

Addressing Low Women's Political Participation in China: Proposals to Increasing Motivation and Improving Current Policies

A. Introduction

In the last fifty years, the level of women's political participation worldwide has increased significantly. Many countries have experienced the emergence of women leaders, who are playing an increasingly important role in various fields. However, compared to Third World countries where the affirmative/feminist movement started later, the issue of increasing women's political participation cannot be judged only by the developed world. This paper will use China as an example to discuss the issue of women in politics participation in third world countries. the problems that women still face. I will then try to trace the origins of these problems and find reliable solutions.

According to an analysis by the China Women's Federation, there are three main problems of women's political participation in the Chinese system. The first problem is the relatively small number of women compared to men. In the first thirteen Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) which is the government agency exercising the legislative power of the state that was elected, the percentage of women in the Standing Committee never exceeded one-quarter (BBC). The percentage of women members of the Central Committee has never exceeded 11% (BBC). Only 7.1% of the ministers elected in the sixth term were women, and only 6.2% of the governors were women, which is more than twenty percentage points less than the Nordic cabinet (NPC website). Thus, in the field of leadership and management, although women started to show in politics, it is still essentially a male world, and the history of male domination of the political arena has not been fundamentally changed.

The second issue is the low percentage of women in key positions. In the 50 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China, there has not been a single woman in the top leadership of the Party or the country, not even in the Standing Committee of the Politburo. Among the existing group of women leaders, there are few women in full positions and many women in deputy positions. Among the 69 female mayors of large and medium-sized cities, there are only 3 full mayors and 66 deputy mayors. Moreover, women's work is still confined to specific areas (City Mayors). According to the statistics of 100 female provincial cadres from all over the country, nearly 80% of them are in charge of women's affairs, family planning, and united front work (Li). From these statistics, it can be seen that women in politics in China at all levels of the party and government power are not yet able to play their role.

The 1995 Electoral Law of the National People's Congresses and Local People's Congresses of the People's Republic of China states that there should be an appropriate proportion of women in the national people's congresses, but in the process of implementation, there is a lack of supporting policies and training mechanisms (Electoral Law). In the selection of female cadres, there is too much emphasis on proportionality and a lack of long-term planning for the areas of responsibility of female cadres (Zeng). There is too much emphasis on hard targets such as age, profession, culture, etc., and not enough on the level of leadership, ability to manage the overall situation, pioneering spirit, and other investigations (Rosen). The lack of relevant policies has led to the selection of female cadres being too one-sided, as if "completing the task", thus limiting women's enthusiasm for politics.

The causes of the unbalance problem are the mixture of Chinese traditional social prejudice against women in politics, lack of education for women, unfair selection of women government employees, and policy constraints. Since the founding of the People's Republic of

China, the government has conceived and proposed a variety of policies to try to address this problem. This paper will analyze the causes of the problem, the coverage, and the policies that have been adopted in other countries. Based on the combination of these efforts, we propose a relatively comprehensive set of solutions that aim to radically reverse the problem of low female participation in politics. We believe, in order to solve this problem from its origin, it should involve optimizing the public opinion environment for women's political participation, establishing a complete system for selecting and training women political leaders, and taking complementary measures are the fundamental and most effective ways to ensure further development of women's political participation.

B. Solution

1. Eliminate Social Prejudices

Traditional attitudes and social prejudices have had a negative impact on women's political participation, leading directly or indirectly to a decline in women's awareness and opportunities to participate in politics. Since China's reform and opening up in 1978, the people have had some degree of voting rights. However, female representation in 1987 was down by nearly half compared to 1973 (Guo). In addition to the existence of gender discrimination, this phenomenon is also related to the existence of a large number of illiterate women after the founding of the new China. According to the population survey in 2000, there are 87 million illiterate and semi-literate people over the age of 15 in China, of which 63 million are women, accounting for 73%; among the 500 million women, 13.5% are illiterate, and the disadvantage of literacy makes women's chances of entering higher levels far lower than men's (Women).

The Roanoke College Department of Public Affairs, after analysed data set across 54 democratic countries observed from year 2000 to year 2010, concluded that Equality of access

and educational attainment between genders can have a positive and significant impact on gender political equality (Delamatta). Considering the current status of China[having partial voting rights], we consider this theory can also be applied to non-democratic countries. Since 1986, the Chinese government has enforced a nine-year compulsory education, providing equal rights to education for youth of all genders (Kelly). However, the quality of education received by students varies between rural and urban areas and between rich and poor (Zhang). In rural areas, where the preference for sons over daughters is most severe, the traditional mindset has not been fundamentally changed. Hence, we hereby propose to further strengthen the education of all people and to improve the quality of the people on the basis of equality as much as possible.

On the other hand, society should also increase women's will to participate in politics through education. As a feudal society with more than two thousand years of history, China's long tradition of male-dominated society has resulted in Chinese women's lack of self-confidence and subject consciousness (Teng). As a result, women's active participation in politics is weaker than that of men. This long-suppressed sense of inferiority leads them to be afraid to challenge social prejudices, to fight openly against male-centeredness, and to be afraid to step into the realm of power (Teng). Therefore, another major goal of education is to eliminate women's fear and inferiority complex in political participation. Society should also increase women's will to participate in politics through education. For example, the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom offers a series of training courses to improve women's leadership skills (Lee). American non-governmental organizations, CARE, have established "women's business leadership camps" for young girls, which not only impart the necessary knowledge to the trainees, but also focus on developing young women's personal and leadership skills, especially self-confidence (The Power). There is now a growing consensus among countries and women's

organizations that education and training can help reduce traditional prejudices and help women become more active citizens. Traditional patriarchal attitudes and unequal access to education have led to political power imbalances between men and women, and increasing women's access to education and schooling has become an effective way to improve women's participation in decision-making and to help them reach higher levels of power.

