

review article
received: 2015-05-26

UDC 316.423.6:316.346.2-055.2(510)(091)

TRANSFORMATIONS OF WOMAN'S SOCIAL STATUS IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the changes, which concern woman's social status in China since ancient times till nowadays. This question deserves special attention because of specific social norms and traditions in China society. Chinese woman have passed a long way in the fight for their freedom and rights, but this process hasn't finished yet and they are still fighting for their right to born babies, to build a career and to be simply happy. The author describes the main difficulties which woman was challenged: forced marriage, cruel cultural traditions such as foot binding, lack of voting rights. She also discusses the key periods of this process and analyzes the perspectives of woman's social status transformations in the future.

Key Words: women's status, feudal culture, gender harmony, patriarchy, political participation.

TRASFORMAZIONI DELLO STATUS DELLA DONNA IN CINA

SINTESI

L'articolo esamina i cambiamenti relativi allo status sociale della donna in Cina, dall'antichità al presente. Questo è un argomento che, in considerazione delle specifiche norme sociali e tradizioni della società cinese, merita una particolare attenzione. Le donne cinesi hanno fatto strada nella lotta per la propria libertà e i propri diritti, ma il processo non è ancora completato; così stanno ancora combattendo per il loro diritto di avere figli, di costruirsi una carriera e di essere semplicemente felici. L'autrice descrive le principali difficoltà che hanno dovuto affrontare – il matrimonio forzato, usanze culturali crudeli quali i piedi fasciati, diritto di voto negato – e discute dei periodi chiave di questo processo, analizzando quindi le prospettive per i potenziali miglioramenti dello status sociale delle donne in futuro.

Parole chiave: status delle donne, cultura feudale, armonia dei sessi, patriarcato, partecipazione politica

THE WOMEN'S ROLE IN CHINESE SOCIETY. HISTORICAL ASPECTS

When retrospectively examining the civilization history of China in the past 5,000 years in general, it can be found that women's social status has been on the low side, with the development of various aspects lagging behind those in the western world. After experiencing several far-reaching social reforms or revolutions, women's status and the situation with the development have been improved to some extent; however, there still are blocks of various aspects. In the course of its long history, Chinese women's status has undergone situations with ups and downs; and in the mind of the modern Chinese, in the ancient time women whose social status was relatively low were subordinated, even attached to men. Then what is the real status of women in the long course of history?

Today, PRC is the one of the global powers, which holds an important economic and political position on the world stage. However, the earnest of development of the PRC's power is not only strong business ties and political decisions, but also the social structure of the Chinese society. Taking into consideration that China had been a closed-off country for a long time (Tkachenko, Barysheva & Ovchinnikov, 2005), it can be stated that the keystone of the Chinese society is made by traditions and social-cultural dominants connected with the commitment to historic and national and cultural practices. The country's development is to a great extent determined by the factors of optimal correlation between social statuses of members of the society. As in the Chinese tradition the woman was regarded as a person of the lowest status, a sexual object, etc., the gender-based discrimination may be a serious obstacle to integration of the country into the world community. Moreover, because of that, this problem has to be analyzed in respect of the aspect of formation of the institution of social relations in China, of national traditional culture and other spheres of social life in China.

The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that in the contemporary Chinese society dramatic changes of social roles are observed. Women gain influence in the society. Today, Chinese women may participate in different civic movements including those for protection of their rights, work in different organizations without segregation and gender-based discrimination. In aggregate, that sets the objective to review the role of women in the history of China and in modern age in a new fashion.

Undoubtedly, the issues of the status and function of women in the society were of researches' concern at all times. However, the fact that at each historical stage of country development the role of women was different cannot be ignored. The place of women in the society was influenced by such factors as political situation, economic environment, national and cultural traditions

(which are regarded by the authors as the strongest factor due to the norms and rules of behavior rooted in minds), etc.

Methodology of Study. The study of the role of women in Chinese culture is of interest for understanding the peculiarities of the hierarchy of family and social relations, as well as of the specifics of the women's status in the system of the country's cultural values. The studies of the status of women in China commenced in the end of the 20th century with the development of the attention to cultural and anthropologic values of different ethnocultures.

The methodological basis of the work is the historical method, which presumes the analysis of special theoretical literature.

The works of foreign and domestic scientists are dedicated to the studies of the role of women in China. Among Chinese studies of the women's status, the following may be named: Te Ai Hua studies the role of the women from the scholars' stratum of the Sung era. In particular, the scientist pays special attention to the problems of marriage, family relations of women, women's property rights, as well as to the role of women in social life (Hua, 2011). Chungmei and Goin study the status of women and the problems of development of their social status, the role of education in changing the status of women, the peculiarities of their family relations, etc. (Chungmei & Goin, 2007).

Lishuk L. V. studies the gender roles in the aspect of the history of civilization (Lishuk, 2007). Mylnikova Y. S. studies women's property rights in the system of inheritance of the medieval China as exemplified by the Tang-Sung Dynasty (Mylnikova, 2011), Chaukerova A. N. studies the role of the woman in the Chinese society. She pays special attention to the social status of women in China (Chaukerova, 2012). Among Russian scientists, many works are dedicated to the role of women in family relations: Berger Y., Pochagina O., Sinetskaya E. study the peculiarities of planning family relations in China and the status of the woman in the family. The studies by Berger Y. are interesting because the scientist provides statistical data, which make it possible to analyze the changes of the demographic situation in China in various historical periods (Berger, 2001; Pochagina, 1999; Sinetskaya, 2003).

