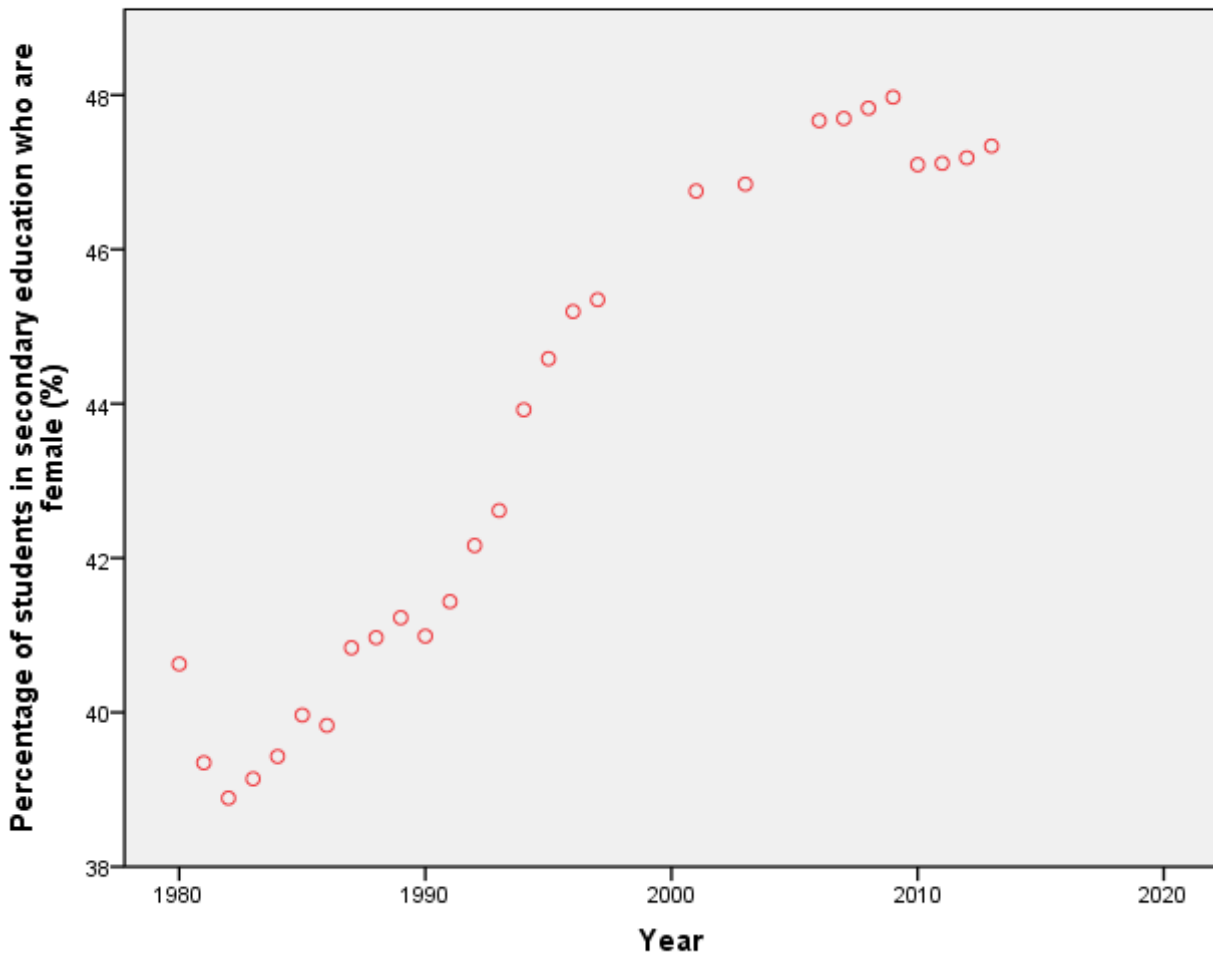


Variable: une\_pfsp Percentage of students in primary education who are female (%). Collected from Quality of Government.

The graph above show the development of share of women in primary school. The share fluctuate between 44-48%. Data is missing from 1999, 2000, 2004, and 2005. Similar to the previous graph, this development is very small, despite the outlook of the curve. It is important to note that these graph show the share of girls as apposed to boys within the school system, meaning that there is no comparison between the absolute number of girls between the different years. Still, the share of women apparently peaked in 1998 for this time period. Interestingly, these two graphs above almost look like a mirror for the other one.



