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Holding Up Half the Sky: Democracy and its Implications for Chinese Women

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Holding Up Half the Sky: Democracy and its Implications for Chinese Women

Abstract

China is democratizing, but what does this entail for Chinese women, a relatively powerless group within society? This thesis focuses on the implications of democracy for women in China through comparing and contrasting the efficacy of electoral participation and civil society in empowering women. It finds that civil society, as seen in government-organized non-government organizations such as the All-China Women's Federation and more independent non-government organizations, are more beneficial to women since these groups provide much-needed services and also communicate the concerns of women to the government elite in Beijing. In contrast, electoral participation at the village level has limited influence on the male-dominated power structure in China. In fact, voting disadvantages women in several key ways and has failed to inspire them to become politically engaged. The conclusion that civil society, not electoral participation, is more effective at empowering women is further corroborated by two comparative analyses, one with the Former Soviet Union and Soviet Bloc and the other with South Korea.

Keywords

China, democracy, women's rights, Social Sciences, Political Science, Avery Goldstein, Goldstein, Avery

Disciplines

Law | Law and Gender | Law and Politics

Holding Up Half the Sky:
Democracy and its Implications for Chinese Women



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List of Abbreviations

ACWF	All-China Women's Federation
CC	Central Committee
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CKWO	Council of Korean Women's Organizations
CPD	Congress of People's Deputies
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
FSU	Former Soviet Union
FWCW	Fourth World Conference on Women
GONGO	Government-Organized Non-Government Organization
KWAU	Korean Women's Associations United
MCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NPC	National People's Congress
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
VEC	Village Election Committee
WRI	Women's Research Institute

Chapter One- Introduction

It should come as no surprise that Chinese women face discrimination in their society. Women everywhere are disadvantaged relative to men. Throughout the world, poverty is feminized with women overrepresented among the poor and illiterate (United Nations Development Fund for Women [UNIFEM], 2008b). Violence against women is rampant, as one in three women will suffer at least one form of violence in her lifetime (UNIFEM, 2008c). The combination of poverty and violence leaves women with little control over their bodies and especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Women also lack a voice in their governments as the average female participation in both the single or lower house and the upper house or senate of parliaments worldwide is 18.4% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009).

Chinese women are no exception to these statistics. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Report*, women are more than one-fifth the total population but only hold 20.3% of seats in the National People's Congress (2008a). Although 68.8% of the female population over age fifteen participates in the economy, the ratio of estimated female to male income is 0.64 (UNDP, 2008a). The issue of gender inequality is even more pressing in China due to the nation's imbalanced sex ratio. In comparison to the global ratio of 106 boys per 100 girls, China's sex ratio is heavily skewed with 119 boys per 100 girls (Tan, 2008, p. 2). The surplus of about 100 million men and the scarcity of women have resulted in increased kidnapping, prostitution, and woman-trafficking (Tan, 2008, p. 3).

Women's empowerment in China is an urgent issue as the sex ratio continues to increase and more boys are entering into adulthood. Political change in the form of liberalization and democracy may offer hope for women's rights in China. With the exception of the Tiananmen

Square incident, the post-Mao era ushered in political opening and reforms. Political liberalization was evident in the landmark 1987 Provisional Organic Law of Village Committees, which formally introduced village elections (B. He, 2007, p. 1). Civil society has expanded through government deregulation and modern technology so that Chinese people now have more space and liberty to organize or protest. The political liberalization in China has been so widespread that some scholars even call these reforms democratization (Thornton, 2008, p. 7).

What are the implications of these political reforms for Chinese women? The relationship between democracy and women has long been contested. Democracy, as suffragettes insisted in their battle for the ballot, offers women universal emancipation. Indeed UNIFEM seeks to empower women through increased political participation in democratic governance (2008a). Cal Clark and Rose Lee's chart "How Democratization Can Promote the Status of Women," Figure 1 in the Appendix, visually demonstrates the potential benefits of democracy for women. Democracy allows women to obtain public office and, from these positions of authority, craft laws beneficial to women. Democracy also provides public space for women's groups to organize and lobby for increased rights. Thus, democracy allows women an alternative to the patriarchy in which they currently reside (Clark & Lee, 2000b, p. 2).

However, modern day feminists disagree with the idea that democracy liberates women. Instead, they lament the disappointment of democratic governance and its failure to expand opportunities for the female half of the population (Young, 1989, p. 258). Modern feminists argue that democracy in a patriarchal society perpetuates the lower status of women, and the path to empowerment illustrated in Figure 1 does not operate as smoothly as projected when practiced in reality. In a male-dominant democracy, men hold seats in representative assemblies whereas disadvantaged groups, such as women, are absent (Young, 1989, p. 258). Democracy, according

to these scholars, fails to recognize that women are an oppressed group, and consequently continues the exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness the female population (Young, 1989, p. 261). The women and democracy debate is relevant to a democratizing China, but does democracy help Chinese women? If so, which aspects of democracy most improve the prospects for women's empowerment in China?

Current literature is too fragmented to answer whether democracy furthers or hinders women's rights in China. Studies of democracy and research regarding Chinese women abound, but there lacks a wide-ranging view of democracy's implications for Chinese women. For example, experts in village elections rarely acknowledge the true decision-making authority of the Chinese leadership based in Beijing. Scholars who understand the nature of elite Chinese politics do not often apply this knowledge to the condition of women. Thus, the experts who study democracy's effect on governance in China fail to provide a comprehensive view of democracy and Chinese women.

This thesis draws from a variety of sources in an attempt to overcome the fragmentation that characterizes the current literature. The methodology of this paper includes statistics from the Chinese government as well as articles from respected sinologists of diverse backgrounds, ranging from political science to sociology. Furthermore, this thesis evaluates the relationship between democracy and women's rights through comparative analyses with other cases: the former Soviet Union and states in its Soviet bloc; and South Korea.

The comparative analyses and data from the Chinese government and various sinologists elucidate the relationship between democracy and the status of Chinese women. Political liberalization in China has resulted in reforms, such as direct village elections and civil society, which in turn have different effects on Chinese women. The research in this thesis reveals that

civil society furthers women's rights in China but electoral participation fails to do so. The ballot box has not empowered Chinese women, but rather resulted in fewer women holding elected office. Voting has not reduced the political gender gap, leaving women as disempowered as before. Moreover, women's rights cannot be furthered through village elections because those elected leaders do not create influential legislation regarding women. Instead, the unelected elite of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) determine national legislation, including that pertaining to women's rights (Saich, 2001, p. 89). Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg identify twenty-five to thirty-five individuals, with few exceptions, men, from the military, wealthy municipalities and provinces, and Standing Committee of the CCP Political Bureau (Politburo), who constitute China's top leadership (1988, p. 35).

Section A of Chapter Two explores the nature of Chinese village elections. Elections were first held in a Guangxi village in 1979, but slowly expanded throughout the nation following the 1987 Provisional Organic Law of Village Committees (B. He, 2007, p. 1). In 1998, China's dedication to electing village committees was reestablished by the New Organic Law on Village Committees, which further extended fair and open elections to China's 930,000 villages (Ministry of Civil Affairs [MCA], 2007a). Through the years, Chinese village elections have shifted from nominations by officials or village assemblies to direct nominations by village citizens (B. He, 2007, p. 23). Improvements are still necessary in the area of electoral procedure because the current system in which three to nine village administrators oversee election operations is not sufficient to guarantee independent results (B. He, 2007, p. 26-7). Since the 1987 Provisional Organic Law was enacted, nearly one million villages have conducted elections, which translate to 600 to 900 million rural Chinese voters (B. He, 2007, p. 3).

Section B of Chapter Two analyzes the effect of village elections on Chinese women. Since elections have occurred, the number of women holding public office has decreased substantially (Howell, 2006, p. 607). For example, the 121 villages in Chengguan township, which first experienced direct voting after the 1998 New Organic Law on Village Committees, witnessed a 41.7% decrease in women elected to village committees after direct elections in May 1999 (B. He, 2007, p. 127). Furthermore, direct elections contributed to a 78.9% decrease in women holding leadership positions, meaning only 1.11% of Chengguan villages had a female village head (B. He, 2007, p. 127). Chengguan township reflects a major effect of elections throughout villages in China. Nationally, the decrease between the era before and after direct elections has resulted in a mere 1% of villages with female village committee chairs and 16% of village committees with female members (Howell, 2006, p. 607).

Not only are women becoming less and less involved in village representation, they also continue to lag behind men who are more politically active. Electoral participation has not closed a gender gap with Chinese men, who possess more media awareness, political knowledge, interest, internal and external efficacy, and non-electoral participation than Chinese women do (Tong, 2003, p. 1). Surveys of various villages reveal that women, despite the right to vote, report they know neither the laws nor their village heads well (B. He, 2007, p. 125). More women than men feel that voting is inconsequential, another indication that that electoral participation is not empowering women (B. He, 2007, p. 126).

Voting has resulted in a decrease in women in village committees and it perpetuates the gender gap for multiple reasons. First, elections replaced the quota system in which seats were reserved for women (Rosen, 1995, p. 327). Second, women village committee members tended to have expertise only in the field of traditional women's work and therefore, were not

competitive with more well-rounded male candidates (Rosen, 1995, p. 327). Third, economic liberalization has negatively impacted women, resulting in fewer women participating in government. Increased economic opportunities have attracted rural men to Chinese cities, leaving the dual burden of farm work and domestic responsibilities for women. Female participation in the labor force has similarly obstructed women's participation in politics as their tenuous employment becomes their primary priority (Wang, 2004, p. 102).

Fourth, voting allows for prejudice and gender biases to be manifested (Wang, 2004, p. 102). In China, a "feudal" attitude which deems women inferior to men still exists (Howell, 2006, p. 604). This belief fuels the Chinese practice of educating of boys instead of girls, which contributes to female candidates being less educated, and thus less attractive to voters than their male competitors. Cultural biases also circumscribe a woman's *guanxi*, or informal loyalties and connections, making it more difficult for her to utilize networks to advance her campaign (Howell, 2006, p. 615).

Lastly, age preferences and media portrayal also contribute to the decline of women in government after elections took place. Due to childbearing and rearing responsibilities, women are unable to run for office until they are older, but unfortunately, voters prefer younger candidates (Howell, 2006, p. 612). The media's neglect or negative portrayal of women leaders further hinders the ambition of female candidates (Cooke, 2005, p. 159).

Village elections in China are unsuccessful in empowering women since voting has resulted in fewer women in office, yet there is an additional reason, unique to China, for the failure of the ballot box. Section C of Chapter Two explores the true decision-making authority in China to explain why village elections are not a useful channel for advancing women's rights. Village elections allow rural voters to select their village committees (B He, 2007, p. 89-90).

However, power in Chinese politics does not lie in the hands of these thousands of elected officials, but rather it is vested in the handful of men who compose the elite of the CCP.

Elite Chinese politics consists of the unelected men who lead the often intertwined institutions of the Party and the state. While the Constitution designates the National People's Congress as the highest power in the country, in actuality, decision-making derives from the Standing Committee of the Politburo, an unelected body of nine men (Saich, 2001, p. 89). The nine men of the Politburo Standing Committee are the core of China's leadership, but the high leaders in the military and the governors and mayors of affluent provinces and municipalities can also wield great power in dictating the governance of China (Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1988, p. 35). No amount of village elections will change the composition of the Chinese elite who are the true decision-makers of national policy. Voting by the general population does not determine the membership of the Politburo Standing Committee, which, since the founding of the CCP in 1921, has never granted a seat to a woman (Rosen, 1995, p. 317).

Since the highest positions in the party and state are unelected, rising to these levels requires informal politicking, an area in which Chinese women are disadvantaged. Women lack the *guanxi* to enter the highest echelons of politics (Jin, 2004, p. 225). While poor men also have limited connections and networks, they can create more through enlisting in the People's Liberation Army, an opportunity denied to women (Jin, 2004, p. 225). Decision-making, including legislating women's policies, lies with an unelected body in which women are poorly represented and have little chance of entering. Because village elections cannot alter this political system, voting is an ineffective means to further women's rights.

Proponents of village elections may counter the notion of the all-powerful CCP Politburo or the supremacy of a handful of Chinese political elite. Indeed, they are correct in pointing to

China's increasing decentralization as provinces and municipalities gain power at the expense of the Center. The growing financial autonomy of China's twenty-two provinces and four municipalities allows them to challenge the central government (Saich, 2001, p. 141-2). While the Center does rely on provinces, townships, and villages to enforce national legislation, ultimate power still resides with a few elite men in Beijing, namely the Politburo Standing Committee. Not only does Beijing continue to produce regulations, but it also possesses the ability to punish the leaders of provinces, townships, and villages who either neglect to enforce or consciously violate national laws. Oftentimes, refusing to promote a provincial leader is enough to turn his defiance into obedience (Saich, 2001, p. 146).

While electoral participation fails to further women's rights, democracy's promotion of civil society is helpful in empowering women. Section A of Chapter Three explains civil society in China. Civil society, the space between the state and the family where people can organize to check the state's power, is steadily becoming a force in China (Hayes, 2002, p. 95). The political liberalization initiated by Deng Xiaoping has promoted an explosion of civil organizations from 4,446 registered organizations in 1989 to 266,612 in 2003 (Z. He, 2008, p. 102). These organizations, however, operate in a civil society which differs from the liberal democratic notion of civil society.

The definition of civil society in China deserves specific attention as the classic Western understanding of voluntary organizations and civic participation is not applicable in China, a one-party state with strict stipulations on the freedom of assembly. Baogang He provides a fitting description of civil society in China through his term "semi-civil society" (B. He, 1997, p. 8). China's semi-civil society, which lies between liberal democratic civil society and

totalitarian state control, is characterized by the fact that Chinese associations are both autonomous from and dependent on the government (B. He, 1997, p. 8).

Like the civil society of liberal democracy, China's semi-civil society offers organizations freedom to organize everyday citizens and lobby government officials. Organizations may receive funding from a diverse pool of sources including international agencies, such as the UNDP and the World Bank (Du, 2004, p. 176). With stable financial support, organizations are able to serve their constituencies through offering welfare services, spreading awareness for their cause, and even affecting policy change.

While semi-civil society in China shares some commonalities with Western civil society, there are also aspects of semi-civil society which echo the practices of totalitarian dictatorship. For example, China's semi-civil society contains regulations on the formation of organizations. All organizations and associations must register with state officials and find a sponsor for day-to-day supervision (Z. He, 2008, p. 170). Rejection by one sponsor usually precludes an organization from securing approval from another, and similar organizations are forbidden from co-existing at the same administrative level (Saich, 2000, p. 130-1). These strict requirements are the CCP's tactics of discouraging organization formation and curtailing the scope of their actions. After an organization is created, the party can still use the justification of national stability to eliminate an organization it finds threatening (Z. He, 2008, p. 170).

China's semi-civil society imposes restrictions, and all organizations have some degree of state involvement. Within semi-civil society, however, is an array of organizations with some closely intertwined with the state and others more detached from it. This thesis recognizes the difference between a government-organized non-government organization (GONGO) and a non-government organization (NGO). The former oxymoronic term refers to a state-created and

state-funded group which, under the premise of a voluntary NGO, seeks to fulfill the state's goals (Naim, 2007, p. 96). In contrast, the latter term describes organizations formed by Chinese citizens which register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs as prescribed by the law. The nature of China's semi-civil society entails state regulation, but it is a mistake to generalize all organizations in China as GONGOs.

