

Problems and Reasons for Gender Inequality in China

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Abstract: With the development of society and economy in China, feminist consciousness is raising while the development of feminism still encounters obstacles that are caused by deep-rooted stereotypes and concepts. This article reviews the gender inequality situations in modern China, emphasizes the urgency of resolving gender equality issues, and analyzes the problems caused by gender inequality as well as reasons behind it in modern Chinese society and proposes a few methods to achieve gender equality.

Keywords: Gender inequality, Education, Employment, Chastity

1. Introduction

1.1 The significance of studying gender inequality

As the #MeToo movement continues to achieve global attention, gender inequality problems in China have been brought up when we watch the news, statements of famous people, and legal regulations. We can find that gender inequality is pervasive and appears in many aspects of people's lives such as education, career, and legal regulations. Gender inequality seriously affects many people's lives. For example, compared to men, women are less likely to receive higher education. Furthermore, women not only have more difficulties to find jobs than men do, but also are more likely to be illegally fired. It has been reported by many news channels that many pregnant women are illegally fired during their pregnancy without even having unemployment compensation. In addition, in gender relations or in the family, men often hold higher status than women. In general, a lot of people are gender biased against others, and women often do not receive the same opportunities and rights as men do. If gender inequality is not resolved for a long time, severe problems may occur which can lead to rising unemployment, huge loss of social wealth, and intensifying polarization between the rich and the poor. It may also cause human trafficking and marriage sales.

1.2 Definition of terms

Equality

Equality means that social subjects are in the same position in social relations and social life, have the same development opportunities, and enjoy the same rights. This includes equality of personality, equality of opportunity, and equality of rights. All persons are born equal (Zhou, 1991).

Inequality

Inequality can be divided into two large categories: one is natural or physical inequality, as it is determined by nature, including differences in age, health, physical strength, and mental or soul quality; the other is moral or political inequality because it depends on one custom and is established or at least authorized by the common consent of human beings. This inequality includes the different privileges enjoyed by some, and prejudices against others, such as being richer, more respected, stronger, and even requiring them to obey (Rousseau, 1755).

2. Study - Gender Inequality Problems

2.1. Inequality of Education

The illiteracy rate of Chinese women has dropped from 90% before the founding of the People's Republic of China to 7.01% in 2019. From 2010 to 2020, the proportion of female graduate students in the country increased from 47.9% to 50.9% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). It can be seen that with the development of the economy and the progress of society, the educational level of Chinese women has improved significantly; however, inequality still exists, and women still have fewer opportunities to receive education than men, because some universities require higher admission scores for women. According to the plan for recruiting general high school graduates released by Naval Engineering University in 2021, the university has 56 majors open to students, but only 8 majors recruit both men and women, and the remaining 48 majors only recruit men (2021). According to the plan for recruiting general high school graduates released by the Air Force Military Medical University in 2021, preventive medicine and public service management majors do not admit women. Moreover, the school plans to recruit 209 men in total, but only 29 women (2021). In 2012, the admission score for Renmin University of China is 601 points for men and 614 points for women (China Youth Daily, 2012). In 2012, the admission scores of Shanghai International Studies University were different for men and women in 12 provinces and cities. For example, the minimum admission score in Guangxi Province was 65 points higher for women than for men. In the same year, the admission scores of Shanghai Customs College were higher for women than men in many provinces and cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Chongqing, Guangdong, Henan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Liaoning. It could reach 33 points higher for women than for men (China Youth Daily, 2012). Women often have to work harder to get the same educational opportunities as men. Even so, some women cannot study their preferred majors, no matter how hard and excellent they are, just because they are women, these college majors do not want women. To a certain extent, women do not have the right to compete equally with men for educational opportunities.

2.2. Inequality of Employment

Contemporary women are discriminated against in the workplace and face the problems of high education but difficulty in finding jobs, securing promotion, and unequal pay for the same work. It can be seen from Figure 1 (Zhilian Recruitment, 2022) that in the workplace, the proportion of ordinary female employees is much higher than that of ordinary male employees. The proportion of male managers is much higher than that of female managers. Men in management positions above the grassroots level accounted for 40.7%, while women accounted for only 34.2%. According to a survey, only about 23% of respondents said that their supervisors were women (Chen, 2020). Research shows that 41.79% of women have suffered discrimination during pregnancy, and 61.16% of women are willing to not give birth or delay childbearing for employment or promotion (Duan, 2021). A survey shows that the average salary of women is 12% lower than that of men (Zhaopin, 2022). Another study shows that about 80% of female workers indicated that they had encountered discrimination, such as not recruiting women, giving priority to recruiting men,