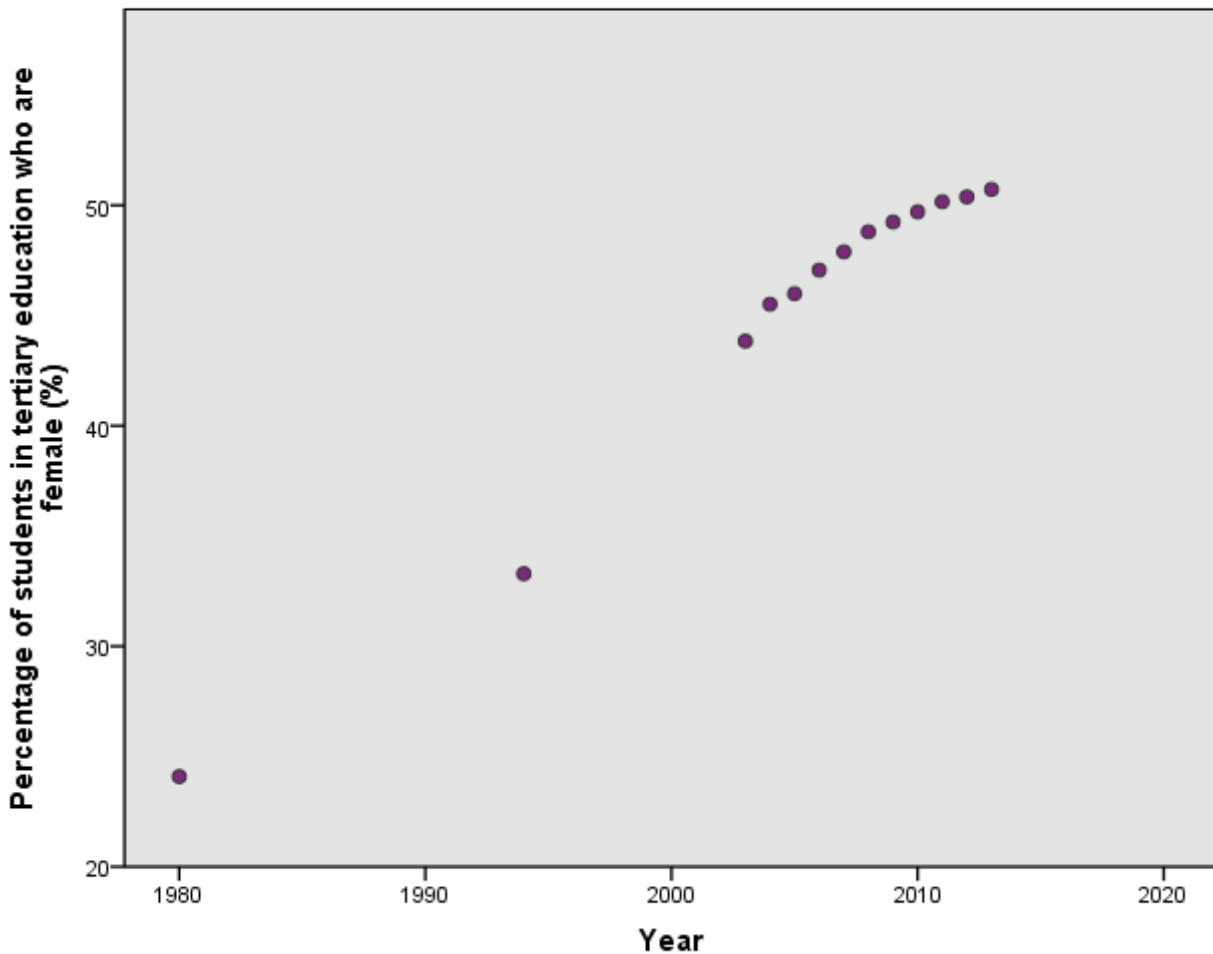
Figure 6: Share of girls in secondary education (%)



Variable: une\_pfss Percentage of students in secondary education who are female (%). Collected from Quality of Government.