Chapter Three evaluates the effect of civil society on Chinese women first through the analysis of a GONGO and then through the study of NGOs. The differences between GONGOs, initiated by the state, and NGOs, independently formed but state approved, necessitate the separate evaluation of their influences on women.

Section B of Chapter Three explores the efficacy of the GONGO the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), a mass organization within the CCP committed to the advancement of Chinese women (ACWF, 2008a). During the Cultural Revolution, the ACWF ceased to operate but returned in 1978 with the reestablishment of its 55,303 branches and 86,053 cadres to various levels of government (Du, 2004, p. 175). Since its return dovetailed the spectacular economic growth of China as well as the repercussions of rapid industrialization and globalization, the ACWF has expanded its capacity to meet the increasing economic, technical, cultural, educational, and health challenges facing women (Du, 2004, p. 175). The ACWF's role within the CCP offers it benefits such as the rare opportunity to voice the interest of women upwards to the Party elite while also transmitting CCP policy downwards to women (Howell, 2003, p. 192).

While the ACWF has been effective in furthering women's rights, they are not the only women's organization operating within China's semi-civil society. Section C of Chapter Three evaluates NGOs which aim to serve women through multiple channels. Grassroots women's organizations offer hotlines, clubs, and counseling centers, services especially vital to migrant

women who leave their rural homes to seek employment in metropolitan centers (Du, 2004, p. 185). Women's NGOs also utilize media as a tool to protect women's rights. For example, the Women's Media Monitoring and Testing Network encourages television programming to portray women in a fair manner, while many grassroots NGOs publish magazines, including the popular *Rural Women Knowing All*. These magazines provide information on health, law, and technological services for women (Bu, 2004, p. 285). Furthermore, female academics have organized to establish research seminars and national as well as international conferences to publicly discuss gender issues. The leadership of these women scholars has successfully established women's studies in universities, and their research on gender has influenced national policy (Howell, 2003, p. 197).

Though Chinese civil society does not operate wholly independent from the state, GONGOs and NGOs have been able to enlighten the government as well as the Chinese people about the importance of gender equality. For instance, throughout the 1990s, NGOs published extensively about increased violence towards women while the ACWF, with its members in the Ministry of Health and the State Family Planning Commission, worked to ban prenatal sex selection (Tan, 2008, p. 14). In 1995, upon suggestion by the ACWF and approval by the State Council, all media outlets were forbidden to demean or insult women's images (Tao, 2004, p. xxx). The NGO Women's Media Monitoring and Testing Network works to enforce this prohibition of female desecration in film, television, and publications (Bu, 2004, p. 283).

Not only are civil society organizations successfully promoting women's rights in China, but they are likely to continue to do so. The number of women's organizations is expected to increase in the coming decades. China's unwavering dedication to economic growth will result in more vulnerable women, for example, more migrant women workers, who need health care,

child care, education, and housing. The state, especially in the midst of the current global financial crisis, will be unable to provide this sorely needed welfare. China's government has and will continue to rely on civil society to provide social services to the country's citizens (Du, 2004, p. 177). Because civil organizations are necessary for the stability of the nation, the CCP is likely to tolerate their existence.

The conclusion that civil society is more beneficial for women in China than is electoral participation may indicate a general relationship between women and democracy if such trends are evident in other parts of the world. Chapter Four engages in comparative analyses of electoral participation and civil society in China with these aspects of democracy in other states.

Section A of Chapter Four contains a comparative analysis of China and the former Soviet Union (FSU) and Soviet bloc states to understand the nature of electoral participation and women. China and Soviet states differ in many respects yet they both transitioned from communism to a greater degree of political openness. Despite different history, language, and culture, China's process of political and economic liberalization has resembled that of the FSU and its Eastern European bloc. Perestroika was similar to China's political liberalization, and the two cases also reveal similarities in the effect of elections on women. For example, reforms in the Soviet bloc during the late 1980s resulted in plummeting female representation in the parliaments of Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia (Molyneux, 1990, p. 35). Maxine Molyneux attributes the decrease in Eastern European parliaments to the dismantling of Communist quotas for female representation and the effect of economic liberalization on women (1990, p. 23-4). The presence of these factors and a similar decrease in women holding public office in China suggests that elections do not necessarily further women's rights.

While Section A of Chapter Four compares the effect of electoral participation on women in China and the FSU, Section B focuses on the relationship between civil society and women through a comparative analysis of China and South Korea. The two East Asian states share a common Confucian heritage, history of authoritarianism, and extraordinary economic development in recent decades. Since South Korea is a fully functioning democracy while China is undergoing political liberalization, the conclusion extracted from the former is applicable to the latter. Despite extremely low representation of women in elected office, South Korea boasts of advanced women's rights legislation. South Korea's progressive legal stance for women is a result of the nation's robust feminist groups which influence politics through lobbying the executive (Clark & Lee, 2000a, p. 189). The analysis of South Korea verifies the conclusion that Chinese women benefit more from civil society than electoral participation.

Understanding which channels of democracy provide maximum protection for Chinese women is vital since women's rights in China have not come naturally. If they are to be realized, these rights must be created and defended through specific political institutions and regulations. Electoral participation, due to its decrease in Chinese women holding public office and, more importantly, its inability to wrest power from CCP elite, is ineffective at furthering women's rights. However, civil society, as seen in the ACWF and pure NGOs, successfully serve women through provision of welfare services and influencing of government officials to protect women's rights. The empowerment women are experiencing through China's burgeoning civil society may hold the most promising path for them to become full citizens of their nation, which would be a major step towards validating Mao's famous quote "Women hold up half the sky."

Chapter Two- Electoral Participation

A. Village Elections¹

The journey to implement village elections spans nearly two decades. Village committee elections were first held in a Guangxi village in 1979 as a method of creating stable local government after the end of the commune system. Throughout the early to mid-1980s, the CCP elite discussed the idea of village democracy. Finally, on November 24, 1987, the state issued the Provisional Organic Law of Village Committees which formally introduced village committee elections to China's over 600,000 villages (B. He, 2007, p. 1-3).

The provisional period in which villagers experimented with electoral procedures came to an end after more than a decade. Village elections, with uniform voting procedures, were mandated nationwide by the Organic Law of Village Committees, signed on November 4, 1998. Article Two of the Organic Law clearly establishes “democratic elections, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision” at the village level (MCA, 2007a). According to Article Two, the village committee serves the dual purpose of attending to public welfare and reflecting the views of the villagers (MCA, 2007a). Article Eleven calls for direct elections of the village committee director, deputy director, and members, while explicitly denying any organization or single individual from designating, appointing, or replacing members of the village committee (MCA, 2007a). Article Twenty-four determines the victor of village elections as the candidate who wins the majority of votes (MCA, 2007a). The 1998 Organic Law clearly established village elections in China through its details regarding electoral procedures and adherence to the principles of democratic governance.

¹ For an in depth analysis of China's village elections, see He, B. (2007). *Rural democracy in China*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Since the 1987 Provisional Law allowed for elections and the 1998 Organic Law clarified their implementation, relatively democratic elections have taken place in China. A Village Election Committee (VEC), composed of three to nine members, administers a village's elections (B. He, 2007, p. 26). For example, the VEC registers village citizens over eighteen years of age, facilitates candidate nominations, and selects the date of the election (Pastor & Tan, 2000, p. 494).

Village elections rely on direct nominations for candidates. This practice, known as *haixuan*, involves granting villagers a blank ballot to write their preferences (B. He, 2007, p. 29). After being nominated, a candidate may campaign, a practice which primarily involves home visits and a five to ten minute campaign speech (Pastor & Tan, 2000, p. 496). On election day, registered voters directly elect their village committee members, and an absolute majority is necessary for victory (MCA, 2007a).

After elections, village citizens have the right to recall their elected officials. Article Sixteen of the Organic Law declares a village vote of more than one-fifth creates a valid request for the removal of a village committee member. The grounds for the recall must be provided, and the committee member has the opportunity to defend him or herself. The village committee convenes immediately to vote on the recall request, and a successful recall requires an absolute majority (MCA, 2007a).

Scholars, both Chinese and Western, have surveyed village elections to determine whether they are genuinely democratic. The evaluations from domestic and international institutions reveal improvements over time, yet some challenges remain. For example, while villages increasingly uphold electoral policies such as private voting booths, corruption in candidate selection as well as proxy voting persist (Pastor & Tan, 2000, p. 491-3).

Though village committee elections are not yet standardized free and fair elections, they have already been influential. Since 1987, 930,000 villages have held elections, translating to 600 to 900 million villagers who have cast a ballot (B. He, 2007, p. 3).

B. Elections and Chinese Women

Since 1987, over half a billion Chinese villagers have participated in village committee elections. Their votes shaped the body of village governance which applies Party directives, collects taxes, and regulates family planning. The village committee, thus, directly affects the lives of rural women, as they are the segment of the population responsible for child and elderly care, domestic chores, and increasingly, agricultural tasks (Howell, 2006, p. 606). One may assume, then, that village elections are a blessing for women, a chance for them to vote for the village committee whose responsibilities affect their daily lives. In theory, village democracy should grant women the chance to become active participants in village governance through voting and holding public office. Unfortunately, the opposite has occurred. Elections have not provided women an equal opportunity to shape their government. Instead of empowering women, village elections appear to have weakened their influence. Since the village committee elections began in 1987, the number of women holding committee seats has decreased, and a gender gap in terms of political culture between male and female voters has persisted.

Fewer women hold political office at the village level since the introduction of direct village elections. The Village Committee Election Methods issued by the Ninth People's Congress states women and ethnic minorities (if the village possesses a minority population) must serve on the village committee (MCA, 2007b). In reality, however, most village committees contain either one or no women, which is a stark contrast to the statistics from the

era before village elections. For example, the villages in Chengguan township, Shengzhou city initiated village elections after the 1998 Organic Law. Their pilot elections held in 121 villages created village committees with only 6.7% of seats belonging to women. The number of women serving on the village committee after the election was a 41.7% decrease compared to the number of women on the village committee prior to the election (B. He, 2007, p.127). The decrease is even steeper when looking at the percentage of women serving as village directors. In the villages of Chengguan township, the number of female village directors dropped 78.9% so that only 1.11% of villages had women leaders after the introduction of village elections (B. He, 2007, p.127).

The decrease in women holding public office is not simply confined to Chengguan township. Jin Yihong notes that during the late 1990s, after the 1998 Organic Law legalized village elections throughout China, the number of women on village committees fell (2004, p. 231). Delia Davin and Jude Howell actually point to the decrease of female village committee members in 1988 after the Provisional Law came into effect. Howell finds that women participated in government in smaller numbers after the onset of elections when compared to the Cultural Revolution period when women composed up to 50% of cadres on committees in some areas (2006, p. 607). Davin aptly summarizes the effect of elections on women: “Where there is a choice, voters prefer men” (1996, p. 96).

Voters, with their preference for nominating and electing men, have created village committees with extremely little female participation. While village committees vary throughout China, the aggregate representation of women in village committees is 16% (Howell, 2006, p. 607). In most instances, there is only one woman serving on a village committee, as the Village Committee Election Methods’ requirement of at least one woman on a village committee has

been interpreted as at most one woman (Howell, 2006, p. 607). For example, of the 4,000 residents of Shuipai Village in the Yuecheng district of Shaoxing city, only one woman serves on the village committee (B. He, 2007, p. 128). 24.1% of villages completely disregard the stipulation by the Village Committee Election Methods and contain no woman on their committees (Wang, 2004, p. 100).

For the lone woman who does happen to win a seat on the village committee, her position is still tenuous. Fang Lee Cooke has observed instances in which the unofficial male leaders of a village, unhappy with the electoral victory of a woman, called re-elections to thwart her from assuming office (2005, p. 157).

More often than dramatic re-elections however, is the acceptance of a single woman on the village committee for the sake of tasks related to women's duties. While men on village committees have portfolios in economic development, village banking, and new construction, women on village committees are limited to women's work, culture, or family planning (Howell, 2006, p. 608). Women representatives are confined to these gender-related assignments due to a traditional understanding that women are not suitable for the challenging and more public role of finance (Cooke, 2005, p. 153). Unfortunately, the women's work allotted to female committee members are minor roles with little substantive power. A female committee member reported that "she felt dignity being elected, but was powerless at village committee meetings when she demanded funds to address women's issues" (B. He, 2007, p. 129). Eventually, she quit (B. He, 2007, p. 129).

In addition to the stratification of village committee portfolios, the hierarchy of committee leadership also leaves female committee members with less power than their male counterparts. The 1998 Ministry of Civil Affairs survey of village elections discovered that of

the 834,999 village committees and 3.58 million elected village committee members nationwide, women were only one percent of village committee directors (Jin, 2004, p. 221). The highest position of village leadership resides with men in 99% of the village committees in China (Howell, 2006, p. 608). The dynamic of men serving as leaders and women as deputies at the village level is mirrored at other levels of Chinese leadership. For example, 500 women serve as mayors out of China's 6,000 total mayors, and most of these women are deputy majors (Howell, 2006, p. 609). Women in government usually occupy a secondary position, such as deputy premier, deputy provincial, county or township governor, deputy mayor, or deputy village chairs.

Explaining the Decrease of Women in Village Committees

Village committee elections triggered a substantial decrease in the number of women serving on village committees. Democracy presupposes equality of income, class, ethnicity, and gender when, in fact, Chinese society is stratified with women often possessing less power than men (Howell, 2006, p. 604). Thus, elections simply channel social inequalities into asymmetrical government representation at the village level. This subsection will discuss the specific factors which have caused the decrease in the number of women serving on village committees.

From Hard Quotas to Soft Ones

Prior to the reform period with its direct village elections, twenty percent of seats in all China's political bodies, except the Central Committee of the CCP, the Politburo, and its Standing Committee, were set aside for women (Edwards, 2007, p. 382). Though women in government held little power, their numbers were significant and their presence deemed

necessary. The political liberalization of China, however, replaced these gender quotas with competition for posts (Wang, 2004, p. 101). Though the Village Committee Election Methods specifies that women should serve on village committees, the law failed to establish a hard number. In the absence of definite stipulations, male village leaders manipulated the soft quota and instituted a glass ceiling in which committees may have at most one female member (Howell, 2006, p. 611). Without their seats guaranteed by definitive quotas, women lost representation in village committees.

Limited Expertise Restricted to Women's Work

Direct village elections also resulted in fewer women holding committee seats because female candidates are not as competitive as male ones. As previously mentioned, the portfolio of women committee members contains primarily women's work responsibilities. Thus, women did not develop expertise in fields outside family planning or gender issues, and failed to be competitive with more well-rounded male candidates (Rosen, 1995, p. 327).

Even when women effectively executed their gender related assignments, they still faced difficulty winning votes. First, success in women's work does not produce tangible results which earn votes. Quantifying a woman's achievement in a "soft" task such as culture is challenging and pales in comparison to the visible accomplishment of a man's successful diversification of village industrial exports, for example. Second, a job well done in the field of women's work, particularly family planning, works to the female candidate's disadvantage. Women in charge of family planning are disparaged as people "who want money and people's lives," as they must fine households and institute corrective actions, such as abortions, for

families who violate the one child rule (Rosen, 1995, p. 328). Thus, even when a woman excelled at her duties, she alienated her electoral base.