Highlighting the parts of the general problem which were not resolved earlier and which are covered in this article. Despite numerous studies dedicated to the problems of women's status in the Chinese society, the issue of the dynamics of the change of women's role and functions in the social life, in family, in the process of the country's historical development, remains unsolved. The scientific novelty of the study lies in conducting a retrospective analysis of the women's status in China and a comparative analysis of their roles in history and in modern times.

DISCUSSION ON ANCIENT AND MODERN TIMES

Women's Status and Behavior in the Pre-Qin Period

The fundamentals of family relations in China began forming as early as in the primitive society (before 1500 BC). It is known that in the primitive society of Ancient China there was no tradition to get married. Sexual relations were disordered; there were no clear traditions of understanding the role of mother and father. According to the study of Robert van Gulik in his work titled *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, despite a limited quantity of materials allowing to exactly ascertain all the peculiarities of social relations in Ancient China, it is reliably known that "although starting from Chou era, the Chinese society had mainly been patriarchal, before and/or during Ying Dynasty times, it was dominated by the female principle" (van Gulik, 2000). Patriarchal bases of the society were supported by Confucianism. That was motivated by the need of the society to create a firm system of family relations. That is, the man was regarded as the family head and leader, while the woman had to obey him.

During the Pre-Qin Period featuring semi-feudal semi-salve society¹, no unified and restricted social norms were formed. According to *The Book of Songs*², the earliest anthology of verse in China, women's status was not low then. According to *National Customs*, "How can I not miss you? I'm worried that you are not brave enough, that you don't dare to elope with me; we can't be together when we are alive, but I hope that I can be buried with you." As another verse in *The Book of Songs* described: "Plums drop on the floor one after another, with seventy percent of them still hanging on the tree; those youngsters intending to run after me, please don't delay such a great moment. Plums drop on the floor one after another with only thirty percent of them hanging on the tree; those youngsters intending to run after me, please don't wait today". These verses show that the society then still respected women's right to pursue their loves and women possessed certain social status.

Women's Status Changes and the Behavior at the Times of the Iron Age Feudal Society

In the period of Ying and Zhou (approximately 1500-222 B.C.), marriages started to be solemnized among representatives of the ruling class. These marriages were

exogamic. Women had no social rights, for example, no right to express their opinion. The women's attitude towards motherhood also was ambiguous. Pronina I. Sadykova V.Z. and Voropayeva L.S. describe the duties of mothers in Ancient China the following way: "The main duty of a woman as a mother in Ancient China was to prepare female children to future marriage" (Pronina, Sadykova & Voropayeva, 2013).

Along with the social development, a number of advanced tools represented by iron farm tools had been implemented in agricultural production, leading to the full display of men's physical advantage and the gradual formation of the production relation as "men-outside-and-women-inside". The society then advocated the idea of men tilling the farm and women weaving, believing that women should be obedient to men; therefore, facing such a social reform, women had to abide by and implement such a code of conduct. However, in the Han Dynasty, the social economy gained further development, the national territory was further expanded; in order to enhance his governance and stabilize the order, the emperor of the Han Dynasty formulated the policy of "abolishing all the free speeches but worshipping Confucianism", leading to a sharp fall of women's social status. According to *The Book of Rites*³, unmarried women had to be obedient to their fathers; and married women had to be obedient to their husbands or sons in case if their husbands were dead. According to principles of "distinction between inside and outside" and "men's superior position with women's inferior position" proposed by Confucianism and rituals, women's morality, behaviors and civilization during their entire lives had been regulated. Compared to the Pre-Qin Period, in this period women had no right to pursue their loves at liberty, they lost the right to make their own decisions and the economic right in particular, resulting in women's social status, which was extremely inferior to men's. Child brides, slaves and maid-servants, even prostitutes emerged because of women's loss of right to make their own economic decisions, which gave rise to their loss of personal freedom accordingly. Especially when China entered the period of feudal society, men's social superiority complex became more distinct, with women gradually losing their original advantages. A complete series of laws about political ideas and moral regulations that conformed to the political benefit formulated by the rulers had further deepened and strengthened men's idea that women shall serve men by "instinct" and deepened women's so-called "instinct-

1 Pre-Qin Era is a time interval of China to separate the ancient dynasties, and the abbreviation of Pre-Qin Period (or Pre-Qin Era), the joint name of the era prior to the Qin Dynasty (BC 221).

2 *The Classic of Poetry*, also *Shijing* or *Shih-ching*, translated variously as the *Book of Songs*, *Book of Odes*, or simply known as the *Odes* or *Poetry* (Chinese: 詩; pinyin: Shī) is the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry, comprising 305 works dating from the 11th to 7th centuries BC.

3 *The Book of Rites* or *Liji*, literally the *Record of Rites*, is a collection of texts describing the social forms, administration, and ceremonial rites of the Zhou dynasty as they were understood in the Warring States and the early Han periods.