This graph presents the share of girls within secondary education. There are values missing from the following years: 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2005. The result all stay within the range of 39-48 % girls as opposed to boys. This curve differs slightly from the other two, as it almost only increases. Despite the little difference from year to year, this positive development still indicate that more women attended secondary education because of the lower share of women in society overall. The only relevant exceptions being from 1980 to 1981 – where it only decreased 1 %, as well as the last four years of measuring (2010-2013) when the decreased share was just as small.

Figure 7: Share of girls in tertiary education (%)



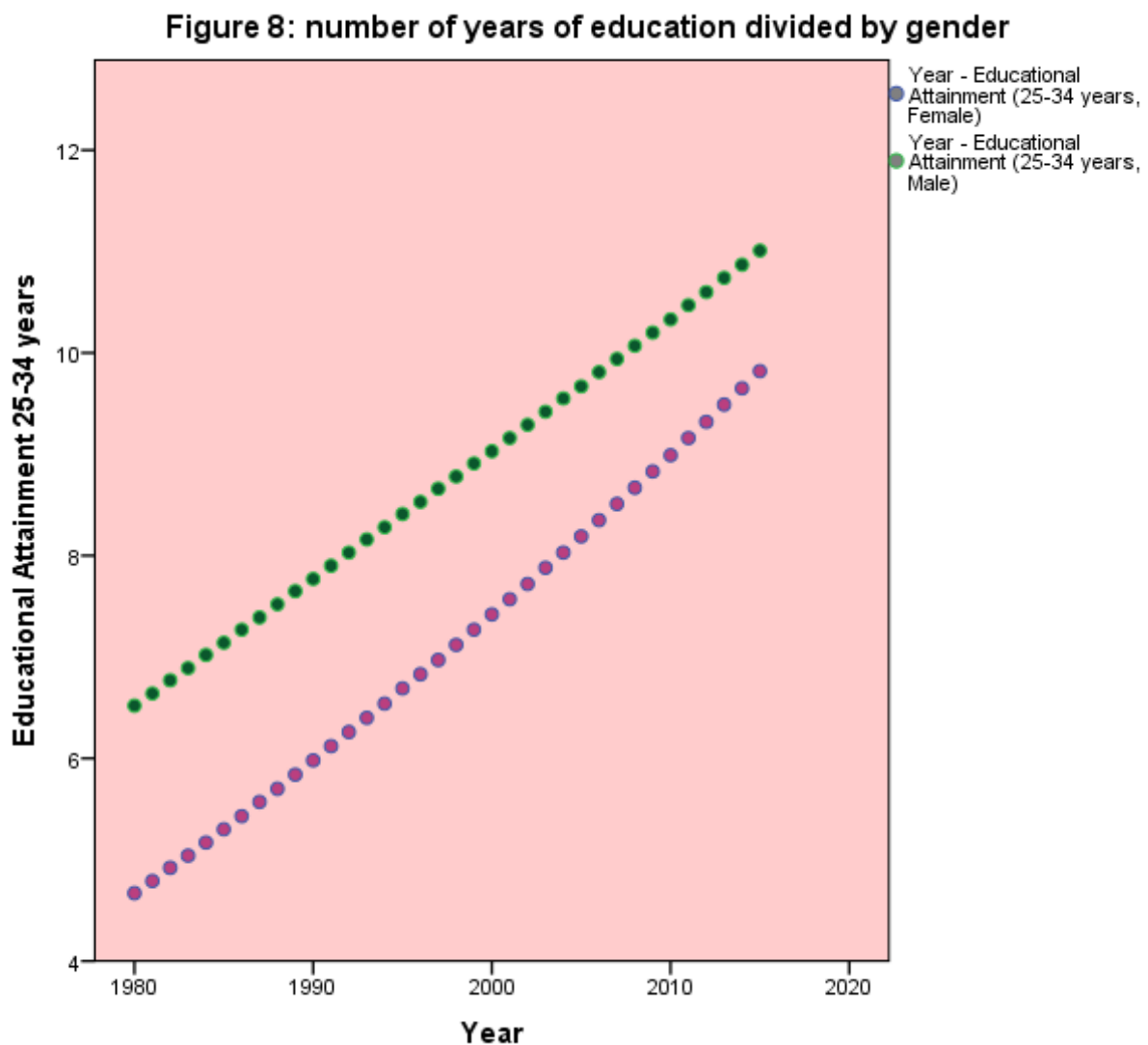
Variable: une\_pfst Percentage of students in tertiary education who are female (%) Collected from Quality of Government.