Economic Liberalization

China's incredible economic liberalization beginning the 1980s yielded phenomenal economic growth but also resulted in several negative consequences for Chinese women. First, economic liberalization burdened women with agricultural work in addition to their domestic responsibilities. China's spectacular growth, located primarily on the eastern seaboard, has attracted millions of the young rural workforce, especially men, to the industries on the coast (Wang, 2004, p. 102). As a result, women have been increasingly responsible for tending the land (Howell, 2006, p. 615). However, women also have the onus of taking care of the family. The task of raising children and preparing meals for the family coupled with new farming responsibilities leave rural women with little time and energy to serve as a village committee member.

Second, economic liberalization decreased women's political participation due to the stress of tenuous employment. During the reform era, more women entered the work force, but the employment did not empower them. Rather women suffered low wages, few promotions, and the constant threat of firing (Ling, 2000, p. 176). After a lay-off, women were re-employed at a rate of 39% whereas men enjoyed a re-employment rate of 63.9% (Wang, 2004, p. 102). The unpredictability of their employment compelled women to be more concerned with their source of income than village politics.

Third, China's obsession with economic growth has cast women's rights to the wayside. Since its transition to a market economy, China has neglected the inequities facing women and

has instead focused mainly on maximizing economic growth (Wang, 2004, p. 101). Without policies designed to address the legacy of gender inequality in terms of resource ownership, women's lower starting point and the lack of assistance from the state means that they are at a competitive disadvantage in both economics and politics. Thus, few women successfully run for office.

Rose Lee and Cal Clark's graph summarizes the negative effect of economic liberalization on women's life circumstances and their participation in politics. Their graph, Figure 2 in the Appendix, demonstrates the economic effects of modernization, which transforms women into the cheap labor of the "industrial reserve army" and marginalizes their role in production. Both of these then allow men to assume leading economic roles. Furthermore, flight to the coasts and increased urbanization breaks down the extended kinship system, which devalues women's traditional role. Male dominance of the new social sector is the ultimate result.

Gender Prejudices in Chinese Culture

The prejudice against women embedded in Chinese culture fuels gender discrimination during village elections. For three thousand years, a feudal patriarchy shaped Chinese culture and its remnants remain in the attitudes of Chinese people today (Wang, 2004, p. 102). The traditional prejudice against women promulgates the idea that women are of poorer quality compared to men (Rosen, 1995, p. 327).

The belief that women are less competent than men is both the cause and the effect of women's traditional role within the home. Because women are not as able as men, they deserve to stay at home, and because they only work at home, women have little knowledge concerning

public affairs and governance. Branching from the belief of female domesticity are stereotypes that women are passive, noncompetitive, and disinterested in non-familial matters (Howell, 2006, p. 610). Ultimately, the well-known Chinese saying *nu zhu nei, nan zhu wai* summarizes the prejudice best: “women live inside, men outside.” (Howell, 2006, p. 609). This pervasive male bias precludes women from winning nominations and elections.

The gender prejudice in Chinese culture manifests not only in men who exclude women from the public sphere, but also in women who internalize their “lower quality” and lack the self-confidence to seek a seat on the village committee. Chinese culture imbues women with the belief they belong at home due to their lack of intelligence and leadership. Even the vice-president of a Hunan city All-China Women’s Federation office admitted, “They [women] don’t have enough ability. Their quality is lower than that of men’s” (Howell, 2006, p. 610). Because women have internalized these gender prejudices, they shy away from public activism and serving on their village committees.

The gender prejudice of Chinese culture has distorted male and female perceptions of women’s ability to participate in the village committee. Chinese culture further contributes to decreased female representation because prejudice results in women enjoying less education and *guanxi* than men. These deficiencies subsequently hinder women at the polls.

Lack of Education

A competitive candidate for village elections usually completes secondary education, but because women, for cultural reasons, are less educated than men, they often fail to win seats on the village committee (Howell, 2006, p. 612). Survey data from the early 1990s indicate that of the six-year olds in China who did not attend school, 80% were girls (B. He, 2007, p. 136).

Education inequity at a young age has consequences in later life, such as illiteracy. During the provisional election period, 70% of the more than 200 million illiterate Chinese were women (B. He, 2007, p. 136). Though a secondary education makes candidates more attractive to voters, 58.8% of Chinese women have not even completed elementary school (Wang, 2004, p. 103).

Chinese culture explains the lower levels of education among women. Because society believes men to be superior to women, many Chinese express strong preference for sons. This son preference allows boys to receive higher quality and quantity of whatever the family can afford, including education (Howell, 2006, p. 610). When family resources are scarce, as they often are for rural families, a daughter's education is usually sacrificed for her brother's continued learning (Howell, 2006, p. 610).

In addition to a preference for sons, the cultural practice of women marrying out of the village dissuades families from educating their daughters. In China, a woman is seen as "flying pigeon" who will marry and relocate to her husband's village (Wang, 2004, p. 102). Since she will eventually leave her family to take care of her husband's, her parents invest less in her education and village leaders are less inclined to develop her leadership skills (Howell, 2006, p. 615).

The limited education afforded to women decreases their chances of winning village committee elections. Without education, women are viewed by men and themselves as unfit to hold office.

Lack of *Guanxi*

Just as Chinese culture constrains a woman's level of education, so too does it limit her *guanxi*, or connections. *Guanxi* describes the "informal social relationships [which] provide the

much needed lubricant for the Chinese to achieve what otherwise may be difficult to secure” (Cooke, 2005, p. 158). *Guanxi* is especially vital in politics, as a candidate’s connections can help a person win an election, receive a promotion, or secure an appointment to office. Because Chinese women possess less *guanxi* than men, victory in direct competitive elections is more challenging for women to achieve.

Chinese culture restricts a woman’s *guanxi*. As mentioned earlier, Chinese women leave their original villages and move to their husband’s. As a newcomer to her husband’s village, a woman feels like an outsider and others treat her as such. Consequently, she struggles to build the *guanxi* necessary to round up votes. In contrast, the men of the village have cultivated *guanxi* from childhood as they attended school in the village and their family and male friends continue to reside in there (Howell, 2006, p. 615). With their extensive connections, men have the advantage of campaign endorsements and name recognition on election day.

Even poor men possess more *guanxi* than women. While wealth is a large determinant of a person’s connections, gender, in China’s gender discriminatory society, matters more. Poor men have the option of serving in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), which grants them the opportunity to extend their *guanxi* beyond the limits of their low socioeconomic means (Jin, 2004, p. 225). Women, however, cannot join the PLA, and thus, they forgo this opportunity to build *guanxi*.

Poor men can also participate in social, *guanxi* fostering activities which are culturally inappropriate for women. While men may drink or smoke, and indeed they are supposed to, women may not. Chinese society looks down on a woman who smokes or drinks, considering such activities improper (Cooke, 2005, p. 158-9). However, it is precisely these after work

activities and networking experiences that build *guanxi*. Cultural norms limit a woman's *guanxi* and subsequently hinder her campaign for a seat on the village committee.

Age Preferences

Age plays a factor in the decrease in the number of women serving on village committees. Strong candidates for village committee elections tend to be young, as a person between eighteen and forty-five possesses the energy needed to meet village challenges (Howell, 2006, p. 612). Women, due to their childcare responsibilities, become most competitive after they are thirty-five years old, leaving only a few years to be considered age-appropriate to serve on the village committee (Jin, 2004, p. 240). While the spectrum of eighteen to forty-five is not a definitive age restriction, neither does the younger age preference favor women.

Media Portrayal of Women

As in many other parts of the world, in China media portrayal of women does not always present women in the most positive light. While the Chinese media does air stories on the accomplishments of women, more often broadcasts reinforce social stereotypes of the female leaders. For example, women leaders are usually framed as cold and unfeminine (Cooke, 2005, p. 159). They either receive these negative portrayals or no media attention at all. Of over 12,000 news items from the top eight newspapers in China, women only made headlines in 16% of them (Cooke, 2005, p. 159). The negative portrayal or absence of female leaders in media reinforces the cultural belief that women ought to stay inside the home and away from public affairs.

Gender Gap

The number of women in local governance after the 1987 Provisional Law has been negatively affected by factors such as soft quotas, economic liberalization, and gender prejudice. In addition to failing to increase the number of women holding public office, electoral participation has also failed to close a more general political gender gap between Chinese men and women. Chinese women lag behind men in several indicators of political culture, defined as the attitudes and behavior of citizens toward politics (Tong, 2003, p. 132). J. Tong's 1993-94 study, based on a multistage, stratified, random sampling design, reveals a national gender gap in Chinese politics prior to the 1998 Organic Law. Tong's survey of 3,360 interviews took place only a few years after the 1987 Provisional Law and village elections were not yet held everywhere. Therefore, his data serves as a baseline to compare with levels of political culture after the Organic Law was enacted.

Tong finds a persistent gender gap with male respondents scoring substantially higher on all survey questions measuring political culture (2003, p. 131). According to Tong's data, men reported greater media attention, political knowledge, political interest, and non-electoral participation. While 13.9% of male respondents affirmed to reading newspapers daily, only 7.1% women claimed the same. More men watched television daily, listened to the radio daily, and accessed more than one media source (Tong, 2003, p. 136). The gender gap is more noticeable in political knowledge as nearly twice as many men as women, 75.7% versus 43.6%, correctly identified the Secretary-General of the CCP (Tong, 2003, p. 136). Men also outscored women in terms of political interest as 68.4% of men and 55.2% of women reported interest. Men were twice as likely to report frequent political discussion, and their conversant also tended to be outside the family (Tong, 2003, p. 136). Furthermore, men reported more non-electoral

participation as 51.1% men while 40% of women claimed to engage in lobbying, contacting officials, or expressive participation in politics (Tong, 2003, p. 138).

In addition to these four measures of political culture, Tong's survey also contained questions on political efficacy, or the belief in politics to produce an effect or change. Data on internal and external political efficacy provide additional evidence of a political gender gap. Internal efficacy is the concept that an individual has the ability to affect the government. Compared to the 23.8% of male respondents, only 14.5% of female respondents agreed they had the capacity to participate in politics (Tong, 2003, p. 137). On the related question of understanding state affairs, 32.4% of men versus 23.3% of women agreed with the statement (Tong, 2003, p. 137). External efficacy is the belief that government is responsive to the individual. More men expressed faith that government listened to them, indicated by the fact that 49.6% of men but only 36.9% of women disagreed with the statement that they had no say in government policies (Tong, 2003, p. 137-8).

Tong's statistics reveal that women score lower than men on all aspects of political life and culture before the 1998 Organic Law. The freedom to vote for village committees, however, had the potential to close the gender gap. Theoretically, when given the ballot, women will become more interested in politics since they personally have the power to create and implement policies. Increased interest would further media awareness as well as political knowledge. Political efficacy, both internal and external, would also increase as female voters see their votes contribute to the village committee. In reality, the effect of voting on the gender gap did not fulfill the possibilities of increasing women's participation in politics. Indeed, there seems to have been no change to the gender gap after the 1998 Organic Law. Baogang He's village survey

revealed that women still lag behind men in terms of legal and political knowledge, political interest, and efficacy despite possessing the power to vote.

While knowledge of law was low overall for the village population, the percentage of politically uninformed women was higher than that of men. 48.4% of women displayed a complete lack of understanding of law compared to 36.0% of men. On the reverse side, 6.7% of men knew the law very well, while only 2.7% of women reported the same. The 2001 National Survey of 2,277 villagers found that throughout Chinese villages, nearly twice as many men as women, 31% compared to 16.5%, knew the law well (B. He, 2007, p. 124-5).

Similarly, more men recognized the political leadership of their villages. About eight percent more men than women reported they knew the village head well. Even more striking was the information regarding having no knowledge of the village leadership. 24.8% of men admitted to no knowledge in contrast to the 37.5% of women who reported the same (B. He, 2007, p. 125).

The gender gap continues to persist in political efficacy as well. While high percentages of both men and women reported they thought the act voting was important or very important, more women deemed their vote inconsequential compared to men. Specifically, 18.7% of women lacked personal external efficacy and believed their vote insignificant, while only 14.4% of men shared that opinion (B. He, 2007, p. 126).

He's survey data indicates village committee elections have not closed a political gender gap. Despite the freedom to vote for their village committee members, women have not become interested in politics since they do not seek to become more familiar with the law or the political leadership in their own communities. Even more important are the statistics on efficacy and the value women place on their vote. Though women think the act of voting is important or very

important, more women than men consider their own vote of negligible importance. Because women seem to have little faith in their vote, electoral participation does not appear to be the most effective means of helping women. If women have political concerns, it is doubtful they will utilize electoral participation as the avenue to address these issues. The persistent gender gap in Chinese politics despite the 1998 Organic Law indicates the ineffectiveness of the ballot in empowering women.

C. Decision-Making Authority in China

As the previous section explained, electoral participation is an inadequate channel to empower women as direct, competitive elections have not resulted in more women holding public office or becoming more engaged in politics. The right to vote has not propelled women into office where they can write legislation beneficial to the female half of the population. The ballot has also failed to encourage women to become more active in politics through raising their own political awareness, interest, and sense of efficacy. In these ways, electoral participation has failed to empower women.

However, there is an additional reason for the ineffectiveness of electoral participation as a means to further women's rights. The creation of laws which assist women do not derive from the elected committees of local villages but rather from the CCP elite in Beijing. The CCP elite are appointed, not elected, and rarely include women in their ranks. This handful of men legislate national policy, including gender-related policy. Since village committee elections have no bearing on the true locus of decision-making authority in China, they are a limited measure to empower women. This section discusses decision-making in China, its imperviousness to electoral participation, and ultimately, the implications for women's rights.

Chinese Communist Party Elites

The Chinese Communist Party, despite eight other political parties, is the ultimate of power holder in China. The CCP not only determines the legislation and execution of all national policies, but its authority also pervades into the realm of morals and values (Saich, 2001, p. 90). This powerful party is organized in a pyramid shape where the base consists of 3.51 million party organizations in work-units, neighborhoods, and villages while the Standing Committee of the CCP Political Bureau rests at the pinnacle (Saich, 2001, p. 80). The top of the pyramid controls decision-making in China.

The power at the apex of the CCP hierarchy lies in the hands of the Politburo Standing Committee. This body of four to nine members meets weekly to deliberate national policies (Lieberthal, 2004, p. 175; Saich, 2001, p. 89). The Standing Committee originated in 1956 as an inner cabinet, and since then, has operated as the highest collective authority in the party (Saich, 2001, p. 90). Figure 3 visually conveys the elite CCP power structure, with the Politburo Standing Committee above all other bodies.