Fig. 1: Slip skirt in the Tang Dynasty (Zhaofang, 2014, 633)

tive" obedience and attachment to men. Besides, when main irrational requirements about women that had been also proposed in the society, such as "innocence is the virtue for women", became the mainstream values and thoughts of ancient Chinese, women's tragic period had just begun (Elisseeff, 1988).

Batyr K. I. calls the Ying and Zhou periods the period of absolute patriarchy and cult of ancestors, in particular, cult of the father's power. The woman, on the contrary, was fully dependent on the power and the status of her husband in the society. Accordingly, the woman had no personal property, and her rights to

inherit something were extremely limited. In addition, Batyr K. I. mentions that the woman could not choose a husband, because marriages were solemnized only at will and under the decision of the parents from the both sides. (Batyr, 2003).

Turnaround: Reasons and Expressions of Women's Status Improvement during the Tang Dynasty

The economy and influence of the Tang Dynasty (617-762)⁴ had reached the period of great prosperity, leading to a more distinct social superiority complex of men; however, in the history of the Tang Dynasty, the "tolerance" of women had been unprecedented; even the unique female emperor, Empress Wu Zetian, appeared in the Tang Dynasty⁵. This was, firstly, because the national strength had attracted representatives of various countries; the western culture and the national cultures of other minorities they brought had introduced some new factors to China's traditional culture; secondly, shocked by Buddhism, the dominant position boasted by Confucianism had been fluctuated; finally, the royal family of the Tang Dynasty were not pure Han people, but with a certain bloodline of minorities; and the daughter of the emperor, Princess Ping Yang had once led armies to battle. Certainly, the Tang Dynasty had also been influenced by the Han culture, so it set up the intermarriage system. Even after the foundation of the empire, there were still many royal princesses marrying to other nations, in order to consolidate the rule of the empire, such as Princess Wen Cheng, Princess Jin Cheng and Princess Ning Guo. Therefore, under the guidance of the royal family, women in the society became active. Taking apparels as an instance: the slip skirt was the one of the typical apparels that women wore in the Tang Dynasty, featuring a large opening at the upper neckline that caused the view of half-covered breasts. The slip skirt – the upper clothes – is a kind of short jacket with a length of no longer than the knee. The lower part is a piece of skirt (see Figure 1). Thus, it can be seen that, as a matter of fact, the slip skirt is the collective name of the two kinds of clothes.

It had fully expressed women's desire to show their beauty and follow fashion. In the painting called *Court Ladies Wearing Flowered Headdresses*⁶ painted by Zhou Fang (see Figure 2), noble women, who dressed gorgeously, were also wearing tube tops half covering their breasts while leisurely playing in the courtyard, picking

4 The Tang dynasty. Chinese: Dāng (618–907 AD) was an imperial dynasty of China preceded by the Sui dynasty and followed by the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. It was founded by the Li family, who seized power during the decline and collapse of the Sui Empire. The dynasty was briefly interrupted when Empress Wu Zetian seized the throne, proclaiming the Second Zhou dynasty (October 8, 690 – March 3, 705) and becoming the only Chinese empress regnant.

5 Wu Zetian seized the throne, proclaiming the Second Zhou dynasty (October 8, 690 – March 3, 705) and becoming the only Chinese empress regnant.

6 *Court Ladies Wearing Flowered Headdresses* attributed, attributed to Zhou Fang. Zhou Fang (730-800 CE, Chinese: 周昉, Wade-Giles Chou Fang) was one of two influential painters during the mid-Tang dynasty. He came from a noble background and this was reflected in his works, such as *Court Ladies Adorning Their Hair with Flowers* (attributed) or *Court Lady With Servants*.



Fig. 2: Court Ladies Wearing Flowered Headdresses. Painted by Zhou Fang, Tang Dynasty. Collected by Liaoning Provincial Museum. Uploaded by Eugene a at en.wikipedia [Public domain]. Transferred from - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhou_Fang_\(Tang_dynasty\)#/media/File:Zhou_Fang_Court_Ladies_Wearing_Flowered_Headdresses._\(46x180\)_Liaoning_Provincial_Museum,_Shenyang..jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhou_Fang_(Tang_dynasty)#/media/File:Zhou_Fang_Court_Ladies_Wearing_Flowered_Headdresses._(46x180)_Liaoning_Provincial_Museum,_Shenyang..jpg)

up flowers, catching butterflies and playing with dogs. This painting directly demonstrated the fact that women of this period had a relatively loose social environment, felt free and at ease. Politically speaking, women in the Tang Dynasty had also participated in politics unprecedentedly, although limited to several special positions, such as sorceresses and female secretaries. However, it was more common for women from the royal family to participate in politics, e.g. Princess Ping Yang, Empress Zhangsun and Princess Tai Ping, daughter of Empress Wu Zetian; among them, the most remarkable one was Empress Wu Zetian who ruled ancient China for as long as four decades. At the same time, in terms of inheritance of family properties, unmarried daughters had the right of inheritance; however, according to the laws of the Tang Dynasty, couples who were not harmonious could opt to divorce. In the royal family of the Tang Dynasty, among the 210 princesses, 27 of them were married twice and 3 of them were married 3 times; except for the princesses who died early or became monks, the remarried princesses in the Tang Dynasty accounted for 23% of the overall number of princesses, far higher than that of the lower class. Yet in the lower class, the divorce rate was not high due to their poor education background and the restriction of traditional rituals. Consequently, women's status during the Tang Dynasty, in terms of family relation, social life, even politics, had been remarkably improved, compared to that of past dynasties.