This graph, contacting share of girls in tertiary (higher) education, unfortunately have many missing values: 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002.

This results in a graph only containing 13 years. At least this graph produces a lot wider range of the share of women within this level of education. Furthermore, there is almost only positive development detectable for these years, and one can also predict that the values for the missing years should be following the same positive curve. In the first year, 1980, there higher education in China only consisted of 24 % women. Then, by 2013 this had increased to 51 %, meaning more than half of the students were women. Factoring in that women are fewer

than men within Chinese society, this figure is really strong and indicates a hopeful future for the young women of China.

As mentioned above, the share of girls within any level of education might be somewhat misleading due to the imbalanced Chinese population in terms of gender. That is why the variable on educational attainment, measured in years, is included below as well.



Variables: `gea_ea2534f` Educational Attainment (25-34 years, Female), `gea_ea2534m` Educational Attainment (25-34 years, Male). Collected from Quality of Government.

This variable contains values for very chosen year. The green line marks the average years of education obtained by men in the age of 25-34 years, and the

purple line marks the average amount of educational years women have obtained at the same age. The graph presents positive development for both genders, however, it also shows that men were on average already one year more educated in 1980. Moving on, the average years increase within both groups. The range for men increase from 7 to 11 years between 1980 and 2015. The average education for women increase from 5 to 10 years. Thus, women have had a stronger increase than men as they doubled the average years of education. This is also visible from the graph: The women are almost catching up for there is only one year difference between men and women's educational attainment in 2015.

The State Council also states that the gender gap in education has been “markedly narrowed” (2015). Isabelle Attané has noticed the same development: “In 20 years, the average length of women's education almost doubled [...] thereby gradually narrowing the gap with men” (2012: 7). She claims that, regardless of gender, a significant reason for leaving school early is financial difficulties within the families. According to her that has been the reason for over 69 % of the boys and 68 % of the girls when leaving school (ibid.). However, the positive development in the graphs can also partly be explained by the fact that more parents consider education important and therefore invest a lot in their children's education. Though there are still parents who consider education to be unnecessary, and the figures are three times higher for girls compared to boys: 9.1 % versus 3.5 % (Ibid.).

# 6 Analysis

The analysis is concentrated on discussing, as well as raising, questions on development of gender equality in China and the possible contributing and challenging factors. The analysis revolves around the intersectionality perspective as well as more detailed information on China.

## 6.1 The China challenges

Ke Qianting claims that the sense of gender equality has not yet been realized in China (Ke 2012). The State Council, however, describe the situation as follows:

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.

The State Council People's Republic of China 2015

China also has the All-China Women's Federation, which can be regarded as proof for China's strive for gender equality and women's empowerment. But even if they promote women's rights and produce well-needed information and useful statistics, they have been shown to provide women with contradictory advice. An example is the many articles on so called "left over women" that were published on their website, where they encouraged women to marry early (Magistad 2013). Their definition of a "leftover" was a woman unmarried after the age of 27 (ibid.). Due to its connection the Party, they are indeed very limited possibilities to be modernizing.

Another important issue is that China's current struggle with an unbalanced population in terms of gender. The proportion of women is much lower than men, creating a surplus of men and a shortage of women. About 118 boys are born for every 100 girls in China today (Sui 2015). Many experts argue that this is a result of the one-child family policy. The policy is part of China's family planning (ibid.). An indirect cause however, is the very visible son preference (Eklund 2011). This has increased the effects of the One-child policy and is certainly the real explanatory factor. Without the son preference, the one child policy would not have resulted in such an evident imbalance in terms of gender. Yet from another angle, the girls born grow up are in an advantage because of the lack of women: As in a classic economic theory, supply and demand are strongly correlated and Chinese women benefit from being few (Eklund 2011: 70-71). As mothers, the One-child policy has contributed to women having more freedom to invest in their careers and focus on their personal lives (ibid.). This is of course especially apparent among the generations affected by the policy. However, new problems, such as children who are not registered, arise instead (ibid.).

The government has since then liberalized the policy into allowing two children for Han Chinese (minority groups were already allowed to have more than one child). However, now when China has relaxed the policy, odds are that more girls will be born and brought up in China. Then again, the heart of the matter is that there should not be a superior gender.