requiring female workers not to marry or have children for a few years, being given a pay cut during pregnancy and maternity leave, and being forced to resign (Chen, 2020). However, 55.9% of women in the workplace have a college degree or above, while only 33.6% of men have such a degree (Zhaopin, 2022). This reflects how unfair the workplace is to women, who are obviously better than most men. Most women in the workplace have higher education levels than men, which shows that women are smarter and more eager to learn than men, and it also indicates that women are more difficult to find jobs than men. Women who want to get the same development opportunities as men must have a higher degree and work harder. This act of imposing different standards on women and men, to a certain extent, deprives women of employment opportunities and is unequal to women. In addition, if the discrimination of female employment is not improved for a long time, it may lead to an increase in the unemployment rate, which will lead to a decline in GDP, a widening gap between the rich and the poor, and increases the crime rate and aggravation of social conflicts. At the same time, it will raise the financial burden of the country because many people need to rely on national security to live.

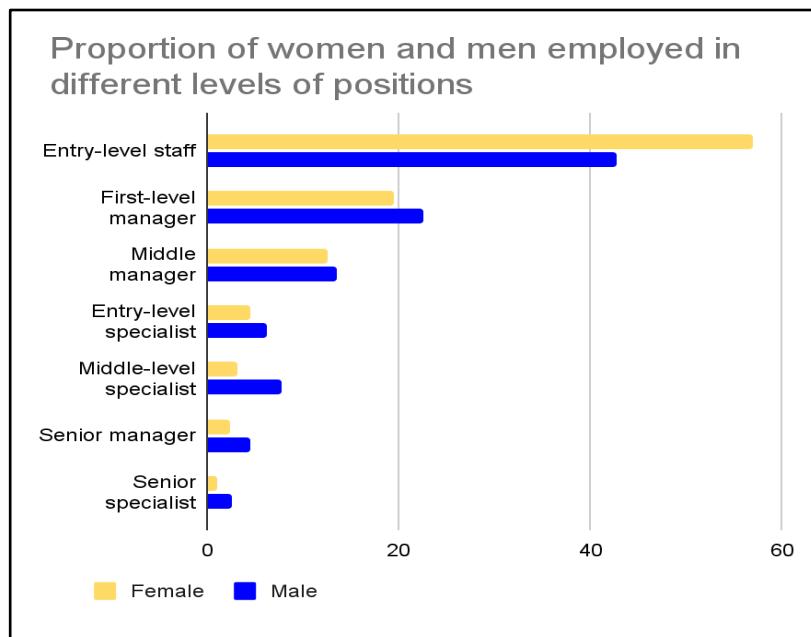


Figure 1. Proportion of women and men employed in different levels of position from Zhilian Recruitment, 2022

2.3. Inequality of Chastity

Influenced by traditional Chinese culture, the Chinese attach great importance to women's pre-marital chastity. There are still many men who ask women not to have sex before marriage and believe that the hymen is the most precious thing for a woman (Wang, 2018).