The Standing Committee is the inner core of the Politburo, the center of elite leadership in the CCP. The Politburo usually consists of fourteen to twenty-four members, each of whom holds leadership positions elsewhere in party or state bureaucracy. A key member of the Politburo and its Standing Committee is the paramount leader, a well recognized though informal political role. The paramount leader is one of the hallmarks of CCP leadership since its inception. Mao dominated the party from 1949 to his death in 1976, and after a brief vacuum, Deng Xiaoping assumed the paramount position from 1978 to 1997 (Saich, 2001, p. 82). Though Deng's successors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao cannot be considered paramount leaders

due to their lack revolutionary fighting, personal charisma, and iron-clad control of power, the role of party and state leader is still vital. Hu Jintao may not invoke the authority of Deng, but he is still the current CCP Secretary-General, President of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and as such is the core leader who has the greatest power to create national legislation and otherwise shape the country's political life.

While some scholars limit the Chinese political elite to those in the Politburo, especially its Standing Committee and the top leader, others believe the decision-making elite include a few other select individuals. Lieberthal and Oksenberg identify between twenty-five and thirty-five people who constitute China's elite leadership (1988, p. 35). Besides the core leader and the Politburo, members of the Secretariat of the CCP, the Standing Committee of the State Council, the high command of the military, and the wealthiest provinces and municipalities also attend high level meetings and edit circulars and directives (Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1988, p. 35).

Clearly, membership into the power elite of Chinese politics requires holding high office. For example, the Standing Committee of the Politburo always includes the Secretary-General of the CCP, the Premier of the PRC, the Chairs of the National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (Saich, 2001, p. 90). Additionally, membership in the Politburo as well as Lieberthal and Oksenberg's broader understanding of Chinese elites include leaders of the Party, state, civilian and military bureaucracies, and important regions (Yan, 1995, p. 7; Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1988, p. 35).

A formal title is necessary to become part of the Chinese elite, but it alone is not sufficient. The other component required to become an elite decision-maker is *guanxi*. Because the positions of high office are not elected but appointed, a person's connections are oftentimes

the only means of attaining a top leadership position. The most beneficial relationship is a personal one with a powerful political patron. Through this patron-client relationship, the patron, usually a senior party leader, will jockey for a position in the Standing Committee for his protégé (Saich, 2001, p. 90). The *guanxi* that derives from family connections, common places of origin, shared military service or alma mater, or loyalty to the same patron or commander enables the CCP's authoritarian hierarchy to function (Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1988, p. 156).

With the help of their patrons, an individual can enter the ranks of elite Chinese politics. As an elite, the individual can create national policy. Despite the PRC Constitution which insists otherwise, decisions about policy mostly flows down the chain of command established by the CCP's pyramid structure as seen in Figure 3. Key legislation originates in the Standing Committee, proceeds to the Central Committee for ratification, and finally reaches the NPC for "consideration" (Barnett, 1967, p. 3; Saich, 2001, p. 113-4).

An example of decision-making can be seen in the steps required to produce a political document. Guoguang Wu describes a "political document" as the guidelines for the administering of a principal issue in politics (1995, p. 25). To begin, the policy is initiated by top political leaders, usually those in the Politburo Standing Committee or the Politburo more widely. Drafters are then organized usually from within the same political organ. For instance, the Politburo has its own permanent policy-consulting and document-writing wing. Next, top-down directives are issued followed by research and drafting of the political document. After a revision of the initial work, the Politburo must read and discuss the policy. Following Politburo approval, the political document is disseminated (Wu, 1995, p. 27-30).

Chinese national policy is created in this top-down approach. Because gender policy is also formed in this fashion, it is pivotal to understand the role of women in elite Chinese politics.

Are women represented in elite politics? What roles do they play in high level decision-making?

The Absence of Women in Elite Politics

Women are absent from elite politics, and their lack of representation will most likely continue. Women are either wholly absent or dismally underrepresented in every body of national politics, including the Standing Committee of the Politburo, the Politburo, the Party Central Committee, and the National People's Congress. The smaller—and more elite—the body is the fewer the women represented in the body.

Women are most underrepresented in the Politburo, and especially in its Standing Committee. Since the inception of the CCP in 1921, only five women have served in the Politburo, and no woman has ever entered the Politburo Standing Committee (Rosen, 1995, p. 317). Rosen's graph (Figure 4) is incomplete as it only tracks the female membership of the Politburo until 1992, but it still effectively demonstrates the dismal female representation during the history of the CCP Politburo. Of the five women who have ever penetrated the Politburo, three did so due to their more powerful husbands (Rosen, 1995, p. 317). Unlike the wives of Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Lin Biao, Wu Yi, former Vice Premier, and Liu Yandong, former chair of the United Front Work Department and current State Councilor, entered the Politburo due to their own merit (Lieberthal, 2004, p. 308; Han, 2007). While Wu and Liu have reached the Politburo, neither has risen into the Standing Committee, the single most powerful body in Chinese politics. The Standing Committee currently consists of nine men (*Zhonggong*, 2007).

Women are also underrepresented in the CCP Central Committee (CC). The CC, a fraction of the entire Party Congress, assumes the Congress's functions of debating policy and passing legislation when the Party Congress is not in session (Saich, 2001, p. 85-6). Though the

CC, in reality, acts a rubber stamp for decisions issued by the Politburo, it is still a formally important body with unique powers and its leadership often goes on to higher bodies in Chinese politics (Saich, 2001, p. 86). Unfortunately, women are underrepresented in the CC. Figure 5 of the Appendix contains the percentage of female CC members through 1992. After reaching a peak of 10.3% in 1973, the percentage of female full members of the CC dwindled to 5.2% in 1982 before a slight rebound to 6.4% in 1992 (Rosen, 1995, p. 319). Today, 6.37% of the Seventeenth Central Committee is female (*List*, 2007).

Women compose slightly more of the National People's Congress than the Central Committee, but their numbers are still low. As Figure 6 of the Appendix demonstrates, women composed around 21% of the NPC between the late 1970s and early 1990s (Rosen, 1995, p. 320). Today's percentage of 20.3% continues the pattern of one-fifth female representation (UNDP, 2008a). Not only is one-fifth a low proportion in absolute terms, women's membership in the NPC becomes even more miniscule when taking into account the powerlessness of the NPC. While women may compose a greater percentage of this body, the weakness of the NPC in comparison to the Politburo dilutes their increased membership.

The underrepresentation of women is further evidenced by their absence from the top leadership of the state. The Central Leadership of the state consists of pyramid with one premier, four vice-premiers, and five state councilors. Of the ten possible positions, a woman, Liu Yandong, occupies only one seat as a state councilor, the lowest of the three positions (China Factfile, 2008).

Women are also underrepresented among the twenty-five to thirty-five member elite identified by Lieberthal and Oksenberg. In addition to almost complete exclusion from the Politburo and the Central Committee, they often fail to achieve top provincial leadership roles

and thus are further barred from the Chinese political elite. In regional leadership, women usually serve as deputy mayors of municipalities or vice-governors of provinces, yet these deputy roles do not grant them admission into the power elite (Howell, 2006, p. 608-9). While Lieberthal and Oksenberg also noted top military as part of the political elite, the military command in China consists entirely of men, and therefore, women cannot use the military as a stepping stone to elite politics (Jin, 2004, p. 225).

Women are essentially absent from elite politics, however one defines “the elite,” and they seem likely to continue to be underrepresented at the upper echelons of Chinese politics. The path to the Politburo Standing Committee as well as the larger sphere of elite politics requires *guanxi*, yet cultural prejudices against women working outside the home, smoking and drinking, and receiving adequate education severely curtails a woman’s connections. Neither can elections offer a channel for women to enter the upper echelon of politics as elites are personally appointed by powerful men, not elected by the Chinese masses. Thus, the decision-making authorities in China will most likely remain men.

Decentralization: Detracting from Elite Decision-Making Authority?

Skeptics of elite Chinese politics may argue that increased decentralization has empowered lower regional governments at the provincial and county levels. However, the fact remains that the authority to make the most important decisions remains in Beijing. As a result, the most important decisions are still made by a few select men in the nation’s capital.

The relationship between the Center, those elite national powers in Beijing, and the provinces has undergone devolution in the post-Mao era. Several reasons fueled the

decentralization. First, the reforms during the Deng era required provinces and municipalities to experiment and improve their own economies (Lieberthal, 2004, p. 181).

Successful economies and increased control over finances led to the second reason for decentralization: greater provincial control of their capacities and less dependence on the national government (Saich, 2001, p. 144). The wealthier provinces and municipalities, such as Guangdong and Shanghai, are able to negotiate assertively with Beijing and leverage taxation policies more favorable to them (Lieberthal, 2004, p. 181).

Third, Beijing relies on the provinces and counties in order to manage a state as geographically large and densely populated as China (Lieberthal, 2004, p. 181). Because China is so expansive, lower level leadership, especially at the county level where there are over 2,000 counties and 427 county-status cities, has historically operated as the basic government authority for over two thousand years (Zhong, 2008, p. 136).

Lastly, the reform era's slogan of getting rich fast contributed to deep corruption in the Center (Lieberthal, 2004, p. 181). The loss of moral authority detracted from the Center's credibility and capacity to dictate the provinces and municipalities, allowing for increased decentralization (Saich, 2001, p. 144). The fundamental shift of power from the Center to the localities has emboldened provinces, municipalities, and even counties to make their own decisions, adopt local regulations, and selectively implement national policies (Lieberthal, 2004, p. 181).

Despite the decentralization of power from Beijing to the provinces and municipalities, decision-making continues to emanate from the Center and lower levels of governance are expected to enforce Beijing's decisions. Ultimately, the Standing Committee of the Politburo

and a handful of elite men in Beijing determine the policy direction of the nation. Not only does the Center make the decisions, it also enforces them on lower levels of government.

Various rewards and punishments are used to induce provincial, municipal, and county leaders into complying with the Center. These mechanisms include the Center's direct control of appointment and removal of cadres (Saich, 2001, p. 146). Because so few cadres, less than 7,000, can receive the much desired promotion from the provincial level to a national ministry, many are willing to enforce decisions from Beijing (Saich, 2001, p. 146).

Some of the punishments for Party members chronicled by A. Doak Barnett in the 1960s are still applicable today. For example, in increasing order of severity, education through criticism, warnings, recording of errors on the Party record, probation, and expulsion from the Party are effective means for keeping lower level Party officials loyal to the Center and its decisions (1967, p. 146).

Punishments for non-Party members also reinforce the authority of the Center. Non-Party members in provincial, municipal, or county leadership positions may receive warnings, permanent criticisms on their record, salary demotion, and job dismissal (Barnett, 1967, p. 146).

Furthermore, the increased monitoring of lower levels of governance during the reform era discourages too much noncompliance from provinces and municipalities. The Center has established indirect control of China's subunits through better auditing, collection of information, and disciplinary inspection. If such monitoring reveals unfaithful adherence to national policies, the Center can initiate ideological campaigns or Party school training programs (Saich, 2001, p. 147). In short, despite the decentralization of the post-Mao era, the Center-locality relationship skews in favor of Beijing (Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1988, p. 352)

Ultimately, power resides in the hands of a few men in Beijing. Village elections have not altered the decision-making apparatus in China. Not only have direct, competitive elections at the village level resulted in a decrease of women in village committees and perpetuated a political gender gap between men and women, elections simply do not affect the true locus of power in China. In order to be empowered, first, women must be represented in the bodies that create national legislation and second, national legislation must protect and ensure women's rights. Local elections can achieve neither of those two goals. Women are underrepresented in elite decision-making circles, and because those positions are appointed, not elected, village elections do not propel women into these positions of power. Furthermore, elections do not create legislation that protects women's rights because those that are in elite bodies are not responsive to local constituents or otherwise held accountable to voters. At the village level, women are not empowered, and in China, village elections cannot persuade the decision-making authorities to become more cognizant of women's issues.

Chapter Three- Civil Society

A. Civil Society in China

A central aspect of democracy, in addition to electoral participation, is the existence of civil society. Though scholars may argue over the specific nuances of civil society, they will agree that civil society is the space between the state and the family where individuals can organize to check state power (Haynes, 2002, p. 95). Citizens of a democracy will arrange themselves in organizations, such as labor unions, grassroots movements, and student groups, to advance specific interests in society. Such organizations act as a counterweight to the state and may prevent it from repressing the people.

A more specific definition of civil society can be found in Philippe C. Schmitter's understanding of this crucial facet of democracy. Schmitter's ideal type of civil society contains four components: dual autonomy, collective action, non-usurpation, and civility (B. He, 1997, p. 5). Dual autonomy refers to civil society's independence from both the state and family. Collective action is the civil organization's ability to provide defense or promote the interest of its members. Non-usurpation indicates that the organization does not aim to replace either the state or the family, and lastly, civility should describe the behavior of participants in civil society (B. He, 1997, p. 5).

Though China has been democratizing and enjoys a burgeoning civil society, Chinese organizations do not fulfill Schmitter's definition of an ideal civil society. Since the reform period began under Deng, the number of organizations has increased substantially. Statistics from the Chinese government and outside sources may not necessarily correspond, but they both reveal extraordinary growth in Chinese civil society. Official statistics report 4,446 registered

civil organizations in 1989 but a whopping 266,612 by 2003 (Z. He, 2008, p. 162). More specific reports show that by the end of 2005, there were 168,000 various social associations, 146,000 private non-enterprise organizations, and 999 foundations in China (Z. He, 2008, p. 162). World Bank statistics differ slightly, but also reflect the growth of civil society in China. In July 2006, the World Bank statistics reveal more than 133,000 officially-registered social organizations and 1,268 foundations (2006).

Despite the explosion of civil society, these organizations do not meet the criteria of Schmitter's ideal civil organizations. Chinese civil society is unique due to the state's control by the CCP. China's authoritarian one-party state system infringes upon the independence of civil society, violating the dual autonomy component of Schmitter's definition. Chinese civil society has created organizations which are neither wholly autonomous nor completely dependent on the state. Thus, Baogang He refers to Chinese civil society as "semi-civil society" (1997, p. 7-8).

In China's semi-civil society, the state restricts organizations and denies them complete autonomy. The dependence is best illustrated by the strict registration requirements for organizations. The 1998 Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations consolidated all rules regarding the formation of civil organizations. First, all organizations must find a professional management unit to act as its sponsor. Second, after determining a sponsor and securing its approval, the organization must complete the appropriate paperwork and register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs (Saich, 2000, p. 129). Thus, the 1998 Regulations established a registration system in which an organization must jump through two hurdles.

The sponsorship requirement presents an obstacle to social organizations which experience difficulty securing approval from professional management units. The potential

organization must find a sponsor at the appropriate civil affairs department, but many management units may not be willing to complete official paperwork, register the organization with the MCA, and assume responsibility of the organization. Furthermore, rejection by one potential sponsor, while legally does not preclude the opportunity to look for another, in actuality prevents the would-be social organization from acquiring approval from another sponsor. Social organizations also enjoy no right of appeal against rejection by a potential sponsor (Saich, 2000, p. 130-2).

If a group secures sponsorship, more challenges await as it must then register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. The MCA may refuse to grant permission for the formation of a social organization for multiple reasons. First, civil society in China is subject to a principle of non-competition. The non-competition principle prevents an association or a private non-enterprise unit from forming if there is already an organization engaged in the same or similar field at the same administrative level (Z. He, 2008, p. 169). For example, there cannot be two national calligraphy associations (Saich, 2000, p. 131). Second, Article 31 of the 1998 Regulations grants the MCA the ultimate authority over civil organizations (B. He, 1997, p. 148). Thus, the MCA may subjectively label a social organization “counter-revolutionary” and prevent its formation. The entire registration process, from finding a sponsor to securing approval from the MCA, costs potential organizations in terms of time and money (Saich, 2000, p. 129).