The period of Tang Dynasty may be characterized as the period of high disinhibition of behavior morals. It is the very period when women actively participated in the political life. According to Selezneva E. A., in Tang era women gained rights equal to the rights of men. They could be conferred titles upon, which never happened before (Selezneva, 2007). If referred to feudal China, it can be seen that the woman was deemed property and the principal power was in the hands of men. In such s

way, being deprived of rights, women had no possibility not only to participate in the political governance of the country, but also to hold an active position in social life.

The improvement of women's status in the Tang era was contributed to by the changes in the family law. For example, according to the *Tang Penal Code with Explanations* by Rybakov V. M., the law provided for punishment of parents by 60 stick strokes if they affianced their daughter and refused to a groom. In addition, pursuant to the law of Tang era, the marriage of a woman with relatives was prohibited (Rybakov, 1999). This law gives grounds to state that the society attempted to regulate the institute of marriage and family relations. Certain restrictions were observed for men too. For example, the prohibition to have two wives who had the same status. That was regarded as bigamy. At the same time, a man could have any number of concubines, which indicates that his social status still prevailed over the status of the woman, who had no right to choose a husband, no right to divorce, etc.

Nevertheless, if the almost rights-deprived status of women in the feudal China is compared with the woman's role in the Tang era, a radical change of attitude towards the woman can be seen. This is especially obvious when taking into consideration the fact that traditions had always been venerated in China. The disinhibition in the Tang era resulted in the possibility for women to speak freely to men and to visit public places together. Even concubines were allowed to leave the palace, which was inconceivable in the feudal society (Elisseeff, 1988).

Reasons and Expressions of the Women's Declined Status in Song, Ming and Qing Dynasties

In the Song Dynasty⁷, in order to strengthen the social order, rulers advocated Neo-Confucianism, represented

⁷ The Song dynasty was an era of Chinese history that began in 960 and continued until 1279. It succeeded the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, and was followed by the Yuan dynasty.



Fig. 3: A woman with her feet unwrapped. Uploaded by Haabet at en.wikipedia [Public domain]. Transferred from – en.wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foot_binding#/media/File:A_HIGH_CASTE_LADYS_DAINTY_LILY_FEET.jpg

by Zhu Xi, the appearance of which had suggested that women's social status started to disappear rapidly. Zhu Xi⁸ offered the idea of "preserving the natural justice and abolishing the selfishness"⁹ and further stressed women's "three obediences and four virtues"¹⁰. This had further restricted women's right to marry. At the same time, in the Song Dynasty, women's foot binding (see Figure 3), popular among the royal family since the late Tang Dynasty, had also quickly developed among the people.

While among the folk women's feet size and shape determined their marriages, in terms of social aesthetics it showed a morbid tendency. In families, women's rights were rigorously restricted, and the partial disability of their feet limited the range of activities. However, men in their families, who vigorously promoted their paternities and authorities as husbands, treated women as their attachments. Yet, the repetitive defeats in the wars between the Song Dynasty and the surrounding minorities had also led to an extreme self-abasement and unwillingness of men in the Song Dynasty and such a distorted state of mind had been transferred to women, who worshiped the food-binding, the corset and appreciated bound feet and extreme thinness. When the thoughts of Neo-Confucianism infiltrated the folk, this situation had been persistent until the late Qing Dynasty¹¹.

Liberty and Restrictions on Women in the Modern Times and in the Republic of China

In the wake of the "visits" of missionaries, western vessels and various western civilizations bringing about gunfire for China, the thousand-year-old feudal dynasty could not be defended any more. Especially "among Christians, many of them clearly believed in the principle of gender equality and were determined to throw themselves into a huge social movement in order to fight for rights equality for Chinese women." After that, Liang Qichao¹², a famous revolutionist, declared, that "men and women are born to be equal"; in the social practice, in December 1899, the China Natural Foot Society was founded in Shanghai to start abolishing food binding. However, women then said "we'd rather die to be free or independent", showing women's willingness to seek their own rights and marking the vivification of women's consciousness of rights. In the subsequent Republic of China, under the support of Sun Yat-sen¹³, Regulations on Prohibiting Women to Bind Feet was formulated, to prohibit women's food-binding; and the feminist movements in large cities had gained a prosperous development. The Natural Breasts Movement had also started

8 Zhu Xi or Chu Hsi (Chinese: 朱熹, October 18, 1130 – April 23, 1200) was a Song Dynasty Confucian scholar who became the leading figure of the School of Principle and the most influential rationalist Neo-Confucian in China.

9 Zhu Xi's formulation of the Neo-Confucian world view is as follows. He believed that the Tao (Chinese: 道; pinyin: dào; literally "way") of Tian (Chinese: 天; pinyin: tiān; literally "heaven") is expressed in principle or li (Chinese: 理; pinyin: lǐ), but that it is sheathed in matter or qi (Chinese: 氣; pinyin: qì). In this, his system is based on Buddhist systems of the time that divided things into principle (again, li), and shi (Chinese: 事; pinyin: shì). In the Neo-Confucian formulation, li in itself is pure and almost-perfect, but with the addition of qi, base emotions and conflicts arise. Human nature is originally good, the Neo-Confucians argued (following Mencius), but not pure unless action is taken to purify it. The imperative is then to purify one's li.

