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# The Huge Improvement in the Status of Women in China since 1949

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## **A b s t r a c t**

*This year, 2019, is the seventieth anniversary since the establishment of people's republic of China. During these 70 years, China has achieved huge progress. It is the second largest economy and one of the five permanent members of the united nations security council. Hundreds of millions of people have gotten out of poverty level. This paper chooses a small aspect to show on this achievement which is the status of Chinese women. Because the status of Chinese women doesn't appear a lot in the academic world and it has increased a lot. This paper shows the increase in status from economics, education, marriage and fertility rate ways.*

**[K e y w o r d s]:** China, Women, Improvement

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## INTRODUCTION

This year 2019 is a milestone for people's republic of China. Since it was founded by chairman Mao in 1949, it has grown by seven decades and has achieved tremendous accomplishment, both materially and spiritually. This article would focus on some points about the status of Chinese women.

Several big things happened during this period that help the economic development. In 1949, China became the independent country, away from the status of partial colony. This gave the country the right to publish policy and manage the economy freely and ended the longtime war and destruction. Political stability was critical to economic construction. In 1978, China decided to open the market and revolute the economic system from plan economy to market economy. Side by side with this systemic reform, the previous development policy of high growth and high investment, which gave top priority to heavy industry, was replaced by a new one which aimed at securing a steady increase in personal consumption and in which investment allocation was weighted in favor of light industry and agriculture (Ishikawa, 1983). This involved letting the market and private sector play an important role in the economy. This measure motivated the people and company to allocate factor of production efficiently and produce the goods and services for the market demand other than order or command. Foreign direct investment came in, invest and build plants which made China the world factory gradually to get the benefit of lower labor and land cost. In 2001, China joined the WTO which reduced the tariff for Chinese product worldwide; this facilitated the China's export further. With good quality and low price, 'Made in China' product becomes a necessity product for U.S., UK, and many other countries citizens. China becomes the biggest trading country in the world after years. In the term of GDP, China now is the second largest country. If using the purchasing power parity measure, China has surpassed U.S as the no.1 (Worldbank, 2019). It can be said as a miracle to keep 9% growth rate for three decades and drop billions of people out of poverty.

There are some papers talking about this improvement also. From fertility way, based on the analyses of data from two nationally representative surveys, Xiaogang Wu (2014) showed that women with fewer children do less housework and are more satisfied with their status within

family. From health status, Meiyu Yu (1997) showed that the overall level of physical well-being of Chinese women has increased. Significant improvement in the health status of Chinese women since 1950 is widely acknowledged as a major achievement for a developing country with the largest population in the world.

**Improvement in the status of politics and education**

With the economic development, the status of Chinese women also improves dramatically. It can be showed in several aspects, such as politics and education.

**Political status:** The national people’s congress (NPC) is the highest organization of national power and the national legislation of the people’s republic of China. In 2018, it had 2980 members. Women members was 742 and accounted for 24.9% (He yanrong, 2018). This was the highest proportion ever before. By participating in the NPC, women represent their voters to approve the national budget and propose new legislations, acting the role of the owner of the nation. In 2018, 22.2% of the leaders of department for government and state-owned companies and 27.2% of the members of China communist party were women (Wang peng, 2019).

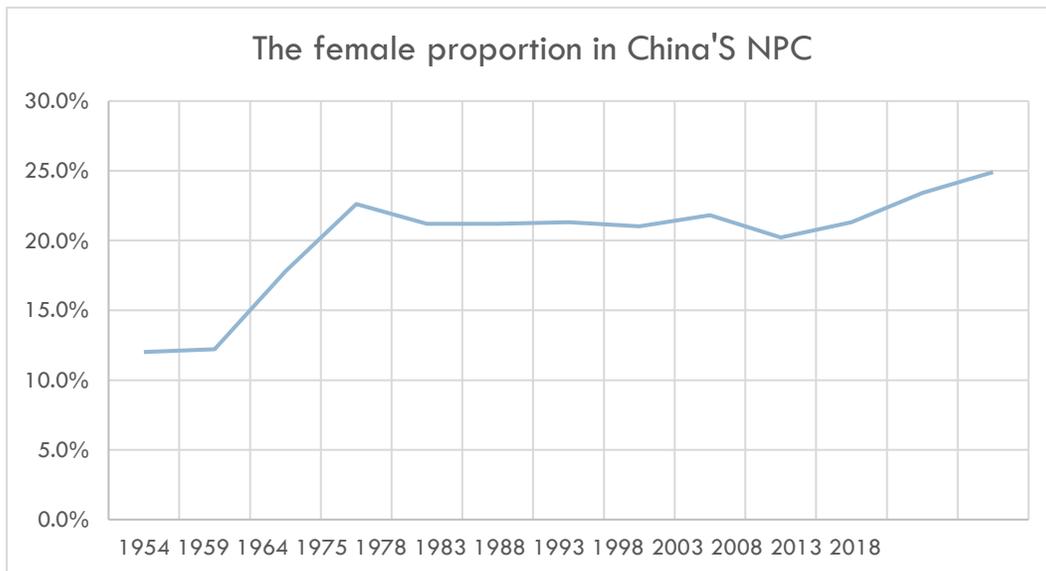


Figure 1: the female proportion in China’s NPC Source: (He yanrong, 2018)

Before 1949, this was almost impossible to participate in politics for women. For thousands of years, women could not go to school and apply for the examination for government officials. The priority for them was to marry a good man and be a careful wife and mother, staying in the home. Going out for public was the thing for man. In this circumstance, there was no politics status and right of speech at all for female. After 1949—the foundation of people’s republic of China, women and men have the same right to elect and be elected which was assured by the national law. The government used many measures to encourage women to stand out. Then the obstacles disappeared and freedom of participation in the politic regime got achieved. The number in the NPC increased dramatically.