Considering the imbalanced population, the phenomenon of leftover women is somewhat surprising. The lack of women and surplus of men ought to result in the opposite. This is also true to a certain extent: Men are having difficulties finding someone to marry. China has even been described as experiencing a "marriage crisis". Eklund claims that modernizing family ideals can eliminate the marriage crisis. Accordingly, her solution is to expand the societal norms on marriage. Instead of pushing for heterosexual marriages between people in their mid-twenties, the Chinese society should embrace other types of marriages as well (Eklund 2013: 69). However, it is important to add that the lack of women is not only positive. Stories of women from poorer families who are sold as wives have been highlighted as a negative result from lack of women (Han 2001: 809):

## 6.2 Feminism and intersectionality analysis

The feminist movement (if one can claim that there is one united movement) is strongly debated in the Western world as being radical and against men. However, I would like to once again stress that the search for gender equality is the main focus within feminist research. I also subscribe to the notion of separating by gender in order to analyze these groups individually. To assume that women's and men's values are socially constructed, is however different (Caprioli 2003: 198). As Caprioli argues:

Although the expression of these feminine values might be more prevalent among women because women are socialized and expected to express feminine values of nurturance, feminine virtues must not be confused with biological sex in that they are not unique to women. In other words, masculine and feminine values are not inherent to each biological sex but are adopted behaviors

Caprioli 2003: 198

Ke Qianting believes that feminism has become demonized in China today. She means that one has mistaken feminism as a power-obsessed movement and proclaims a hatred of men, instead of being portrayed as a movement that is struggling for gender equality in a current social system (Ke 2012).

Feminist research is also concerned with the re-creating of norms and normality, as it also naturally produces abnormality: the existence of Other. Still, is allowed to either examine the normal or the marginalized groups. Even though this thesis has been focused on gender equality (i.e. focus on more than on gender), the main concentration has nevertheless been on women because that is the group in need of more resources and power. It is important to realize that women are not one homogeneous group and that certain groups of women are more discriminated than others. For China examples include rural women, women of ethnic minorities, migrant rural women, women with disabilities. In fact, women account for about 70% of the agricultural work force (State Council People's Republic of

China 2015). As always, there are several ways of viewing a phenomenon. The journalist Leslie Chang wrote a book in which she portrays these shifts in population as relatively advantageous for women. She claims that China's migration has both advantages and disadvantages like everything else (Chang 2009: 424). Women seem to view the domestic migration as a possibility to improve their lives to a larger extent than men (ibid.).

The government claims that the first two groups, rural women and women of ethnic minorities, now enjoy equal access to education (State Council People's Republic of China 2015). They have also introduced policies that ensure education for migrant rural girls in the cities. Allegedly, girls with disabilities now have improved access to education, thanks to the recent increased importance attached on special education (ibid.).

Another dimension that can be added to gender is age. The decision of family division has increasingly shifted over generations, and some power now lies with the young women. Traditionally, living with parents of the husband has been the norm, and many elderly still prefer this arrangement (Thøgersen & Ni 2008: 12). However, the younger women instead arrange an early parting from the family and move into separate homes (Yan 2009: 141-144). All these factors have ultimately altered the domestic sphere into an environment where the young have more power; they have transformed their identities from "voiceless dependents to active agents in family life" (Yan 2009: 134). However, this indirectly creates an inequality between generations that traditionally was unseen, at least in that direction (Thøgersen & Ni 2008: 20).

Economic class is also a dimension that can be combined with gender. When the International Monetary Fund explored how to reduce income gaps, they found the conclusion that gender inequality is one of the factors driving income gaps (International Monetary Fund 2015). Thus, in order to reduce income gaps one has to first reduce gender inequality. The International Monetary Fund's suggestion consists of four parts: Firstly, remove gender-based legal restrictions. Secondly, revise tax policies to encourage women to join the labor force (ibid.). As of now there is still not enough incentive for a married woman to join the



workforce, and that is a direct result from the tax policies. Thirdly, alter government budgets into more focus on infrastructure and education. Fourthly, implement well-designed family benefits. These are all applicable suggestions, but even if these measures were to be successfully implemented, there is no guarantee that the income gap will be significantly reduced. Many developed countries already have a successful implementation of at least three of these four stages, but are still dealing with income gaps between genders.