10 The Three Obediences and Four Virtues were a set of basic moral principles specifically for women in Confucianism. The two terms ("three obediences" and "four virtues") first appeared in the Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial and in the Rites of Zhou respectively.

11 The Qing dynasty, also Empire of the Great Qing, Great Qing or Manchu dynasty, was the last imperial dynasty of China, ruling from 1644 to 1912 with a brief, abortive restoration in 1917. It was preceded by the Ming dynasty and succeeded by the Republic of China.

12 Liang Qichao (Chinese: 梁啟超; February 23, 1873 – January 19, 1929), courtesy name Zhuoru, pseudonym Rengong, was a Chinese scholar, journalist, philosopher and reformist who lived during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republican China. He inspired Chinese scholars with his writings and reform movements.

13 Sun Yat-sen (12 November 1866 – 12 March 1925) was a Chinese revolutionary, first president and founding father of the Republic of China, and medical practitioner. As the foremost pioneer of Republic of China, Sun is referred to as the "Father of the Nation" in the Republic of China (ROC), and the "forerunner of democratic revolution" in the People's Republic of China.

in 1927, advocating that women shall shake off the restriction of chest wrapping cloths to show off the natural curves of women; in that period, China was going through a phase of capitalism, when many trendy women acted as the examples of the society to initiatively wear the bras coming from the western world and the high-slit and sleeveless cheongsams instead of the modified cheongsams, with their gracefully sexual figure covered by high fashion dresses. Women started to come upon a historical stage. They pursued rights to education, marital autonomy and political participation equal to those of men. Yet the vast inland still stuck to the old fashion, that is to say that despite the fact that democracy and equality ideology was transmitted into China from the western world and resonated with the capitalist intellectuals at that time, the transmission range was only limited to southeastern coastal cities with the vast majority of the inland remaining outside influence.

The reason is that women in those regions had still been under the influence of the rooted feudalism with the history of thousands of years and their freedom and education had been restricted by the men in their families; however, the political power of the Republic of China¹⁴ was still not stable enough, with years of wars and natural disasters; at the same time, the laws on gender equality had been completely implemented in those underdeveloped regions without the strong restriction, leading to the incomplete liberty of women.

FEMALE LIBERATION AND RIGHTS IN THE NEW ERA

Since the foundation of New China, the majority of Chinese women had been ultimately liberated, at least formally. After the establishment of the country, the social status and the development of Chinese women underwent a qualitative leap. Firstly, women's various basic rights had been gradually admitted in the form of law. For the first time ever, women had their own right to vote and to be voted for, as well as the right of political participation.

Pursuant to the Constitution of the PRC, women gained rights equal to men's rights. In such a way, women acquired the possibility of active participation in the economic, political, social and cultural life of the country. The movement of May 4, 1919, which emerged under the influence of the October Revolution in Russia, contributed to the development of the women's legal equality in China. A demonstrative step in the equalization of the men's and women's rights was the 'Cultural Revolution' in China, which took place in 1966-1976. That 'Revolution' took place under the slogan expressing the key ideas of the cultural movement: "A woman can do what a man can do". Accordingly, the strengthening of women's rights in the social life provoked the

changes in gender roles of men and women in the Chinese society. Actually, it is possible to speak of the commencement of forming of a new model of gender relations, in which women were invested with masculine traits (Vavilenko, 2014). In 1980, thanks to the signing the UN Convention, an attempt was made in China to eliminate all forms of discrimination of women at the legislative level. In addition, an important step was taken in the form of changes in the women's labor status. Thus, in 1990 a decision was made to equalize the salaries of men and women in China (Chaukerova, 2012).

The formulation of Marriage Law fundamentally resulted in gaining the freedom of marriage by women. Women's Rights and Interests Protection Law had provided women with the path to safeguard their rights legitimately. Women could also receive education and get jobs the same way as men, giving women the opportunity for their own development and independence, with women's social status being constantly improved. During the period of China's opening to the outside world and reforms, women even showed unprecedented achievements in the fields of politics, economy, culture and education: in terms of politics, the degree of women's participation in politics and democracy was higher; in terms of economics, women's employment rate increased, along with a wider employment scale and strengthened entrepreneurship ability; in terms of culture and education, the gap between men and women in terms of the enrollment rate, school attendance rate and the rate of admission into higher schools had been further narrowed. However, in the 1980s, in the wake of the deepening of the reform and opening up to the outside world and the in-depth market economy, the significance of women's participation in social labor began to be questioned, with the emergence of the voice of "female workers going home". It meant that China's social transformation, the establishment of the market mechanism and the decrease of state intervention brought about severe challenges for women, leading to their adverse position in the market compared to men¹⁵; the gender discrimination, the increase of unemployment rate and the expansion of the income gap between the two genders were typical manifestations in that period, with women being washed ashore by the market wave once again. Due to China's politically-oriented development model in the 1980s, the processes of women's liberation movements was the means and goal of making male standards universal to apply uncritically to women's liberation. Western scholars believed that in the equality wave in the period of the Great Cultural Revolution, people usually simply denied the difference between the two genders and refused to admit the so-called "feminist characters"; and sometimes, people did not accept the difference between the two sexes and

14 A name for the period of ROC government's effective ruling of Chinese mainland (1912-1949). Please see the history of ROC.