**Education status:** In 2009, the number of university undergraduate and college students was 21.44 million in China. Women students accounted for 50.48% (Wang linying, 2013) which was the first time to have more female students than male students (by more than 200 thousand in number of students). For master university students, it was in 2010 that there were more females than males. Obviously, it was a world trend to have more women students in the higher education, like in the united states. But it was still amazed by many scholars and researchers. Because before 1949, many women didn’t attend schools. One reason was that the family was poor in that time. They didn’t have enough resources to support women education. Women had to quit the school to make money for their family and brothers’ education. Another reason was that there was a popular opinion regarding women education, quoting it was useless to study for girls (A woman with few knowledges was good for the family). Currently we can see that women have fewer dropout rates than men and tend to work hard in the school to find a good job. This will reshape the labor market and next generation (Sandberg, 2013). This will also boost economic growth by more skilled labors and increase the personal quality and skills for the whole country if mothers can attend school and have a good education background. It would be a big waste of resources to only have male students in the school, while women could contribute their intelligence also. Especially nowadays, the tertiary industry and quaternary industry have expanded and occupied a large portion of the economy. These industries suit more for women than secondary industry which requires great strength physically. They provide many jobs, making women easy to find an appropriate work.

**Reasons behind the improvement**

There are many reasons behind this improvement. This author would like to express several perspectives.

**Economic growth.** The GDP was 67.91 billion RMB and 367.9 billion RMB (Chinese currency) in 1952 and 1978 respectively. However, in 2018, it increased to 90 trillion RMB which amplified by the factor of more than 1000 times as showing in the figure 2 (Worldbank, 2019). The GDP per capital was 8800 US dollars in 2018 which made China one of the middle-income countries. It is the biggest industrial country, biggest foreign trading country, and the biggest foreign reserve country in the world.

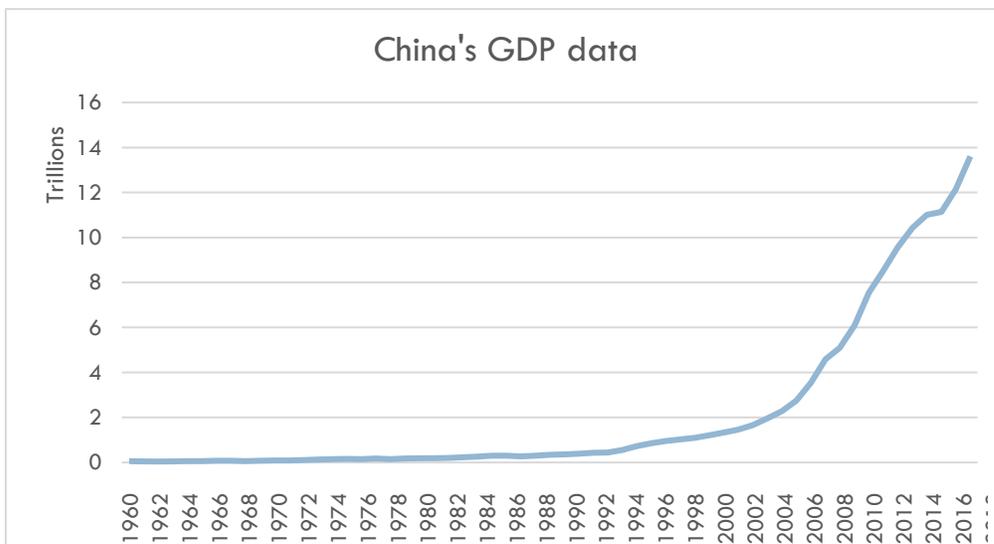


Figure 2: China’s GDP data Source: world bank (Worldbank, 2019)

This huge progress cannot be accomplished without the women labor. Since the foundation of China, the law has stated that women can work and get the same pay with men for the same job. No employer can discriminate the women applicant and make redundancy by gender reason. By now the ratio of female to male labor force participation rate is 80% for China (Worldbank, 2019) and 82% for united states. It is not a big difference with developed country. Having a job means having the income and then can get economic independent. To have more power in the family and

society becomes possible.

**Marriage and fertility laws.** Before the foundation of China, women didn't have the power to decide their marriage. It was determined by the parents and eldership in the family. After 1949, the new government published the first law which was marriage law. Women had the power to decide their own marriage and divorce. They could choose who to marry other than by appointing. Women become a free human instead of the subsidiary and belongings of man. Since 1980, China has strictly administered the one-child policy which tried to control the population. It indeed decreased the growth rate of population. And it also helped women in some ways. With only one child in the policy, girls could get more attention and resources from parents, even grandparents. Especially in the city, women were able to study more and pursue higher degree and will have good jobs afterwards with more possibility. Previously they may have the responsibility to support her brothers, because only sons can inherit the family by ancient ideology. One child in the family also means less fertility rate for women. They can pursuit their careers with less interruptions and relieve the burden of raising children.

### **Conclusion**

China is still the biggest developing country which needs to develop further to become the developed and high-income country. In the history, men dominated the Chinese society for thousand years. These both means it needs huge effort to achieve the real equality for women in the society. Fortunately, China is on its way to solve the gender inequality and have achieved much progress. Gender issue is also a worldwide problem (UN, 2015; Sandberg, 2013; Gates, 2019). More corporations and communications with other countries could contribute to the final solution, like the case in climate change. Further studies and policies should be done in the future to accelerate this process.

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