The Chinese government claims it “fully protects the economic interest of women” (State Council People’s Republic of China 2015). That might be an excessive statement considering that the scores on economic rights presented above were not the highest ones. However, the graphs in the previous section showed the Chinese women are granted some economic rights by law. Yet, it does not seem to be enough: “Women, though economically liberated, are still restrained by the cultural cage” (Ke 2012). The set of criteria above might be sufficient as an initial approach for developing countries (as well as for the United States) but a more radical set of actions ought thereafter to be implemented.

### 6.3 Traditions and paradoxes

Returning to Sweden’s feminist foreign policy, there are some matters that should be stressed. Firstly, having a clear feminist policy within foreign policy relates to the concept of developed Western states applying cultural and societal norms on other states. This can be problematic. Still, feminist foreign policy is new and innovative. But what would Sweden say about the gender equality status in China? An article published in the Swedish magazine *Dagens Nyheter*, compared the labor markets in Sweden and China and argued that Chinese women are thriving: In many ways, the Chinese women are taking bigger opportunities, despite the unequal labor market (Dagens Nyheter 2014). They interviewed a Chinese entrepreneur situated in Sweden, Lydia Liu. She claimed that the Chinese

business world is more equal than the one in Sweden because Chinese society focuses on results, not on the person producing it (ibid.). Lydia Liu also considered the laws in China to be sufficient for protecting women in the work force (ibid.).

That China had the highest percentage of female company leaders is also an indicator for its development (Grand Thornton 2013). However, it was pointed out that one should not draw the conclusion that all leaders are in thriving positions: The differences between businesses are significant: A middle class female entrepreneur and a woman selling baozi in the streets may have very different realities and abilities of empowerment. Nevertheless, Sweden was placed as number 22 out of 44 countries in the same study (ibid.). Still, according to the three R's (Rights, Representation, Resources), Sweden would probably determine China's treatment of women as insufficient. Does that mean that they, in accordance with their foreign policy, should stop conducting business with China? The current reality is that China is Sweden's largest trading partner in Asia and top ten trade partner globally (Business Sweden).

What other factors are responsible for remaining inequalities? The question has to be answered by taking into account, and examining, societal, political, and economical factors. Despite their categorization, it is important to note that all these factors are interlinked, as they are elements within one society. Therefore, every explanatory factor within the categories relates to, and affects one another. This might result in a complex and unfocused thesis unable to draw any conclusions but that there are complexities and contradicting information everywhere. Isabelle Attané convincingly argues the complexity of this paradox:

The analysis of social, just as much as economic and political, transformations is moreover sometimes so delicate that it quite rightly leads us to conclude that a paradox exists. The attitude of Chinese society towards women, which also displays its quota of paradoxes, testifies to this duality – itself all the more complex since it remains marked by the search for equality between the sexes that prevailed during the Communist parenthesis.

Attané 2012: 5

This leads into the factor of traditional society. In the collective era, the family was the unit of production, and the father earned the ultimate power in the household (Yan 2009: 133). Since the losing of these collective ideas, the father has less status within the family, which evens balance within the family. This is also true for rural women and girls, even if the hierarchy is still more visible in the countryside. In the traditional family, young women and girls were marginal outsiders and had a temporary positions since they were to leave when they got married. From their temporary position, they were regarded as drains on family wealth when being just daughters. When moving to the husband's family and transforming to daughters-in-laws, they were instead viewed as potential threats to the existing family order (Yan 2009: 134). The only way to acquire a proper place in the domestic sphere was to become a mother (Yan 2009: 134).

After decades of Communism and economic liberalism, the Chinese society is still considered a traditional patriarchal society (Attané 2012: 4-5). However, China's traditional values system has recently experienced competition from increasing modernization and individualization; all especially apparent in urban areas. (Attané 2012: 4-5). To return to Attané's arguments on perplexities: She claims that it is really difficult to try to differentiate between traditional societal norms and more temporary socio-economic reactions within for example globalization (ibid.).

Still, trying to understand the transformations of opportunities, representations and possibilities for women is imperative for the understanding of contemporary China: "In fact, the place given to women, measured by various indicators relating to education, employment, demography, and health, is a generally reliable indicator of the radical changes affecting society" (Attané 2012: 5). Yet this is a paradox in itself: although in certain respects, notably regarding education and health, improvements in the situation of Chinese women in the absolute are indisputable, in others, their relationships with men remain all the more unequal for being part of a demographic context that is not in their favor (ibid.).