Even after passing through the double tier registration system, civil organizations are not free to do as they please. For example, organizations need permission in order to publish. Groups in China must also request instructions and submit a report to the MCA prior to launching important activities. They are also inspected annually by their sponsor and any indiscretions are reported to the MCA (Z. He, 2008, p. 169). The organization is constantly

concerned with its sponsor who may arbitrarily choose to cease acting as a sponsor (Saich, 2000, p. 133). Furthermore, the MCA is a persistent worry for it may condemn an organization as illegal, discover financial discrepancies, force key members of the organization to transfer into a state job, or reactivate a Party cell within non-Party civil organizations (Saich, 2000, p. 133). Under the premise of these oftentimes idiosyncratic decisions, the MCA may suspend or completely withdraw an organization's permit to operate (Saich, 2000, p. 132).

Civil society in China contains these institutional barriers to free operations because the state refuses to relinquish total control of society. The CCP's foremost priority is political order and state stability (Z. He, 2008, p. 170). The Party fears autonomous civil society will allow seditious groups to undermine national order, and therefore China does not permit free association (Z. He, 2008, p. 170). The MCA is able to monitor social groups, and this power is an effective control mechanism (B. He, 1997, p. 148). By essentially forcing organizations to link up with a government unit, the CCP discourages bottom-up initiatives and ensures that its mass organizations enjoy monopoly representation without challenge (Saich, 2000, p. 132).

Despite the strict regulations established by the state to exert control over social organizations, civil society in China is becoming increasingly autonomous from the state for three reasons. First, the state lacks the finances and human resources to monitor hundreds of thousands of organizations (Saich, 2000, p. 133). The state is incapable of applying its policies, and therefore, organizations enjoy more and more freedom from the state's grasp.

Second, the state is increasingly reliant on social organizations to provide services to Chinese citizens. Since the fundamental shift from the commune system to rapid industrialization and integration with the global economy, Chinese people have suffered from the state's withdrawal of social services. In the state's stead, social organizations have offered

welfare services to the people. Indeed, the state is now dependent on civil society to help with the burdens of social security provision, pension protection, and health and unemployment insurance (Saich, 2000, p. 128). The CCP understands that the masses of unemployed, sick, and frustrated people are the greatest threat to national stability, and therefore needs social organizations to tend to these citizens (Saich, 2000, p. 128).

This change from a unidirectional to a symbiotic relationship between the state and social organizations was echoed at the Fifteenth Party Congress in September 1997 when then President Jiang Zemin emphasized the need to “cultivate and develop...social intermediary organizations” (Saich, 2000, p. 128). Furthermore, at the Ninth NPC (1998-2003), State Councilor Luo Gan criticized the government for assuming the responsibilities of social organizations only to mismanage the provision of services (Saich, 2000, p. 128).

Third, Chinese civil society is increasingly autonomous because organizations have perfected evasion strategies to escape the state’s monitoring. Social organizations register as businesses or refuse to register at all in order to elude state control (Saich, 2000, p. 135). Other organizations use *guanxi* to secure sponsorship from a friendly or categorically irrelevant organization. *Guanxi* also helps an organization register with the MCA without difficulty (Saich, 2000, p. 136).

Due to the transition from total state regulation to more relaxed monitoring, a spectrum of organizations exists in China’s semi-civil society. White, Howell, and Shang define the spectrum from the caged sector, those organizations wholly located within the state, to the suppressed sector of underground civil society (White, Howell, & Shang, 1996, p. 30-35). The organizations most enmeshed with the state occupy the caged sector of civil society. These mass organizations, such as the All-China Women’s Federation and the All-China Federation of Trade

Unions, originate from within the CCP and operate as an extension of the state (White et al, 1996, p. 30-1). The incorporated sector is the area of civil society one degree removed from the caged sector. In the incorporated sector, social organizations, such as trade or professional associations, academic societies, and recreational or cultural clubs, register with the state and abide by the sponsorship requirements. Even further removed from the state than the incorporated sector is the interstitial, “limbo” civil society. Organizations in limbo refer to groups without official license to operate but do so anyway with the help of connections or sympathetic agencies. Lastly, on the other end of the spectrum of Chinese semi-civil society is the suppressed sector. The suppressed sector consists of the underground civil society, where organizations work illegally and incur state surveillance and repression.

This thesis focuses solely on the first two areas of White, Howell, and Shang’s spectrum of civil society: the caged sector and the incorporated sector. The latter two areas of civil society, the limbo and suppressed sectors, exist outside the state, and accordingly, there is little information about organizations in these areas. Furthermore, study of the caged and incorporated sectors directly involves women as there are women’s organizations which fall into both sectors. Analysis of civil society on women’s empowerment can thus be studied through focusing on the caged and incorporated sector.

This thesis refers to organizations in the caged and incorporated sectors as government-organized non-government organizations and non-government organizations respectively. GONGOs fulfill White, Howell, and Shang’s definition of organizations in the caged sector. This oxymoron describes organizations which are created by and receive funding from the state (Schwartz, 2004, p. 36). Moreover, government officials oftentimes serve on the board of directors of GONGOs (Schwartz, 2004, p. 36). Chinese GONGOs mimic the traditionalist

Leninist transmission belt structure, which explains why some scholars lambaste GONGOs as a dangerous masquerade of civil society (Saich, 2000, p. 136; Naim, 2007, p. 96).

The criticism of GONGOs as pure transmission belts is not entirely warranted. GONGOs are not completely state-controlled. Rather, a GONGO may develop its own identity and ethos (Saich, 2000, p. 137). Furthermore, the criticism is unfair as it indicates a lack of understanding of China's semi-civil society. All social organizations in China must register with the state, and therefore, they all experience some influence from the state. To contend that an organization originating within the state is ineffective at serving its intended constituency is a fallacy. Indeed, a GONGO has more of an impact on policy-making than an organization which operates with complete autonomy from the state (Saich, 2000, p. 139). Moreover, over time, GONGOs, because of their ties with the state, develop viability and legitimacy with those both inside and outside government (Saich, 2000, p. 139).

An example of a GONGO is the All-China Women's Federation. The ACWF is considered a GONGO as it is the official mass organization of the CCP dedicated to the advancement of women (ACWF, 2000a). The ACWF is a GONGO and not simply a government organization because its sources of funding are now diversified and do not solely stem from the government. Furthermore, its mission has expanded from the original one set out by the CCP, and now the ACWF creatively serves women facing twenty-first century challenges. Due to its affiliation with the CCP but its increasing autonomy, the ACWF is considered a GONGO not a government organization or a non-government organization.

In contrast to GONGOs like the ACWF, several women's NGOs exist in China's semi-civil society exist to serve the female population of China. These NGOs are similar to the organizations described by White, Howell, and Shang in the incorporated sector of China's semi-

civil society. During the reform period, especially in the lead-up to the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in Beijing, new women's NGOs emerged (Du, 2004, p. 175). These institutions, collectives, and networks are registered with the state and aim to empower Chinese women through various means, including offering education, health care, child care, and employment opportunities (Du, 2004, p. 173). Unlike GONGOs, these NGOs enjoy greater autonomy from the state and independent sources of funding (Du, 2004, p. 175).

The analysis of GONGOs and NGOs dedicated to women's rights will reveal the impact of civil society on women in China.

B. Government-Organized Non-Government Organization: All-China Women's Federation

The All-China Women's Federation is the Chinese Communist Party's mass organization dedicated to the advancement of all Chinese women (ACWF, 2000b). Founded on April 3, 1949, the ACWF aims to "represent and safeguard women's rights and interests and promote equality between women and men" (ACWF, 2000b). In the early period of the PRC, the ACWF had little autonomy from the Party and operated mainly as a transmission belt for CCP policy (Barnett, 1967, p. 186). In the 1960s, Barnett even characterized the ACWF as "paper organization" which simply echoed the CCP and whose own activities were insignificant in size and effect (1967, p. 186). Barnett's description may be too harsh since the ACWF, as the primary group dedicated to all Chinese women, did achieve legislative and policy changes beneficial to women in those early years (Howell, 2003, p. 193). After the initial decades of the PRC, Mao unleashed the Cultural Revolution, which scorned women's rights as "bourgeois." During these dark years, the ACWF lost all credibility (Howell, 2003, p. 193). Only after the rise of Deng Xiaoping was

the ACWF able to emerge from inactivity, but its resurrected version differs greatly from the “paper organization” of its early days.

After the reforms beginning in 1978, the ACWF transformed itself in several ways to become more accessible to Chinese women and less Party reliant. First, the ACWF reestablished its branches after temporary shutting down during the Cultural Revolution (Du, 2004, p. 175). The ACWF’s return blossomed so that it currently consists of over 98,500 full-time professional women cadres (Wang, 2004, p. 100).

Second, the ACWF expanded its traditional domain from the countryside to meet the new needs facing women in the 1980s (Du, 2004, p. 175; Howell, 2003, p. 193). The reform period ushered in great economic change which presented new employment opportunities for women, who became entrepreneurs and lawyers, but also new challenges including workplace discrimination and women trafficking (Howell, 2003, p. 195).

An internal debate led by ACWF leaders who sought a closer connection with the Chinese woman led to the third major change in the ACWF: increased autonomy from the CCP. Because the ACWF wanted to better serve the female population of China instead of merely recapitulate CCP statements, the organization turned to outside sources of funding to decrease its financial dependence on the Party (Du, 2004, p. 176). The World Bank, UNDP, Ford Foundation, as well as other international donors contributed over forty million RMB for ACWF programs (Du, 2004, p. 176). The ACWF’s increased economic independence allowed it to carry out its own initiatives for women’s empowerment. The ACWF even began referring to itself as an NGO during the FWCW in Beijing (Howell, 2003, p. 195). Despite the increased autonomy of the ACWF, it is not a NGO but rather a GONGO. The CCP still requires the

ACWF to abide by its socialist policy, and the ACWF originates and continues to receive financial and ideological support from the Party (Du, 2004, p. 176-7).

The CCP's influence is evident in the organizational structure of the ACWF. The ACWF mirrors the National People's Congress lay-out in its own organization. Like the NPC, the highest organ in the ACWF is the National Congress of Chinese Women (ACWF, 2000b). The body meets every five years to deliberate major issues facing Chinese women. When not in session, the Executive Committee of the National Congress of Chinese Women implements the resolutions passed by the body and also drafts reports for the next session (ACWF, 2000b). The Executive Committee is also responsible for electing a President, several Vice-Presidents, and the rest of the Standing Committee of the ACWF. The ACWF also consists of a Secretariat, members of whom are recommended and elected by the Standing Committee and who are responsible for the day-to-day work of the women's organization (ACWF, 2000b).

Below the national level, the ACWF has branches of provincial and county women's federations. These local federations include the membership of unionized women workers as well as politically engaged women registered with the civil affairs departments (ACWF, 2000b).

The ACWF, in addition to its national and local organization structure, serves as an umbrella for thousands of women's groups. The national-level ACWF has sixteen groups connected to it, including the Women Mayors' Association, the Women Lawyers' Association, and the Women Judges' Association (Howell, 2003, p. 196). Provincial and county federations also have women's groups affiliated with them. In total, the ACWF joins together 68,355 women's groups of all varieties at all levels (Wang, 2004, p. 99).

The ACWF utilizes its robust membership and its relationships with thousands of women's groups to carry out its mission. To serve its purpose of empowering Chinese women,

the ACWF adopts a five-prong approach. First, the ACWF seeks to engage women in China's socialist modernization through women's participation in economic development. Second, the ACWF educates women and promotes women's self-improvement. Third, the ACWF is responsible for women's participation in government and public affairs, especially in programs regarding women and children. Fourth, the ACWF assists women and children by offering services. Lastly, the ACWF unites all Chinese women regardless of nationality (ACWF, 2000b).

The general tasks of the ACWF have multiplied into more responsibilities as a result of the new difficulties facing women in the reform period. The shift to a market economy diversified the female population in China, which in turn caused various new challenges for the ACWF. For example, rural migrant women moved to cities for employment, yet they faced poor work conditions, sexual harassment, urban prejudice, and gender discrimination (Howell, 2003, p. 194). The tasks of the ACWF are now as hefty as ever, and the organization meets these challenges through their efforts at both the local as well as the national level.

The ACWF's work on the local level primarily involves training women to participate in the new market economy and democratic village politics. The ACWF believes women's position can improve through developing their skills and raising their self-esteem. In 1991, the ACWF launched the Four Selves Campaign in nearly every Chinese city and town (ACWF, 2000c). The Four Selves Campaign aimed to promote women's self-respect, self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-development in hopes that such self-improvements would encourage women to become active in the village economy and politics (ACWF, 2000c; Howell, 2003, p. 201). At the grassroots level, the ACWF supports women entrepreneurs through creating entrepreneurs' associations (Howell, 2003, p. 201). Furthermore, micro-finance allows women to start their own businesses and also infuses them with a competitive spirit to engage in the waged economy

(Howell, 2003, p. 201). In the realm of politics, the ACWF encourages women to run for leadership positions through leadership training programs and also promotes increased female voter turn out through voter education (Howell, 2003, p. 201). In rural areas, the ACWF couples its economic and political programs with literacy courses as reading and writing are fundamental to empowerment (Du, 2004, p. 183).

In addition to its economic and political programs at the grassroots level, the ACWF attempts to improve the status of women through use of mass media. Media is integral in gender perception since it delivers a message and influences its audience in specific manners (Bu, 2004, p. 275). In this way, media transmission can perpetuate or help combat the prejudices against women in Chinese society. Because the media is a powerful tool which can affect public opinion, the ACWF utilizes media in two ways.

First, the ACWF works through the government to regulate media outlets. The ACWF believes all media should publicize the national policy of gender equality and cultivate public opinion that appreciates women (Wang, 2004, p. 104). To this end, the ACWF suggested to the State Council, the highest state organ of the PRC, the Regulations for the Control of Advertisements. On July 27, 1995, the State Council approved the policy which outlaws “any description in movies, TV programs, and publications that is demeaning or insulting to women’s images” (Tao, 2004, p. xxx). The ACWF also works with the NGO Women’s Media Monitoring and Testing Network to examine media content for any images or messages which promote a stereotypical perception of women as inferior to men (Bu, 2004, p. 287, p. 278).

Second, the ACWF issues its own media through magazines and television programs in an effort to shape the nation’s attitudes towards women. The ACWF’s media outlets consist of over forty-five journals, newspapers, and magazines, a monthly women’s column in the *People’s*

Daily, and special television programs such as *Wong's World* and *Women Hold Up Half the Sky* (Howell, 2003, p. 201). Each of these forms of media promotes women's rights by offering journalism which highlights the often overlooked contributions of women (Bu, 2004, p. 279).

The great strength of the ACWF's media outlets is its ability to raise awareness in both the public and government to the issues concerning women. The ACWF can make specific injustices a public issue through its journals, magazines, and television programs. In this way, the ACWF alerted the public to the increased kidnapping of women and terrible working conditions for women in the Special Economic Zones (Howell, 2003, p. 201). The ACWF's articles on low female representation in government or the discriminatory retirement regulations which compel women to retire five years earlier than men are intended to educate and inspire the public (Howell, 2003, p. 201).