2. Complementary Measures

Subjectively, we should try to change the social prejudice against women in politics through education as much as possible. Objectively, we believe that the government should set up supporting policies to improve the status of women in order to promote women's political participation. Many countries have set up policies in areas such as maternity leave, family allowances, etc. to address the concerns of women in politics. For example, in 1993, Norway changed its maternity leave legislation so that the father of a newborn child is entitled to four weeks of leave, which is forfeited if not used and cannot be transferred to the mother (Ang). This policy has facilitated the increasing participation of fathers in shared childcare activities and reduced the burden of household chores on women (Ang). In addition to this, the Norwegian government places great emphasis on childcare as part of its efforts to promote gender equality (Ang). Also, a family grant scheme has been introduced, which allows parents to receive a grant to stay at home with their children, or to subsidize the cost of child care or hiring someone else to care for them (Ang). In Denmark, in order to assist women politicians with their duties, such as business trips and evening meetings, etc (Early childhood). The government pays 10,000 kroner per child per year to cover the cost of temporary child care services (Early childhood). These policies have freed family and childcare responsibilities from women's shoulders, emphasizing

equal sharing of household chores between husband and wife, and changing traditional attitudes and stereotypes of gender.

These policies, which have been successful in other countries, can also be applied to solve China's problems with modifications that fit the country's circumstances. Although Chapter 4 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women clearly states: "The State shall guarantee that women enjoy the equal right, with men, in work and social security." and "Labour contract or service agreement must be signed between the employer and employee when the female employee was recruited, any content that limits female employees' marriage or pregnancy therein will be prohibited (Law)." However, due to China's large population base and lack of regulations, hidden discrimination still exists. In the report published by Human Rights Watch, an international human rights organization, it was noted that in 2017, 13% of vacancies in China's national civil service job listings were listed as "male-only," "male-preferred," and "suitable for men (Only Men). This percentage increased to 19% in 2018 (Only Men). The rise of this phenomenon may be related to the Chinese government's liberalization of the "two-child policy" [the maximum number of children per family is two; prior to this, family planning limited the number of children per family to one]. At the 2017 National People's Congress (NPC), Fu Yingyi, the spokesperson for the NPC, emphasized that the implementation of the comprehensive two-child policy may lead to a new round of employment discrimination against working women, and that "relevant supporting policies and services should keep up."

However, existing laws are unilateral policies towards women, such as extending maternity leave. Such policies undoubtedly reinforce the gendered nature of society and are not conducive to employment equality between men and women. China's recent shift from restricting births to

encouraging them, the increasing emphasis on women's role in the family, and the reluctance of companies to bear the costs of childbirth have further aggravated the already harsh employment environment for women. Therefore, we believe that the law should do more to eliminate discrimination than unilateral welfare measures such as delayed maternity leave. As discussed earlier in Denmark and other countries, maternity leave should be available to both men and women, and the state should bear more of the cost of childbirth, such as childcare and other services.

3. Long-term Women Political Leaders Selecting and Training System

Changing traditional attitudes is a complex systemic project that requires the attention of society as a whole and the efforts of women themselves. Therefore, political quotas were introduced in order to increase women's political participation in a short period of time (Su). Political Quotas successfully increased the women participation rate in many countries and can solve the problem can serve as an efficient way to increase the women participation rate through policies. However, mandatory quotas have led to a lack of permanence, continuity, and stability in the selection of women political leaders.

Therefore, in the report at 17th Party Congress, China, proposes to improve selection and training measures based on political quotas to ensure that the real voices of women political representatives are heard and to encourage women who are genuinely interested in politics (Hu). For example, setting up a professional training system and a long-term training program would be an effective way to compete with the quota system, to ensure that women's political participation is not just about to ensure that women's political participation is not just about "completing the task".

At the same time, in order to promote women's political representation at the top of the role, there is a trend toward a unified retirement age. According to the World Health

Organization, women on average live longer than men and have proven that women are capable of continuing to lead in all walks of life even after the age of fifty-five (World Health). However, in China's current retirement system, the age of retirement has always been sixty for men and fifty-five for women (Al Jazeera). This limited tenure restricts women's performance and excludes them from management. Therefore, we believe that unifying the retirement age for both genders is the necessary way to promote equal political power between men and women.

C. Discussion

Since the last century, the issue of women in politics has received increasing attention. The Platform for Action adopted by the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women states : 1) Gender socialization and negative stereotypes of men and women reinforce the tendency for political decision-making to remain a male domain. 2) The traditional patterns of operation of many political parties and governments continue to act as barriers to women's participation in political life. Discriminatory attitudes and practices, family and childcare responsibilities, and the high cost of seeking and holding public office may all discourage women from seeking political office.

China, as the world's most populous country, women are underrepresented in politics due to long-standing traditional gender discrimination and imperfect social guarantees. Therefore, understanding the severity of the problem and its causes, in order to improve the environment for women's political participation in China today, we believe that in the long term, we should encourage women to participate in politics by eliminating gender discrimination and reversing traditional gender socialization through education and other measures.

In the short term, we believe that we should establish comprehensive policies to support women's political participation, such as a unified retirement age for men and women, maternity

leave for both parents, and childcare protection. It is important to ensure that laws and policies are in place to protect women's rights to political participation. At the same time, we need to build on the existing political quota policy to improve the training and selection system for women cadres to ensure that women are truly at the center of decision-making and to help their long-term development.

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