In the beginning of the Maoist era, the State interfered in order to change some of existing norms and values. For example, the Chinese Communist Party's slogan "Equal protection of the sexes" goes against traditional values (He & Ng 2013: 280). Several attacks were also made on the patrilineal ideology and on kinship organizations (Yan 2009: 133). Recently, however, many of the reforms have dealt with relaxing the State's control of economy and society (Perry & Selden 2010: 7). Still, there are some spheres where the state control is extremely visible.

The One Child Policy was quite rigorously enforced in the 1980's and 1990's, but then continued in a more relaxed manner (Perry & Selden 2010: 8). The Policy is more or less only enforced on ethnically Han Chinese living in urban areas (White 2010: 175-176). The reason why I mention this again is because this actually poses a threat towards to traditional value system, because China is a society for which its whole core in terms of cultural values, revolves around kinship bonds and family continuity through future generations (Perry & Selden 2010: 8). Still, the One Child Policy worked well in urban areas, as the urban population fast accepted the new small family norm (White 2010: 173-174). Probably due to the fact that the urban women could rely on the state and collective pensions for their future (ibid.). In rural areas, however, the Policy was questioned and resisted upon its establishment. The main reason being that agriculture work require a lot of man-labor (White 2010: 174). Additionally, rural women did not enjoy a functional welfare regime like the urban women (White 2010: 173). Finally, the government had to alter the campaign for rural areas into "one-son or two child-policy" (White 2010: 176). This system allowed couples that had a daughter to try again for the chance of having a boy (Ibid.). However, disappointing health care in rural areas, as well as abortion of healthy female fetuses are still existing problems. The latter has created the uneven gender divide of the population, especially for the generations that were subjects of the Policy (Ibid.). However, the policy has gradually been relaxed; two years ago the Party made the announcement that it was acceptable for single children to be allowed two children. The latest development on the One Child Policy (family planning policy) is that the Party has decided to allow everyone two children instead (BBC News 2015).

Another object for state control is the household registration system, the Hukou, which exists in order to create a balance between the rapidly developing market economy and the stability of the one-party political monopoly (Wang 2010: 83). It has been a "major source of sociopolitical control and governance in the People's Republic of China [...]" (Wang 2010: 80). However, it also constantly recreates inequality within the urban-rural divide. However, various reforms have been established in order to decrease the exclusion of rural citizens, but they are excluded from many of the subsidies given to the urban people (Wang 2010: 81-83). The Hukou system unarguably creates inequality, and rural women are even less prioritized (Chen 2014: 72). The Hukou system also greatly affects girls' access to education. This is the reason why many children have to stay in the rural areas when their parents go to the cities and work. The rural women who migrate find themselves in an even less fortunate situation, as "...rural migrant workers in the city [...] are not entitled to any forms of social and housing welfare" (Pow 2009: 379). The only positive factor is that they can work and earn money in order to support themselves and possible children left behind.

When the Communist Party came into power in 1949, it was stated that women should be treated equal with men (Pow 2009). For example, Mao Zedong argued that "women hold up half the sky" (The Economic Times 2012), and the rights of women strongly improved upon the revolution (Branigan 2014). After the initial attempts of modernity, however, the Party then turned back to traditional gender roles with the nuclear family as the key to a harmonious society (Pow 2009).

For most part, the Chinese population lives in a less oppressive environment now compared to the Maoist period (Dickson 2010: 23). The current leaders keep balancing between avoiding political uprisings and "a willingness to tolerate local protests and social movements that do not directly challenge their own claims to power" (Perry & Selden 2010: 28). Still, for (political) activists, "the CCP's hand can still be quite heavy" (Dickson 2010: 23). However, Tarrow argues that "popular mobilization and institutional change" intersect, fundamental changes in the current regime are entirely possible (Tarrow 2008: 10).



## 7 Conclusion

Here in the conclusion I would like to return to the research questions outlined in the introduction. The first one is: How can the development of gender equality in China since 1980 be described through the intersectionality theory? The second one is: Based on the question above, what explanatory factors does the intersectionality theory detect for explaining this development?

The graphs do not present the intersectional perspective but only the development of gender equality through the three definitions. Their result, however, has been analyzed through an intersectional perspective. Taking into account that gender statistics is scarce in China, like Chen argues, the graphs still managed to provide an overview of the development of gender equality through different definitions. Even though they focus on various parts of women's empowerment, it is interesting to draw potential conclusions of the development of the Chinese society through them as well. For example, the percentage of women acquiring education and the years of women's education has seen a dramatic effects which undoubtedly can be viewed as a societal development as well (see figure 4-8). Furthermore, the benefits of that development should be detectable in Chinese society.