The ACWF can also raise women's issues to the national government just as it does with the general public. One of the most significant tasks of the ACWF is its communication of women's concerns to those in government. For example, the ACWF was alarmed at the fall in the number of women in political office after 1987. The low percentages—6.18% at the provincial level, 6.85% at the regional, and 8.12% at the county—induced the ACWF to organize a seminar to raise attention to the declining presence of women in government (Tao, 2004, p. xxviii). Thanks to the ACWF's efforts, the Ministry of Personnel became involved in the issue, and the two groups together created a “think bank” of capable women cadres to train female candidates (Tao, 2004, p. xxviii).

The ACWF is also responsible for enlightening legislators and decision-makers of the gender repercussion of their policies. Jude Howell's 2003 interview with an ACWF cadre revealed her work to “talk to relevant ministries and get the support of different departments and

then influence central government, as with laid-off workers and the Ministry of Labor or land reform and the Ministry of Agriculture” (2003, p. 199). The ACWF meets with various decision-makers and bureaucrats in Beijing to ensure women’s interests are taken into account. The ACWF cadre stated outright, “If the ACWF did not raise these issues, these ministries would not take the initiative” (Howell, 2003, p. 199).

In addition to raising government’s awareness to women’s issues, the ACWF also applies internal and external pressure on the power-holders in Beijing to create or modify national policies to be more beneficial to women. For example, the ACWF exerted internal pressure on the Ministry of Health to produce gender disaggregated health statistics beyond the county level because numbers directly specified for women are necessary to understand women’s development (Howell, 2003, p. 200). Externally, the ACWF capitalizes on China’s need for international recognition by encouraging China to meet the standards of women’s rights established by international bodies (Edwards, 2007, p. 384). For instance, the women members of the CPPCC, many of whom are ACWF cadres, pointed out the NPC’s failure to meet the United Nation’s target of thirty percent female membership. Using this international shaming as leverage, the women recommended China appoint women to at least twenty-five percent of the 2003 NPC (Edwards, 2007, p. 384).

Critics may be skeptical of the ACWF’s success in pressuring the government modify laws or propose policies beneficial to Chinese women. To be sure, the ACWF does not have the power to create any legislation, even that which relates to women. However, the ACWF does possess great powers of persuasion and can both propose amendments to old laws and urge the creation of new women’s policies altogether. An example of the ACWF’s capacity to modify old laws is the changes to the Marriage Law. The Marriage Law was created in the early days of

the PRC, but the ACWF, in the early 1980s, reviewed it to find several deficiencies. Due to the ACWF's review of the law and pressure on high organs of government in Beijing, the Marriage Law was revised to enable women to divorce more easily (Howell, 2003, p. 200). Since then, the ACWF has worked to further strengthen the Marriage Law's protection of women through its successful lobbying for the law to include provisions on domestic violence, extramarital relationships, bigamy, and concubinage (Du, 2004, p. 182).

The ACWF has successfully proposed new laws as well as modified old ones. For example, the 1992 Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women was a result of the ACWF's initiative. The ACWF, based on its own independent investigations, proposed a special protection for women's development during the post-market transition (Howell, 2003, p. 200; Du, 2004, p. 182).

The ACWF has pushed its own proposals, but it has also combated policies that have potentially negative consequences for women. During the late 1990s in the lead up to the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001-05), scholars, journalists, and even members of the NPC expressed support for the idea of phased employment for women so that men may find work. A proposal for phased employment, in which women were encouraged to take unpaid leave for vocational training or pregnancy without welfare, was being discussed in the NPC when the ACWF aggressively attacked the proposal (Du, 2004, p. 182). The ACWF's argued that women who returned home would be unlikely to return to their workplace due to increased competition. Furthermore, the women's organization charged that phased employment rests on the unfair presumption that women are responsible for home life while men may work in public spheres (Du, 2004, p. 183). The ACWF successfully lobbied both female and male NPC and CPPCC representatives to raise the inherent inequality of phased employment at conference and prohibit

its passage into law. In the final draft of the Tenth-Five Year Plan, the idea of phased employment was omitted (Du, 2004, p. 183).

The ACWF is able to successfully modify, propose, and oppose national policies for the sake of women due to its location within the CCP. The ACWF is a GONGO, a part of the Chinese Party-state apparatus. It is not independent of the state, and it is precisely because the ACWF is located within the government that it is able to affect so much change. From its position inside, the ACWF has the legitimacy to interact with various ministries and decision-making bodies in China (Howell, 2003, p. 199). The ACWF's insider position also allows easy access for consultation, so national and local representative bodies and bureaucracies can seek out the ACWF for its advice (Howell, 2003, p. 199). Through its connections with Party officials and NPC delegates, the ACWF can push gender issues with the unelected decision-makers in China (Howell, 2003, p. 200).

While the ACWF's status as a GONGO confers benefits such as unprecedented access to decision-makers, the organization's ties with the CCP can also impose several challenges. First, the CCP requires the ACWF adhere to the Leninist philosophy regarding women's role in society. The CCP forces the ACWF to accept a Marxist-Englesian understanding of gender oppression as simply a consequence of class reductionism (Howell, 2003, p. 202). Given the new challenges of a market economy and its effect on women, the ACWF struggles to link the reality of women in China with socialist rhetoric echoing the ideology of China's non-market, pre-reform past (Edwards, 2007, p. 381). The ACWF's responsibility as a liaison between the Party and Chinese women is growing more and more difficult as the experiences of Chinese women in a market economy are becoming too diverse for a Marxist philosophy.

The ACWF's position within the CCP hierarchy poses a second challenge. As a mass organization, the ACWF is ranked lower than a ministry (Howell, 2003, p. 202). Given its lower status, the ACWF is dependent on ministries, bureaucrats, and elite decision-makers to initiate meetings (Howell, 2003, p. 202). Furthermore, the ACWF receives instructions from above and must implement these top-down decisions. Thus, the hierarchical nature of the CCP and the ACWF's position in the pyramid of political power preclude it from exercising true decision-making authority.

Despite the limitations of being a GONGO, the ACWF's position inside government has allowed it to promote women's rights with notable success. Decision-making power resides in the CCP elite, the men who create national policy which directly or indirectly affect Chinese women. Because the ACWF is part of the Party, the women's organization can raise issues, pressure, and propose pro-women policies to these decision-makers. Unlike electoral participation then, the expansion of civil society, as manifested in the activities of the ACWF, has been an effective means of furthering women's rights in China.

C. Non-Government Organizations

Civil society in China exists as a diverse spectrum. At one end of the spectrum, White, Howell, and Shang describe caged organizations, such as the ACWF. However, the spectrum also contains organizations they label "incorporated." These incorporated organizations register with the state and operate under the supervision of a sponsoring organization (White et al, 2006, p. 31). This thesis refers to incorporated organizations as non-governmental organizations. Since all civil organizations must register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs in order to operate legally, all organizations are to some extent connected to the state. However, organizations can

still be considered NGOs because they were created by individual Chinese citizens and funded independently of the state. Many of these organizations call themselves “NGOs” to emphasize their bottom-up nature and spirit of civic activism (Milwertz, 2002, p. 25). This section will focus on the growth of NGOs in the last two decades and analyze its effect in empowering Chinese women.

As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, China has witnessed an incredible growth in the number of NGOs in the last two decades. Prior to 1978, only about 6,000 social organizations existed in China, though other sources estimate fewer (Lu, 2008, p. 90; Z. He, 2008, p. 102). By 2006, however, interest groups totaled more than 346,000 and reflected great diversity as organizations were dedicated to such groups as commercial entrepreneurs, lawyers, doctors, cooks, movie producers, and women (Ogden, 2007, p. 54). Howell notes that many of the new associations and groups aim to provide services or represent marginalized groups in Chinese society (2004 p. 145). For example, legal counseling centers for women and children as well as help groups for prisoners’ wives were created (Howell, 2004, p. 146). Those suffering from HIV/AIDS, cancer, disabilities, unemployment, and poverty could now benefit from health care, education, cultural services, legal aid, and social welfare (World Bank, 2006).

The increase in quantity and diversity of China’s NGOs was a result of several causes. First, the state decentralized during the reform era, allowing local governments and grassroots organizations more space to operate (Du, 2004, p. 177). Second, the CCP loosened its control on civil society because the Party needed NGOs to provide services to the Chinese people (Du, 2004, p. 177). During the shift to the household responsibility system when communes were dismantled and citizens returned to private farming, the Party-state reduced social services, expecting NGOs to fill the void (Du, 2004, p. 177). The lack of services such as child care

exerted pressure on already vulnerable groups, for example women, and thus, organizations formed to address their specific needs (Howell, 2004, p. 148).

Third, Beijing's hosting of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 was also a major impetus for the creation of NGOs. In the lead up to the FWCW, the CCP encouraged the development of NGOs to burnish its reputation after the international revulsion at the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989 (Du, 2004, p. 177). Furthermore, the actual conference allowed a deluge of foreign resources to flow into China. International NGOs interacted with Chinese participants, introducing them to the international women's movement and the skills necessary for NGO formation (Howell, 2004, p. 148).

The external variable of the FWCW and the internal changes of decentralization specifically contributed to the rise of groups dedicated to women's rights. The CCP's conciliatory attitude toward civil society in the lead up to the FWCW and the nature of the conference itself inspired the emergence of women's groups. Chinese women seized the opportunity afforded by the FWCW to discuss women's issues such as domestic violence, establish groups for widows, single mothers, and divorcees, and offer services to vulnerable women, for example migrant workers, rural women, and women seeking divorces (Howell, 2004, p. 149).

Women's NGOs in China receive their funding primarily from donors and not the Chinese government. To minimize government interference in their activities and missions, NGOs prefer to secure funds from non-government sources, such as private companies or the general public (Howell, 2004, p. 156). For women's NGOs dedicated to sensitive subjects, such as HIV/AIDS or labor rights, international funding is vital. For instance, the Shenzhen Working

Women's Center, the Shaanxi Women's Legal Counseling Center, and the Center for Victims of Industrial Accidents all receive funding from Oxfam Hong Kong (Howell, 2004, p. 156).

An independent source of funding is one of the differences distinguishing women's NGOs and the ACWF. Another key difference between the two types of women's organizations is their respective relationships with the Party-state. Because the ACWF is a part of the CCP, it enjoys greater government access to negotiate gender issues (Du, 2004, p. 185). Women's NGOs lack the internal relationship with the upper echelons of the Chinese Party-state, and therefore, are disadvantaged at influencing gender policy. Instead of placing its efforts upwards to influence government, NGOs primarily direct their attention downwards to Chinese society.

The work of women's NGOs in Chinese society can be classified as service-providing, women's studies, or project-based. First, service-providing NGOs seek to fulfill the various needs of Chinese women that the state has neglected (Du, 2004, p. 178). For example, legal counseling centers, such as the Xishuangbanna Psychological and Legal Counseling Centre for Women and Children, address the concerns of female victims of rape, domestic violence, divorce, and human trafficking (Howell, 2003, p. 196). This service is vital in empowering women who otherwise lack economic resources and struggle silently (Du, 2004, p. 185).

Second, other women's NGOs focus primarily on women's studies and research. The first women's studies center was established in Zhengzhou University in 1987, yet the field underwent tremendous growth so that by 1999, there were thirty-six women's studies centers in various Chinese universities (Du, 2004, p. 178). Women's studies departments are integral in providing alternatives to the Marxist-Englesian account of gender oppression and women's development (Howell, 2003, p. 197). These centers also research the status of women and this data serves as background for policy proposals to the government (Du, 2004, p. 186). For

example, the women's studies center of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences hosts an annual forum where it collects policy suggestions from participants. In 1998, the suggestions on reproductive health, which demanded greater access for reproductive health services for women and greater female participation in reproductive health decision-making, became an official government proposal (Du, 2004, p. 186).

Third, women's NGOs consist of the project-based organizations. These NGOs focus primarily on a cause, such as domestic violence, to spotlight a specific gender-sensitive issue (Du, 2004, p. 187). Usually, the project will create a network of various women's organizations, from the ACWF to independent NGOs, that together work to spread awareness for the cause and lobby the government to change it (Du, 2004, p. 179).

All three types of women's NGOs—service-providing, women's studies, and project-based—utilize mass media to influence the Chinese populace. Many women's NGOs issue their own publications, highlighting accomplishments of women or injustices women face in the workplace or society. Like the ACWF's publications and television programs, women's NGOs attempt to change public perception of women through various ways. For example, the Capital Association of Women Reporters is dedicated to providing women the chance to report news and its sub-organization the Women's Media Monitoring and Testing Network aims to ensure fair portrayal of women in media (Bu, 2004, p. 284-5).

A case study of Rural Women, the NGO which publishes the magazine *Rural Women Knowing All* and encompasses the Migrant Women's Club, reveals how an NGO can effectively use media to spread gender awareness and empower women. The guiding concept of Rural Women is: "If you are given a fruit, you can enjoy it only once; if you are given a seed, you can benefit from it your whole life" (Rural Women, 2006). Accordingly, Rural Women aims to

improve rural women's self-development through education and skills training. The *Rural Women Knowing All* magazine offers literacy training, and the NGO established a development fund for rural women as well as a reproductive health program (Milwertz, 2002, p. 93).

In December 1996, Rural Women established the Migrant Women's Club which empowers women through various means including education. The Migrant Women's Club offers primary school courses in mathematics, Chinese, and English to members, the great majority of whom only received six years of formal education (Milwertz, 2002, p. 108). The education serves the two fold purpose of teaching women skills that will allow them to compete in a market economy and also improving women's self-esteem to banish feelings of inferiority their gender or status as a rural citizen may have conferred upon them (Milwertz, 2002, p. 109).

While the case study of Rural Women reveals how women's NGOs can affect Chinese society, an analysis of the Women's Research Institute (now the Maple Women's Psychological Counseling Center) demonstrates how NGOs can influence government. Founded in 1988, the Women's Research Institute (WRI) was the first institution dedicated to women's research (Women of China, 2006). Unlike the ACWF, the WRI boldly researched taboo subjects such as prostitution (Milwertz, 2002, p. 32). The WRI also established a hotline, and through interviews with thousands of Chinese women calling in for help, they obtained data on marriage, domestic violence, and sexual harassment (Milwertz, 2002, p. 48).

WRI research reports have transformed into policy recommendations. For example, a 1996 WRI report was submitted to the Special Group on Women and Children, a subsection of the NPC Committee for Internal and Judicial Affairs. The proposal hoped to redefine "ill-treatment" and "sexual harassment" in the 1992 Law on the Rights and Interests of Women. The

Special Group acknowledged the WRI's proposal and took it into consideration when revising the law (Milwertz, 2002, p. 48).

Persuading government to listen to an NGO's research report is not always so easy, however. While research can influence policy and alter the attitudes of elite decision-makers, it is unlikely to do so for multiple reasons. Gender research must be published in journals outside academic women's catalogues since elite CCP officials are unlikely to read those publications (Howell, 2003, p. 203). Furthermore, a NGO can influence policy only if they are invited for consultation (Howell, 2004, p. 160). The invitation to speak with government bureaucrats or commissioners is rare because many women's NGOs lack legitimacy when the ACWF already exists to represent women's interests (Howell, 2004, p. 60).