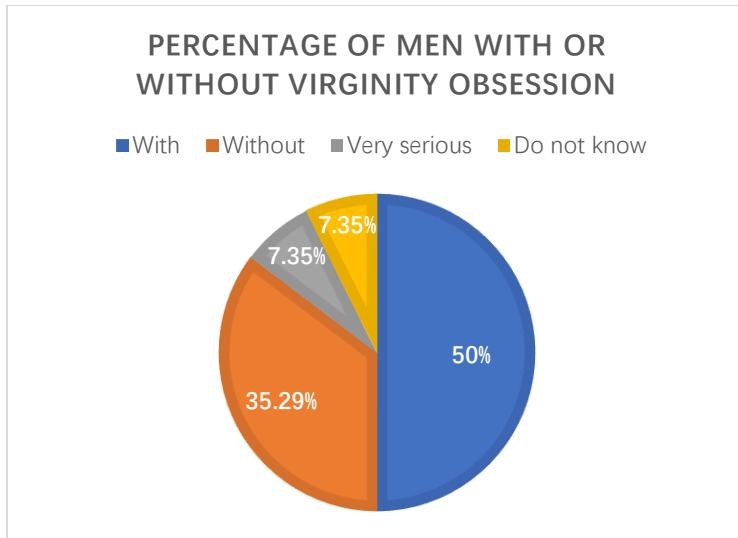


Figure 2. Percentage of men with or without virginity obsession

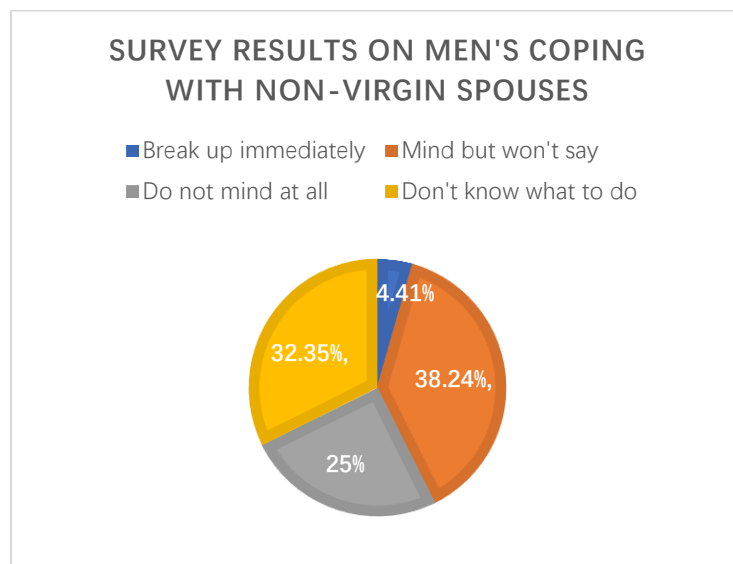


Figure 3. Survey results on men's coping with non-virgin spouses

It can be seen from the illustration that 57.35% of men have a virgin obsession, and a few men choose to break up immediately when finding out that their girlfriend is not a virgin. Some people even think that a girl with an incomplete hymn is not a good girl, believing that it is profligate, and it is shameful. However, few people require that men should not have sex before marriage. Many men pay great attention to chastity, but they only ask others harshly and do not restrain their own behavior. This kind of double standard for men and women, strict treatment of others and tolerant treatment of self, must be cast aside and disdained.

In addition, as a deep-rooted conception in the public of China, it can be easily observed that when a man has a lot of female friends or many former girlfriends, people generally praise him and think that he is very popular and attractive. However, when a woman has many male friends or many former boyfriends, many people will think that she is profligate and dirty. It is injustice and discrimination against women.

2.4. Inequalities for men caused by stereotypes

In modern life, some men have also become exquisite and like to make up and dress up. Boys would sometimes hold hands and hug each other. But for some people, these things can only be done by girls. It is abnormal and disgusting for guys to do these things. There are even people who think that men will be as weak and feminine as women by doing so, so these behaviors of men are often spurned and suppressed. In May 2020, Si Zefu, member of the Standing Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, stated in his "Proposal on Preventing the Feminization of Male Adolescents" those Chinese male adolescents are weak, inferior, and timid, and pursue fair skin and beautiful skin. The "feminization" trend, if not effectively managed, will endanger the survival and development of the Chinese nation (China Development Network, 2020). In this regard, the Ministry of Education responded that it should pay more attention to cultivating students' fortitude (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

This shows that sexism can also harm men's rights. Dressing up is not a women's patent. The title and claims of the proposal have gender stereotypes. The title of the proposal could be changed to "Proposal on Fostering Bravery and Positive Spirit in Youth" or "Proposal on Preventing Physical Decline in Youth". In addition, women will not endanger the survival and development of the Chinese nation. Inferiority and timidity are not issues of feminization, but issues of character. It is indeed necessary to cultivate strong, decisive, and courageous qualities in students, but the opposite should not be female. People should not have gender stereotypes, men are not necessarily all masculine, and women are not necessarily all feminine. There are many girls who like sports and are outgoing, and there are many boys who are quiet and introverted. On the surface, people do not want to make boys feminine, they do not want to make them weak, inferior, and timid, but their essence is gender stereotypes and discrimination against women. Women are considered weak, inferior, and timid, and female is regarded as a pejorative term. This would not only hurt women's rights but also men's rights as well. Therefore, sexism must be abandoned, and there should be no stereotyped concepts of masculinity and femininity, people should not be bound by stereotyped labels.

3. Discussion - Reasons for Gender Inequality

3.1. The Influence of History

In the middle and late Paleolithic period, China entered the matriarchal clan society from the primitive population stage. Lineage and inheritance are calculated by matrilineal. Women held leadership positions in the clan. Children follow their mothers' surnames. In the late Neolithic period, China began to enter a patriarchal society. Men's rights and social status are higher than women's, men become the masters of society and the family, the property is inherited by men who determine their biological father, women become men's appendages, patriarchy is established, and there is a situation where men are superior to women. From then on, including the later class society, China has been patriarchal for thousands of years. In society, whether in politics, economy, law, religion, education, military or family, all positions of authority are reserved for men, women are in a position of inferiority and obedience, so it is difficult for women to have the opportunity to work outside the family and have a career. However, men have the opportunity to study, become officials, do business, fight wars, and become heroes. The great images depicted in legends and historical novels are almost always men, while women seem to be separated from society and the public, and no one records their deeds. Over time, many people will have an illusion that only men are capable of making a career, while women are almost useless. Patriarchy has existed for too long, this kind of thinking is deeply rooted, so sexism is difficult to change for a while.