According to the State Council, the promotion of gender equality has been further improved over the last two decades, by for example establishing and expanding government organs concerned with gender equality (State Council People's Republic of China 2015). Another example is that women's development was included in the last four "five-year plans" for economic and social development (ibid.). If this increased promotion is true, then this research, which covers development over the last 35 years, ought to capture these efforts in terms of improved scores. Indeed, representation in the National People's Congress has overall increased, and the share of girls in schools and their average levels of

educational attainment have also improved. Unfortunately, there is no positive development in terms of women's, or men's, rights. There are three possible reasons for this lack of results: the first is that the government's actions are not as explicit as they argue. The second is that the efforts has not resulted in any difference; either it will be detectable later in time or they were simply not effective and will not be detectable at all. The third is that this study does not cover the dimensions of gender equality the government is referring to.

To sum up: Promoting factors for gender equality include the rising economic freedom, result-oriented market, globalization, and individualization. Challenging factors are for example: The traditional Value System, ideology, the Hukou system, urbanization, the One-child policy, the son preference, and the conservative political sector.

Gender equality is something that is ought to be created, it does not simply exist in the current societal formation. It is similar to democracy in that sense: It has to be created and then nurtured as it is not just one great leap but many combined actions that create a democratic system, or gender equality... China certainly has great determination and effectiveness to apply should they desire: Maybe a gender equal society can become the new Chinese dream?

However, when examining this development, it is important to stress that not even the so called developed states are fully developed in terms of gender equality. And while China has developed rapidly in economic terms, there is still a lot of improvement to be made within the society. Ke Qianting's conclusion on the subject is that "cultural and systematic elements as well as the lack of gender education in schools are impending women's developments" (2012). My conclusion on the development of gender equality in China is coincidentally the same as the State Council of the People's Republic of China: "There is still a long way to go to achieve gender equality in China, and arduous tasks remain to be tackled" (2015).

It seems that state control over personal lives is one common factor for all mentioned factors: Economical, political and judicial factors all seem to be



derived from a This is apparent through the Hukou system, where people might lose their original rights when moving, but may at least choose where to live. It is also apparent through the One Child Policy, where women cannot choose the number of children they wish to have, but have more chance to provide for the children they do get. It is also apparent through the laws on the institution on marriage.

The Fourth United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, has been considered a significant turning point for the global agenda for gender equality.

Mao Ze Dong once said that “women hold up half the sky”. In fact, there are several similar notions that the West can learn from China. Women holding up half the sky does not suggest that women are competing with men, it suggests that women are needed in society, and that they should be given the space to invoke their unique qualities in order to achieve the full and whole sky (society). The more power women gain, in every aspects of life, the more agencies they have over their lives. Gender equality does not necessarily have to be a zero-sum game; it can be beneficial for both sexes. Furthermore, the focus on results rather than the person is something very typical for China. It might be viewed as impersonal or cold, but some layers of discrimination are actually limited when the focus shifts from individuals to actions.

To conclude: Despite certain development, women are more disadvantaged than men within Chinese society. Yet, inequality is not only prevailed between sexes. There is an inequality between people with urban and rural Hukou, between generations, class etc. Younger women and girls, both urban and rural, are gaining more power over their lives, but this affects the older women negatively. In order for the situation to improve, women and girls need to gain more than just temporary empowerment. The future for women in China is also connected to the imbalanced population and its resulting marriage crisis. The combination between state policy and traditional cultural preferences produces, and re-produces, a discriminating and old-fashioned son-preference.

This thesis marks a new research area in its way of describing development of gender equality in terms of three different definitions from an intersectional perspective. The findings, while less from complete, allude to a very interesting field to be explored. China is characterized with a number of inequalities, and the natural progression is to start diminishing the differentiation between different forms of inequalities within academics, while at the same time allowing for different methods for achieving interesting results to analyze.

Incidentally, several of the above mentioned reasons are mainly identified as diminishing the importance of women in society. In some ways, it has resulted in the opposite, yet again proving Attané's paradox. Ultimately, the change in mentality within the population would probably result in the largest impact, no matter if China is a democracy or not.

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