In addition to their limited power to influence government, NGOs also suffer from the CCP's strict regulations on their formation and operations. Women's NGOs, like all organizations operating in China's semi-civil society, must find a sponsor and register with the Ministry of Affairs. The road to legal recognition is riddled with pitfalls, and after registration, the MCA may still suspend a NGO's license to operate.

Despite the regulations constricting NGOs, they have become an effective force for women's empowerment in China. Though women's NGOs may have limited impact on policy legislation, they can still enlighten government to issues. Chen Yiyun, founder of the Jinglun Family Center, a well known women's NGO in Beijing, says that one of her most important tasks is talking to the government. In an interview with Cecilia Milwertz, she states, "We bring our ideas into the process of our cooperation [with government] and we influence them from below" (2002, p. 138).

The greater significance of NGOs is the service they provide to Chinese women and Chinese society at large. Women's NGOs provide much-needed services such as child care, health care, legal counseling, and education. In this way, NGOs empower women. Their services keep women healthy, train them to be competitive in the economy, and raise their self-esteem. Unlike electoral participation, civil society in the form of these women's NGOs offers women tangible assistance. Furthermore, the media work of NGOs alters the general public's perceptions of women so that Chinese men and women increasingly respect a woman's competency and independence.

China's dedication to reform ensures the continued existence of women's NGOs. The CCP hopes to reduce direct management of services and increasingly relies on intermediary organizations to serve the constituencies vulnerable to market reforms (Lu, 2008, p. 90). The government hopes to foster the NGO sphere to offload some of its burden of public provision. Thus, women's NGOs will remain in operation in China's semi-civil society, and these organizations will continue to empower Chinese women.

Chapter Three, with its analysis of the ACWF, a GONGO, and various women's NGOs, demonstrates both the effectiveness and the limits of semi-civil society in China as a means for promoting women's rights. A GONGO like the ACWF is a force of upward change since it, with its position in the CCP, can influence the elite policy-makers in China. Due to the efforts of the ACWF, decision-makers in China are increasingly cognizant of policy implications for women. As a complement to GONGOs, NGOs empower Chinese women in their downward

provision of resources. While NGOs also educate decision-makers and influence policy, their main task has been serving women through welfare services. In this way, NGOs nurture women into full and healthy citizens who can exercise and protect their rights. The combined efforts of the ACWF and women's NGOs have successfully empowered Chinese women.

Chapter Four- Comparative Analyses

The previous two chapters reveal the implications of democracy for women's rights in China by comparing and contrasting the effect of electoral participation and civil society on Chinese women. Analysis of village elections and women's organizations reveal that civil society is more effective than electoral participation at furthering women's rights. While this is a striking discovery, it may be a finding unique to China unless this same pattern is visible in other states. This chapter contains useful, albeit preliminary, comparative analyses to test the conclusion from China. Though the comparative analyses are limited by the space constraints of a thesis dedicated to the Chinese experience, they offer data to compare with the observations of democracy and Chinese women. Section A applies a comparative analysis between China and the Former Soviet Union and Soviet bloc countries to determine whether the phenomenon of electoral participation's negative effect on women is universal. Section B will then turn to South Korea for an analysis of civil society to ascertain the relationship between civil society and women beyond the case of China.

A. Electoral Participation: Comparative Analysis of China and the Former Soviet Union and Soviet Bloc

The FSU and Soviet bloc are chosen to compare with China in order to fulfill Mill's Method of Agreement. Though meeting every requirement of Mill's Method is usually not feasible, his logic is helpful in directing the researcher to isolate variables and explain how two different cases may have the same outcome. In this comparative analysis, the former Soviet region and China differ in terms of ethnicity, culture, and history, yet the two share in common

female underrepresentation in government. This common outcome can be attributed to a similarity between the two regions: transition from communism to free elections. In China, political liberalization has resulted in direct competitive elections at the village level. Similarly, the FSU and Soviet bloc states have democratized so that elections occur at the village level as well as the other levels of government. Because the shift to elections is a common factor between the two regions, it is plausible to hypothesize that this caused their shared outcome of declining female participation in representative bodies. Since Chapter Two, Section B details the effect of electoral participation in China, this section will first focus on the effect of voting in the FSU and Soviet bloc then compare the results with those in China to determine any generalizations about elections and women.

After the political liberalization of the FSU and Soviet bloc granted the freedom for electoral participation, the number of women holding office in these parliaments decreased substantially. Prior to Gorbachev's reforms of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the communist governments in the USSR and Soviet bloc were officially dedicated to gender equality (Waylen, 1994, p. 344). Because they were committed to equality between the sexes, women participated in government at fairly high numbers. Loose quotas ensured that about one-third of representatives in USSR parliaments were women (Waylen, 2007, p. 97). For example, women composed up to 32.8% of the Supreme Soviet in 1984 and even as much as 49.5% in USSR parliaments in 1980. The percentage of women in Eastern Europe parliaments was slightly lower with 21% in Poland, 20.2% in Hungary, and 25.4% in Czechoslovakia in 1985 (Waylen, 2007, p. 97).

Gorbachev's reforms in the late 1980s initiated a democratic transition. For instance, relatively free elections were introduced in the USSR and Eastern Europe in 1989 (Clark & Lee,

2000b, p. 9). Liberal reforms such as elections coupled with Gorbachev's renunciation of the Brezhnev doctrine inspired the masses of Eastern Europe to demand independence and democracy (Clark & Lee, 2000b, p. 9). Soon after, in 1991, the USSR collapsed.

In the era following the democratic transition, women of the FSU and Soviet bloc suffered underrepresentation in parliament. Whereas in the pre-Gorbachev days, quotas ensured seats for women, in the new democratic era, women received no such assistance (Sperling, 1998, p. 151). As a result, the percentage of women in institutional politics plummeted throughout the region, dropping from the average of 33% to about 10% (Waylen, 1994, p. 347). For example, after the March 1989 elections to the Congress of People's Deputies (CPD), the percentage of women fell to 15.6% from 34.5% (Molyneux, 1990, p. 35). Valerie Sperling reports that the percentage of women in the Russian CPD decreased to a mere 5.4% in 1990 (1998, p. 151). Similarly, the Polish Parliament witnessed a drop of female representation from 20.2% to 13.3% after January 1988 elections (Molyneux, 1990, p. 35). Even more severe drops occurred in Romania where women went from holding one-third of the seats to 3.5% of the seats and Czechoslovakia where female representation declined from 29.5% to 6% (Molyneux, 1990, p. 35). Hungary experienced a likewise plunge in women in parliament from 20% to 7% (Molyneux, 1990, p. 35).

Although the proportion of women in Eastern European parliaments increased with subsequent elections, the numbers never returned to the level of the pre-Gorbachev years. The proportion of women in the legislature fell to 8.8%, but rebounded to 10.7% and 13.7% in the second and third post-communist elections respectively (Waylen, 2007, p. 93). Despite the increase in later elections, the numbers are still a far cry from the one-third of parliament women used to hold.

Some may argue that while the number of women in government after elections is lower, these women hold real power whereas under the communist system, they served as token representatives with little authority. This is a valid argument as the one-third quota served primarily symbolic purposes with only rubberstamping capacities (Waylen, 2007, p. 98). In the real bodies of political power, the Politburo of the Communist Party, women were excluded (Waylen, 1994, p. 346).

However, these critics are incorrect when they argue that meaningful low female representation is preferable to less powerful increased representation. High representation matters for multiple reasons. First, increased visibility of women in politics challenges the prejudice that women belong in private quarters not public spheres. These women demonstrate to society that women are capable leaders outside the home. Women in government serve as role models for other women, sending the message that they too can engage in politics. Second, increased representation is imperative because its absence permits the state to craft policy without consideration to women's issues (Molyneux, 1990, p. 43). While meaningful representation is important, so too is high representation. Hence, quotas served a purpose as they ensured a high proportion of female representation in government bodies.

Without quotas, women of the FSU and Soviet bloc have become increasingly absent in government. Maxine Molyneux goes as far to say that "perestroika in the USSR has delivered little to women in material terms" (1990, p. 48). Clark and Lee describe women as losers in the transition to democracy (2000b, p. 11). Because the experience of women in the FSU and Soviet bloc mirror that of women in Chinese villages after elections, a general pattern of electoral participation's effect on women can be distilled.

Though diversity marks the cases of the USSR and China, as seen in their different cultures, histories, and rates of democratization, both witnessed fewer women in office after elections. It appears that democracy becomes masculine so that elections deny female participation (Watson, 2000, p. 203). Institutionalized democracy does not equalize power relations in society. Thus, despite democracy, women continue to operate in the private sphere as they are considered “inferior” to men (Waylen, 1994, p. 329). The fact that democratization in Latin America has also led to the exclusion of women in post-transition governments provides further evidence that the core democratic practice of voting fails to empower women. The reality is quite the opposite as voting allows gender prejudice to manifest itself at the polls and results in disastrous consequences for women. The declining number of women in village committees in China is not an isolated incident but rather part of the larger phenomenon of the disappointment of democracy.

B. Civil Society: Comparative Analysis of China and South Korea²

The previous section established the pattern of electoral participation’s failure to empower women in cases beyond that of China, cases in which a similar political outcome prevailed despite different historical and cultural conditions. However, it would be misleading to conclude from this observation that democracy has uniformly negative consequences for women. Civil society formed from within the burgeoning space granted by democratization, it will be recalled, has become an effective means of furthering women’s rights in China. The findings in Chapter Three describe the composition and activities of China’s semi-civil society, specifically how women participate in GONGOs and NGOs to affect policy changes or provide services to

² The following draws on the pioneering work of Rose Lee in “Democratic Consolidation and Gender Politics in South Korea” (2000) and “Electoral reform and women’s empowerment: Taiwan and South Korea” (2000). In R. Lee & C. Clark (Eds.), *Democracy and the status of women in East Asia*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

benefit women. To understand whether civil society is an effective tool for women requires looking outside the lone case of China. This section engages in an analysis of South Korea in order to better comprehend the relationship between civil society and women.

South Korea is a helpful case in a comparative analysis of the impact of civil society for two primary reasons. First, South Korea has a robust civil society with many female participants and thus, yields information regarding the efficacy of women's organizations. Second, the conclusions extrapolated from South Korea may be relevant to China since the two states have much in common. Both share a Confucian heritage as well as a similar post-war history characterized initially by authoritarian rule and later by spectacular economic growth (Lee, 2000b, p. 48). Because South Korea is a fully democratized nation whereas China is in the midst of political liberalization, the Korean case may provide clues about the future implications of democracy if it continues to take root in China.

Democracy in South Korea has led to some of the most advanced women's rights legislation in Asia. For example, the reform to the Family Law under the Roh administration entitled women to community property, parental custody, and inheritance. The successive Kim administration further revised the Family Law so that women could be legally recognized as heads of households, exercise property ownership, and enjoy the increasing exemptions of gift and inheritance taxes (Lee, 2000a, p. 136-37).

Not only has South Korea addressed gender issues in family law but also in employment. The Roh government transformed the Equal Employment Law from a vague intention to a concrete goal of equal treatment and pay for women. Through implementation mechanisms, the new law offers protection to women and mothers who work, ensuring services such as child care,

paid maternal leave, and housing for single working women. President Kim then extended the services provided by the Equal Employment Law to include paternity leave (Lee, 2000a, p. 137).

On other fronts, South Korea has also championed women's rights. The government is encouraging women to participate in civil service by diminishing the bonus points male applicants receive for military service. The government has also removed the maximum percentage of women selected for the different levels of civil service. The Basic Law of Development, the culmination of years of struggling for gender equality, contains all South Korea's gender laws and also adds ten programs for women's social participation in a globalized era. While some gender issues, such as sex violence especially within families, still require more attention and legislation, a basic Special Law on Sex Violence has been approved (Lee, 2000a, p. 137-38).

These victories on gender issues are a result of participation by women in South Korean civil society not in South Korean government. In fact, women are nearly absent from government bodies. Since the first elections in 1948, women have rarely exceeded two to three percent of the national legislature (Lee, 2000b, p. 49). Because women are so underrepresented in government, the UNDP's Gender Empowerment Index, which measures the percentage of legislators, senior officials, and managers who are female, ranks South Korea sixty-fourth in the world, a low number for a developed state (UNDP, 2008b).

While women's representation in government is low, women's involvement in civil society is high and helps to explain the state's strong gender legislation. The women's organizations in South Korea can be divided into two major umbrella groups, the Council of Korean Women's Organizations (CKWO) and the Korean Women's Associations United (KWAU). The CKWO is the older of the two and contains most of the mainstream organizations

such as the Young Women's Christian Association, the Korean Center for Family Law, the Business and Professional Women's Organization, and the Korean University Women's Association. The CKWO is engaged primarily in family law reform, education, and traditional women's matters such as child care. In comparison with the CKWO, the KWAU is both smaller in numbers and more radical in mission. The KWAU aggressively tackles gender issues in both the public and private spheres, for example assisting abused women in factories and homes. The KWAU consists of progressive groups such as the Women's Society for Democracy, Women Workers Association, and Women's Hotline (Lee, 2000a, p. 134).

The political lobbying of women in both the CKWO and KWAU resulted in the formation of the Korean Women's Development Institute and the Council on Women's Policy. These organizations conduct gender research and compose a policymaking organ in Korean government. Not only do women leaders in South Korea create policy with their research, they also propel their members into government bureaucracy. For example, President Roh appointed a prominent women's rights activist to lead the Ministry of Political Affairs II, which she and subsequent female leaders have transformed from an amorphous bureau into what effectively is the ministry of women's affairs (Lee, 2000a, p. 135).

Korean women have also had an impact on presidential campaigns. Operating within South Korea's civil society, female leaders publicize gender issues, such as equal employment, during president elections. With the politicization of gender issues, they are able to leverage and extract pledges from the candidates. Once in office the president receives persistent reminders from women's groups about his campaign promises. Korean women's organizations were able to create women's rights legislation through this method with Presidents Roh and Kim. For example, Roh, to fulfill his campaign pledge to women's groups, convened the National

Assembly to revise gender legislation. Kim was even more willing to carry out his promises as he appointed three women, a record number, to his cabinet (Lee, 2000a, p. 136). He also revised Roh's gender-related legislation to further extend women's rights.

This brief analysis of South Korea further underscores the importance of women's organizations in civil society. Combined with the findings presented in the Chinese case, the potential significance of civil society as an arena within which to advance women's rights becomes clear. Although the impact of village elections for women's rights in China has thus far been disappointing, women's organizations operating in the country's emerging civil society have already begun to demonstrate their effectiveness. This suggests that if China continues down the path of political liberalization, or if it becomes fully democratic like South Korea, Chinese women, like those in Korea, might be wise to lean heavily on their organizations in civil society to further their rights.