3.2 The Influence of Productive Force

During the matriarchal society, women were the main inventors of agriculture, animal husbandry, pottery, and textiles. Agriculture and stock farming provide human beings with more abundant sources of food and clothing than gathering, fishing, and hunting. The pottery industry and the textile industry have greatly improved the living conditions of human beings. However, men are still largely in the field of fishing and hunting products and have not made outstanding achievements. In addition, women do the heavy lifting in cooking, managing chores, and parenting. At this stage, women are the main productive forces. Therefore, women are dominant in social and economic life. With the continuous improvement of social productivity and the great changes in the agricultural revolution, men gradually shifted from fishing and hunting activities to the field of agricultural and stock farming production, especially plowing, which is labor-intensive, thus strengthening the role of men in agricultural production. At the same time, handicrafts such as pottery-making became complex, highly technical, and labor-intensive, and men who were strong and do not need childbirth became the main bearers, thus replacing the dominant position of women in the field of production, and China began to enter patrilineal society (Wei & Guo, 2014). The productive forces determine the relations of production, and the economic base determines the superstructure. Whoever is the main productive force in society has a higher status. In modern society, although the difference in productivity between men and women is reducing, most employers are reluctant to hire women due to physiological problems, and men are still the main productive force. If we want to achieve equality between men and women, we need to further develop productivity. The higher the proportion of high-tech and high-intellectual labor in production, the lower the proportion of heavy manual labor in production, the smaller the difference in productivity between women and men, and the more equality between women and men.

3.3 The Influence of Laws

According to the "Special Regulations on Labor Protection for Female Employees", female employees enjoy 98 days of maternity leave, of which 15 days can be taken before giving birth, employers need to pay salary normally to female workers during maternity leave. The "Regulations on the Administration of Population and Family Planning" in most provinces stipulate that paternity leave for men is generally 7 days, and the maximum is only 30 days long. The length of maternity leave and paternity leave varies greatly. In essence, it is tacitly that most of the responsibility for caring for the newborn should be borne by the mother, which leads to unfairness to women. Parenting should be the responsibility of both husband and wife. In addition, this results in a huge difference in the degree of impact on the work of male and female employees due to childbirth. Therefore, employers will see that hiring female workers is less profitable than male workers, which may exacerbate employment discrimination against women.

According to the "Interim Measures of the State Council on the Placement of Elderly, Weak, Sick and Disabled Cadres" and the "Interim Measures of the State Council on Retirement and Retirement of Workers", the current retirement ages for Chinese workers are 60 years old for men, 55 years old for female cadres, and 50 years old for female workers. Men and women have different retirement ages, which is essentially discrimination against women, resulting in female workers not having equal labor rights with men. As the scale of brain research has expanded, scientists have found that brain differences between male and females appear trivial. The current study found that, apart from simple differences in brain size, there were no significant differences in brain structure and activity in the brains of men and women in different groups (Ying & Yu, 2021). If the difference in retirement age between men and women is only based on the difference in their physical fitness, female workers engaged in intellectual work should not be required to

retire at a younger age than males. That is to say women should not be discriminated against in mental work because there is almost no difference in brain power between women and men.

3.4. Physiological factors in women

Due to the different human anatomy of men and women, women have special physiological conditions such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation. During these circumstances, female workers need vacation and rest. It may cause troubles such as interruptions in work continuity and difficulties in post connection, resulting in increased costs for enterprises. Therefore, many employers are reluctant to hire women, they believe that hiring male workers is more profitable (Wang, 2021).

4. Conclusion

Marx pointed out that humans are the unity of natural man, social human, and spiritual human. Gender equality is based on the recognition and respect for the biological differences between men and women, the equality of the personality, dignity, and values of men and women as human beings, as well as equality of rights, opportunities, results, and responsibilities in all spheres of family and social life (Liu, 2016). To face up to the physiological differences between men and women, men and women are two different kinds of people, cannot take men as a reference, require absolute consistency between men and women, because it is also an inequality to require women to cater to men's standards. Respect for physiological differences needs to base on the physiological differences between men and women to give special care, for example, in the national legal policy on women in pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation to give special labor protection provisions, maternity protection system development and improvement and so on, to reduce women's responsibility at work, because in these periods, women take on the responsibility that men do not. Equality of rights cannot be said to be ignored. However, this requires that both members of society and companies have a very high level of morality, otherwise some companies will be reluctant to hire women because women are protected by labor during special periods, which will lead to increased costs and lower profits for companies.

In conclusion, gender equality is not about making women like men, and it is not about gender opposition. It is about facing the differences, living in harmony, and depending on each other. All people should be equal in personality, dignity, worth, with equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities in all respects. Achieving gender equality is not only the liberation of women, but also the liberation of men and the liberation of all human beings.

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