15 **Renzhong Q. (1998):** Chinese Women and Feminism. Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House.

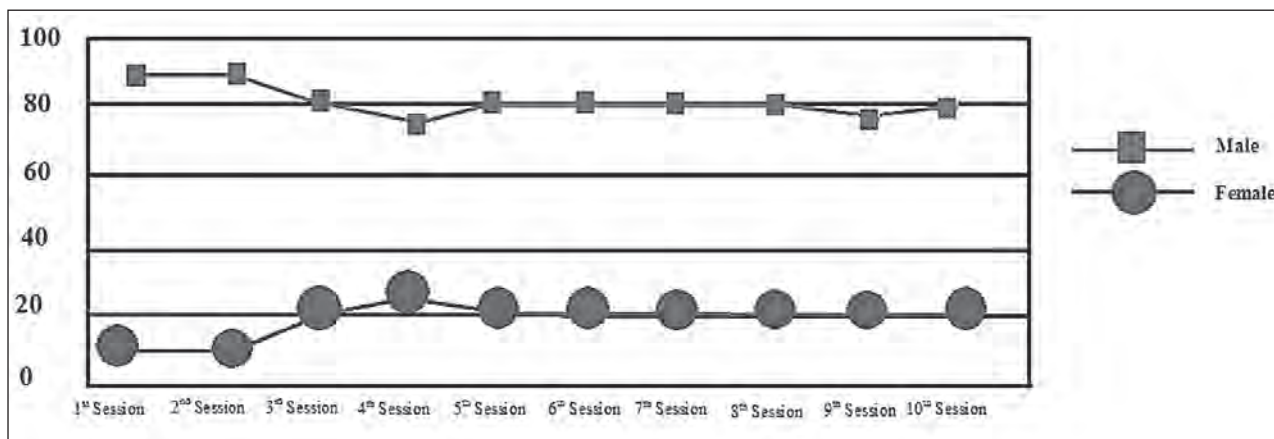


Fig. 4: The dynamics of Chinese woman participation in politics in period since 1st Session in 1956 to 10th Session in 2002. Round points indicate female representatives, square points indicate male representatives.

tried to make those characters highly appraised¹⁶. It is not difficult to find that because China's women liberation movements are a kind of national behavior focused on men and promoted by the coercive force of the state, a comparative equality between the two genders was achieved formally, instead actually. Women did not play the role of someone being rescued, but were instrument-oriented objects. Women had always been placed at the great background of national prosperity and ethnic florescence, acting as those "being liberated" instead of "liberating themselves". However, scholars' discussions mainly focus on the role played by women at the economic level and the issue of whether women's liberty, promoted by the coercive force of the state, is significant, instead of explaining the reason leading to gender inequality, whether equality can be achieved and how to achieve equality from the origin.

In the process of liberation of China's women, the difference between the two genders was simply denied with the "feminist characters" being highly appreciated. Such a seemingly rational process is achieved due to the concept of social construction without gender difference, which results in two negative aspects. On the one hand, under the influence of the male domination, masculine identity and patriarchal thought pattern, the feminist characters are simply regarded as identical to the masculine characters; the difference between the two genders is denied, leading to obliteration of unique feminist characters and demands; the essence of gender equality is the equality of obligations instead of the equality of rights. On the other hand, based on the women's nature, the natural care, feeding and softness (such interpretation of cultural universalism ignores the fact that women's characters are based on the special history, cultural phenomenon and subjected to the economics and political institutions) of women are stressed;

however, in fact, it actually provides for a legitimate basis for the low status of women in employment and salary and for the decisions of employers to make away with women from the labor force. Those are the reasons why the vigorous momentum of women's liberty movements did not change the gender equality in essence. Therefore, it shall be clarified that there is a difference between the two genders, yet this difference is not natural, but constructed during the socialization process; therefore, such difference shall not lead to gender inequality. In order to achieve equality, this difference shall be destructed; proceeding from women themselves, the research on women should be conducted while treating them as the flesh-and-blood individuals with unique living experience, instead of placing them into the grand background of social facts.

Compared to feminism in the western world, Chinese feminism was characterized by softness; although China was also dominated by political voices with the ideology guided by politics, China's liberty aimed at the entire society instead of women alone; with women's liberty included in the social liberty, feminist consciousness was left behind by the society and politics without special attention; consequently, women did not have the right to speak up and a strong awareness to contend for power, so they tended to be silent and maintained the attitude of making no enemies with men in a great environment advocating gender equality. Therefore, during the process of the transmission of western feminist theory to China, the awareness of "right" had been gradually decreased; when Chinese women were under special protection with extremely serious depression, many female writers were not willing to admit that they were feminists or study the feminist theory with the soft attitude; they intended to hold themselves aback from politics, because feminism meant the confrontation with

16 Renzong Q. (1998): Chinese Women and Feminism. Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House.

the patriarchy-centered social order, making enemies with the entire traditional culture. Besides, it required utterly inadequate measures to shock the roots of traditional culture by virtue of individual forces and it was impossible to master one's own right of speech without the transformation of the ideas in the entire society. Most female scholars in China held suspicious, even negative attitudes towards feminist theories.