Chapter Four contains two preliminary comparative analyses which reinforce the data from China on the efficacy of electoral participation and civil society in furthering women's rights. The comparison of China with the FSU and Soviet bloc, two regions of different cultures and histories, reveals the universality of election's effects on women. It appears that regardless of where they occur, elections result in decreased female representation in government. The comparison of China and South Korea, on the other hand, provides evidence of the success of civil society in affecting legislation beneficial to women. The study of cases outside China indicates a general pattern that civil society is a greater influence on women's rights than electoral participation

Chapter Five- Conclusion

This thesis has explored the implications of democracy for women in China. First, electoral participation in the PRC was evaluated and found to be ineffective at furthering women's rights. Since the 1987 Provisional Law allowed for village elections in China, the number of women in local governance has plummeted. As a result, only 16% of villages have women serving on the village committee, and these women rarely hold the leadership position of village director (Howell, 2006, p. 607). The ballot has also failed to close a political gender gap: Women are less attentive to media, display less knowledge about politics, express less interest in politics, continue to doubt their ability to affect change through political activity, and have lower rates of non-electoral political participation than men (Tong, 2003, p. 131).

Furthermore, village elections have failed to alter the gender composition of the most important decision-making bodies in China. The CCP elite dictate national policy, and these are the overwhelmingly male power holders who dominate leading bodies such as the Politburo and its Standing Committee, along with a relatively small group of other leaders in the military and wealthier provinces and municipalities (Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1988, p. 35). Admission into elite politics requires holding high office and extensive *guanxi*, both of which are challenging for women to achieve due to cultural reasons (Saich, 2001, p. 83; Wang, 2004, p. 103). Because the CCP elite are impervious to village elections, participation in such political activities, however genuine, remains a futile method of empowering women.

Second, this thesis explored civil society and determined that women's organizations have successfully advanced women's rights. While GONGOs and NGOs both face the constraints of China's semi-civil society, they have proven effective at promoting gender

legislation and serving the interests of the female populace. As a GONGO, the All-China Women's Federation operates within the CCP and informs decision-makers of the gender consequences of their policies (Howell, 2003, p. 199). Women's NGOs, which saw dramatic growth in the 1990s, supplement the work of the ACWF by providing welfare, education and literacy training, economic assistance, and legal aid to the female population in China (Du, 2004, p. 185).

The comparative analyses with the FSU and its Soviet bloc as well as with South Korea suggest that civil society rather than electoral participation is the more effective means of empowering women. Elections in the FSU and Eastern Europe, as in China, resulted in a decline in women's representation in government (Molyneux, 1990, p. 35). By contrast, women's organizations in South Korea, like those in China, have ensured strong women's rights through lobbying and exerting pressure on decision-makers (Lee, 2000a, p. 136).

The implications of the success of civil society and the ineffectiveness of electoral participation extend beyond women to other marginalized groups in China. For example, labor, environmentalists, and ethnic minorities may learn from the experience of Chinese women and see the possibilities to further their own agendas using civil society. While this path may be challenging for minority groups who are oftentimes seen by the Party-state as separatists, labor activists and environmentalists may have more of an opportunity to organize and successfully lobby to advance their interests.

The evidence from China may suggest lessons relevant to women and constituencies outside of China as well. The comparative analyses in Chapter Four reveal that the negative impact of elections as opposed to the positive impact of citizen groups in civil society for advancing women's rights is a not a story restricted to China. It may be that democracy is

helpful for the advancement of women's rights not because it calls for free and fair elections, but rather because it offers space for civil society and new avenues for women to pressure government. In the literature and contemporary understanding of democracy, however, it is too often equated with elections. For example, Western nations, such as the United States, applaud elections in Iraq as progress towards democracy in the Middle East. Perhaps democratic states pressing leftist or authoritarian regimes to democratize should be advised to encourage the growth of civil society and not simply elections. Civil society empowers citizens whereas elections do not necessarily result in the choice of political leaders who represent one's interest or even possess the power to make policy.

This thesis does not, however, intend to disparage electoral participation. On the contrary, voting is integral to democratic governance. However, the fact remains that elections in China, the FSU, and the Soviet bloc were followed by substantial decreases in women holding public office. These drops are alarming since representation remains important for the normative argument of equal representation, and it furthermore serves as an essential means for citizens to shape policy. Representation matters even as the South Korean comparative analysis shows low representation can be overcome by robust civil society. The lesson to be learned from South Korea is not just the efficacy of women's organizations, but also the importance of representation in powerful bodies. Women's groups in South Korea must lobby the executive branch because women are absent from this body of authority. Ideally, female citizens would gain entry to such leading government bodies, and not have to rely so heavily on civil society to protect their rights.

In addition to these larger implications, the analysis of China also yields valuable information about Chinese women specifically. China's semi-civil society has been instrumental

for the advancement of women's rights. Though they are virtually excluded from the CCP elite and elections cannot propel them into power, women have successfully fought for their rights through civil society. This is important because the power structure of elite politics in China is unlikely to alter in the near future. Nor will China's culture, another roadblock to a more significant role for women in elite politics, change dramatically in the short term. However, women are not entirely powerless as long as they can pursue their interest through the work of the ACWF and the many other women's NGOs. So long as civil society continues to flourish in China, as seems likely, Chinese women can at least inch closer to gender equality and "holding up half the sky."

Appendix

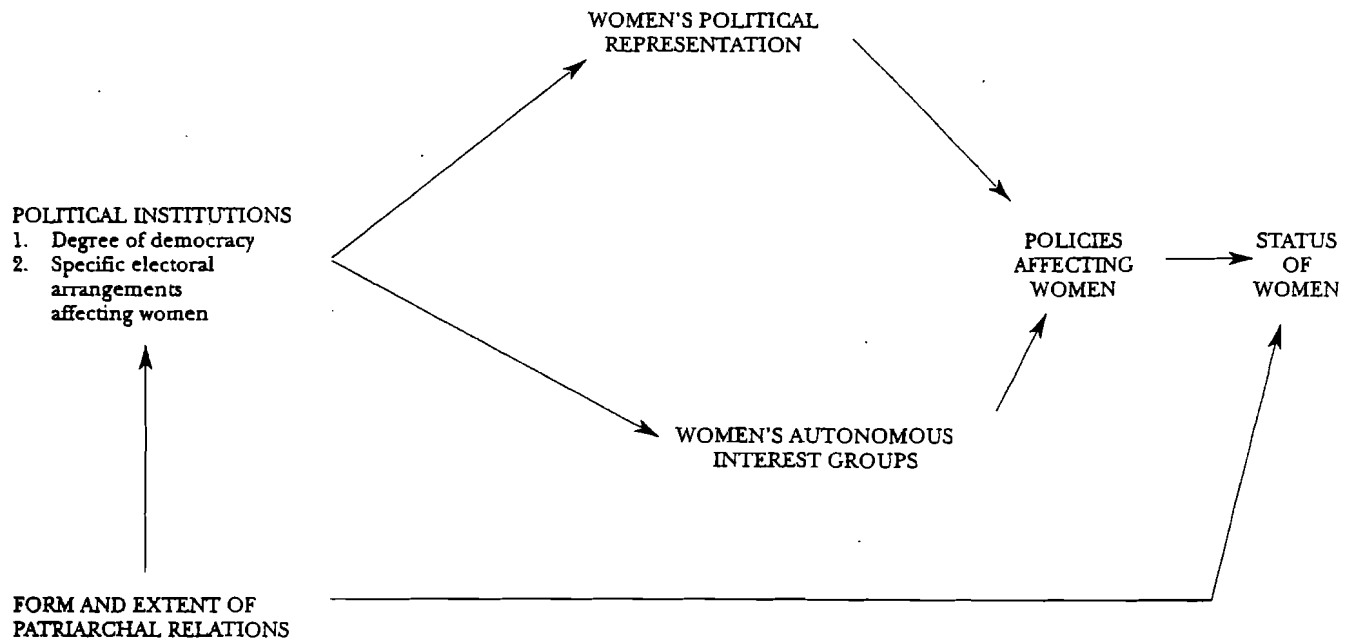


Figure 1. How Democratization Can Promote the Status of Women (Clark & Lee, 2000b, p. 3)

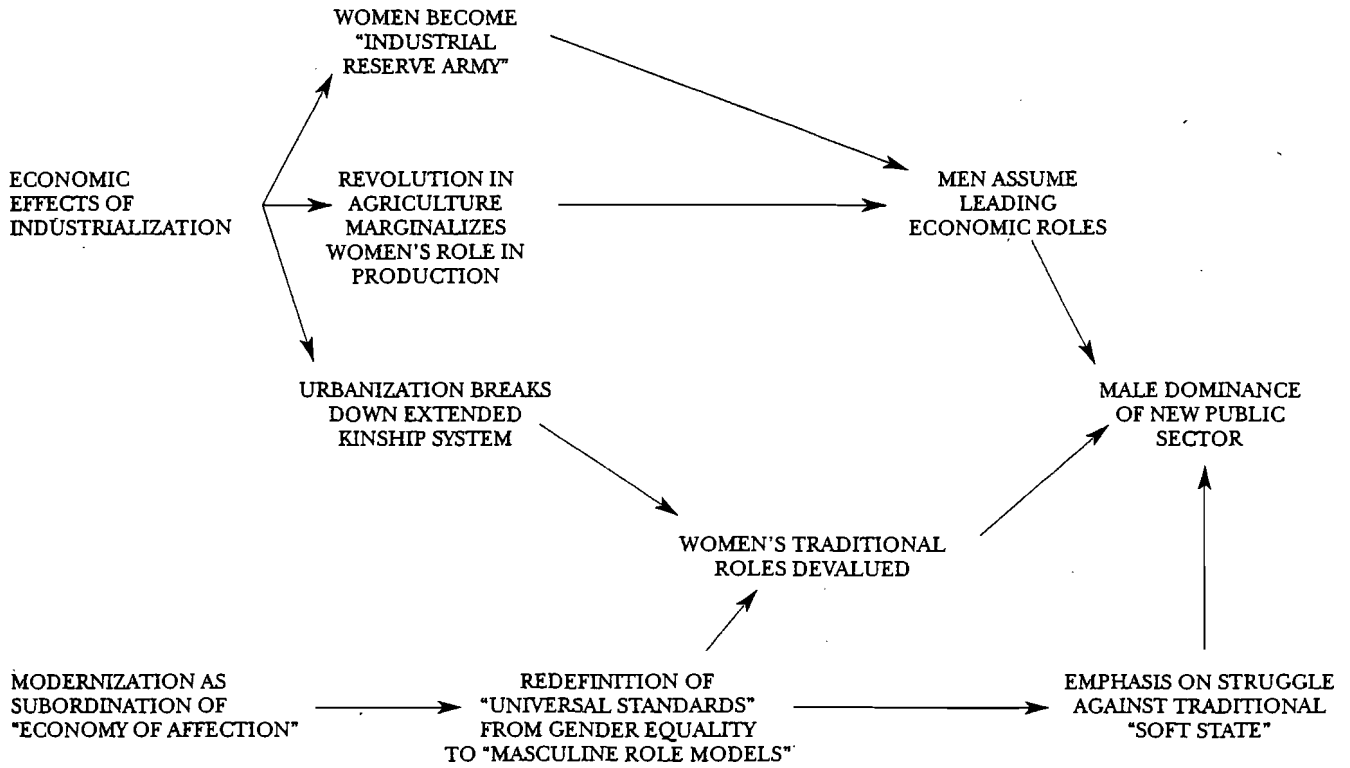
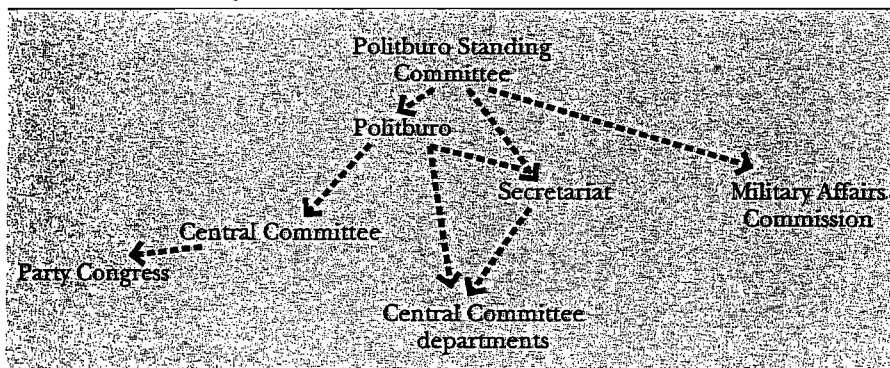


Figure 2. How Modernization Undercuts the Status of Women (Clark & Lee, 2000b, p. 8)



Arrows indicate general direction of authority in practice.

Figure 3. Party Organization at the Center (Lieberthal, 2004, p. 174)

FEMALE MEMBERS OF THE POLITICAL BUREAU IN POST-1949 CHINA

Central Committee	Total Members	Female Members	Percentage of Female Members
8th (1956)	17	0	0%
9th (1969)	19	2	10.5%
10th (1973)	21	1	4.8%
11th (1977)	26	0	0%
12th (1982)	25	1	4%
13th (1987)	14	0	0%
14th (1992)	20	0	0%

Note: Deng Yingchao entered the Political Bureau in December 1978 and resigned in September 1985.

Figure 4. Female Members of the Political Bureau in Post-1949 China (Rosen, 1995, p. 318)

FEMALE MEMBERS OF THE PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE IN POST-1949 CHINA

Central Committee	Total Members	Female Members	Percentage of Female Members	Alternate Members	Female Alternate Members	Percentage of Female Alternate Members
8th (1956) ¹	97	4	4.1%	73	4	5.5%
9th (1969) ¹	170	13	7.6%	109	10	9.2%
10th (1973) ¹	195	20	10.3%	124	21	16.9%
11th (1977) ¹	201	14	7.0%	132	24	18.2%
12th (1982) ¹	210	11	5.2%	138	13	9.4%
13th (1987) ¹	175	10	5.7%	110	12	10.9%
14th (1992) ²	189	12	6.4%	130	12	9.2%

Source: ¹ Research Institute of All-China Women's Federation and Research Office of Shaanxi Provincial Women's Federation, eds., *Statistics on Chinese Women (1949-1989)* (Zhongguo tongji ziliao) (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1991), p. 572; ² *Chinese Women's News* (Zhongguo funu bao), October 19, 1992, p. 2.

Figure 5. Female Members of the Party Central Committee in Post-1949 China (Rosen, 1995, p. 319)

FEMALE REPRESENTATIVES IN THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS

Congress	Female Representatives	% of All Representatives	Female Members of The Standing Committee	% of All Standing Committee Members
1st (1954) ^a	147	12%	4	5%
2nd (1959) ^a	150	12.2%	5	6.3%
3rd (1964) ^a	542	17.8%	20	17.4%
4th (1975) ^a	653	22.6%	42	25.1%
5th (1978) ^a	742	21.2%	33	21%
6th (1983) ^a	632	21.2%	14	9%
7th (1988) ^a	634	21.3%	16	11.6%
8th (1993) ^b	626	21.03%	17	12.68%

Source: ^a Research Institute of All-China Women's Federation and Research Office of Shaanxi Provincial Women's Federation, eds., *Statistics on Chinese Women (1949-1989)* (Zhongguo tongji ziliao) (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1991), p. 571; ^b *Chinese Women's News* (Zhongguo funu bao), June 28, 1993, p. 3.

Figure 6. Female Representatives in the National People's Congress (Rosen, 1995, p. 320)

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