However, the participation of Chinese women in governance was still at a low level. Taking the female NPC members, the highest proportion of women's political participation in China during the 15 years between 1978 and 1993 after China's reform and opening up to the outside world and was at the level of 21%; it increased by 0.8% until 1998. However, such a slight achievement was lost four years later; the proportion of the year was decreased by 0.8% as compared to that of the year 1978 (as shown on Figure 4).

The standstill of the proportion of political participation of Chinese women was even more distinct in the core of state power. The proportion of China's NPC members has been the highest among all the fields of women's participation in politics. If various fields are ranked according to the amount of power, the closer women are to the core of power, the lower proportion of women's political participation is observed. By the end of 2002, female members of the standing committee of NPC accounted for 13.20%, female members of the standing committee of CPPC accounted for 11.7%, while the female membership of the standing committee of the ruling party, CPC, was zero, lower than the proportion of the 9th Session of NCP in 1969 and far from the level observed during the period of the Great Culture Revolution – 13% (McMillan, 2006).

This is mainly because the related policies did not take full consideration of women's physical characters and law of growth. For instance, certain regulations stipulated in the Ordinance on Appointing Party and Government Leading Cadres apply to men and women equally while ignoring the gender difference; the ignorance of women's childbearing period will directly influence female cadres in adherence to the conditions and regulations for cadre appointment and demission, leading to the adverse development of female cadres. The lower quality of women's education and the traditional thought of "men-outside-and-women-inside" hindered the increase of women's level of political participation. Over 80% of illiterate people in the contemporary China were women. According to the questionnaire survey on women's political participation conducted in a province, women's share in the political participation was less than 20%, showing that various historical reasons, current reasons and women's personal reasons have led to a lower ability and less confidence of women at the present time.

Under the influence of traditions, most women have not realized the importance of the women's participation in politics or the difference between male and fe-

male domination. Therefore, women do not pay attention to the issue of gender of leaders, believing that "any gender of leaders is the same" with a lack of understanding and support of female political participation. This has led to the situation where female political participants are "facing male competitors without any female followers".

Besides, women are often oriented as understanding wives and loving mothers. The public lacks mature and natural psychological readiness for accepting female leaders. Once women become stronger, the public's appreciation can evolve into a kind of exclusion and depreciation, influencing the women's passion in the issue of democracy and the awareness in achieving higher goals. The news media contain insufficient propaganda of women's political participation. According to the survey in 8 newspapers in China, conducted by China Women, among all the newsmakers, men accounted for 83.19% and women accounted for 16.81%; male political participants accounted for 87.3%, and female political participants accounted for 12.7%; the news reports focusing on men accounted for 91% and the ones focusing on women accounted for only 9%. Many reports on advanced women were only concentrated around the March 8, the International Women's Day. The women's images transmitted by the media were still dominated by the traditional culture, e.g. many movies and TV soap operas just blindly promoted the soft and submissive characters of women who often suffered from the toughness and pressures coming from their families and the society; those women changed with their bearing and sacrifice for the well-being of their families, and such kinds of women became typical among those traditional men in China. Such treatment of women oppress women's personality and creative spirit, and have an extremely negative influence on the women's confidence and images of participation in social development in the secular society (McMillan, 2006).

In fact, women in the new era are often trapped in the contradiction of family and business. Women take upon themselves the "dual roles" (the family role and the social role) and the "triple responsibilities" (as wives, mothers and workers), they have to accomplish all of their works while performing the trivial and heavy housework (including daily needs). However, one's time and spirit are limited, so women have no spare time and spirit to improve themselves, especially in the face of the contradiction of family and business. It is a common phenomenon that some professional women who may put too much attention to their careers and ignore their families have to give up their business. Objectively speaking, women, compared to men, are taking upon themselves the special task of reproduction of human beings; they have to care for their families and to teach their children while working on the social stage, and it is easy to imagine the physical and psychological pressure they undergo.

Chaukerova A. N. when characterizing the life of Chinese women in the present-day society, notes that the status of women in China remains shaky. It is commonly believed that sons are the bearers of the family line, and in connection with that, the tradition to kill baby girls gained new meaning in the modern society (Chaukerova, 2012). Today, many women who find out at an ultrasonic examination that the gender of the baby is female prefer abortion. In such a way, it is possible to say that the status of women in China remains low as compared to the status of men. In order to solve this problem, the Chinese government enacted the prohibition to inform the parents of the gender of their future child. This is how Y. Solovyev describes the striving of Chinese women to give birth to boys: "Well, a boy is a "little emperor", and for many people the birth of a son is the evidence of success in life, after all he is the bearer of family line, the main support and hope for the old age. To some extent, the system of birth restriction is to blame for that. In the attempt to stop the explosive increase of population at the end of 70s of the last century, the government proclaimed the principle of "one family – one child". Because of that, "some people regard the birth of a girl as a failure, which is sometimes transferred to the attitude towards the child" (Solovyev, 2013). As a comparison, the example of Azerbaijan may be given, where the discussion of similar law On Reproductive Health and Family Planning was initiated, which is connected with the preference to have a son, but not a daughter (Attane, 2013; MedNews, 2015)

Under the influence of western feminist ideas, the model of the so-called "little family" became spread in China (Olikhova, 2012). According to that model, the values of the Chinese family are still preserved, but the woman actively participates in ensuring the financial soundness of the family.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the ancient and modern times, despite the fact that women's status has been improved greatly, China today is still influenced by the thousand-year-old traditional idea, including the domination of men in the world; therefore, there is still a long way to go to achieve gender equality fundamentally. In the author's opinion, in order to improve women's status and achieve the gender equality, the idea has to come first. Women have their special experiences and feelings that shall be heard by the society. Women shall create their own series of speaking methods and have the right to tell their own stories in their own languages. From politics perspective, the society shall provide opportunities for women to choose instead of treating them as the subjects to help them choose. Secondly, the society shall pay attention to defusing the issue of women's participation in the democratic politics, which is very significant in China. This is not only required by gender equality and

democratization in the new era, but also the necessary exploration to structure the socialist harmonious society. Women issues in the Chinese society at present are the results jointly caused by the traditional cultural factors, economic factors, political factors, social factors and artificial factors. Guided by the scientific outlook of development, the society shall advocate gender equality, constantly promote the democratic progress, integrate advanced institutions into the actual situations and policies to raise women to achieve self-growth, to affect the society with the unique power of women in the new era and enhance women's growth in various aspects. These are the effective paths to solve the issue of women's social status in China.

The research shows that the woman's status underwent changes as the Chinese society developed and established. Disregard towards women, their deprivation of any property rights whatsoever at the early stages of the Chinese social institution's establishment (before 1500 B.C.) gradually changed to female emancipation.

The main reason for breaching female rights was the fact that unlike sons, after marriage the woman no longer belonged to her family. Thus, she could not aid or support her parents in old age. It is also possible to state that the reason for women's low status in the society of Ancient and Medieval China was the Confucian dogmas that declared rules of female behavior, the main moral whereof came down to the following regulation: "a woman shall not be heard of beyond her home" (Usov, 2006: 26).

The role of the woman in modern society continues to change. According to demographic researcher Professor Yang Juhua, women's status changes are showing a negative trend. Having obtained equal rights with men, including labor rights, women have begun searching for self-fulfillment in labor. Participation in labor life and achievement of careers has led to a considerable rise of competition among women under market relations (Andreyev, 2014).

The reasons for founding a family have also changed. The parents used to choose the husband for a woman, while marriage was an obligatory condition for procreation. However, nowadays, families are founded based on the personal needs of women and men, their love and care. The authors believe that the family institution of marriage, based on the married couple's psychological comfort, is the most promising direction for developing the woman's status in marriage and forming her family values. Savchenko A.V. states the following: "The world view of the Chinese youth already firmly includes the obligatory presence of love when forming family relationships. The youth believes that without love there can be no harmony and, therefore, no happiness in life" (Savchenko, 2013). A new tendency of premarital relationships has formed in China, influenced by the "sexual emancipation of the West". In particular, according to traditional Chinese dogmas, a woman had no right

to premarital relationships. As of today, premarital relationships are common in China. However, it is worth noting that many Chinese continue to uphold traditions. Nevertheless, if premarital sex used to be condemned, nowadays the attitude thereto is not that critical. Chinese women themselves strive for self-fulfillment, career building, financial independence from parents, etc., which is why their marriage is motivated, usually, by a serious intention to found a family. Savchenko A.V. also acknowledges another trend: approximately 50.2% of

Chinese women do not strive for marriage at all, preferring childfree life (Savchenko, 2013).

Thus, it is possible to draw a conclusion that the women's status formation remains dynamic. Globalization and internationalization play their roles. It is certainly impossible to predict what manner of influence a radical equalization of men's and women's rights will have in China – a country that has long preferred traditions, however the future development of the state itself is impossible without these changes.

SPREMEMBE V DRUŽBENEM POLOŽAJU ŽENSK NA KITAJSKEM

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POVZETEK

Tako v suženjstvu kot v obdobju fevdalizma in kapitalizma, na zgodovinskem prizorišču daljne preteklosti in moderne dobe, so ženskam v Republiki Kitajski priznavali določen družbeni položaj ob rojstvu in v življenju, ki pa je z gospodarskim in političnim razvojem družbe doživel vzpone in padce. V patriarhalno urejeni zgodovinski družbi so bila pravila obnašanja za ženske in razpon njihovih dejavnosti podvrženi različnim nepravilnim omejitvam, nenehno so jih ovirali in zatirali. Po ustanovitvi nove Kitajske so se ženske začele postopoma osvobajati položaja, ki so ga opredeljevali vplivi kulture spolov v tradicionalni družbi, dolgoročna ekonomska odvisnost žensk od moških ter androcentrična družba, vendar je vpliv teh dejavnikov na njihov status še dandanes močan. Avtorica v prispevku sklone in povzema predhodno objavljeno literaturo, analizira razvoj družbenega položaja žensk, odkriva, ali je enakopravnost med spoloma mogoča ter kako doseči enakost z vidika sociologije spolov. Njen cilj je v širši akademski skupnosti odpreti razpravo na temo spolne enakopravnosti na Kitajskem.

Ključne besede: status žensk, fevdalna kultura, sožitje med spoloma, patriarhat, politično udejstvovanje

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