

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN CHINA

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Executive Summary

1. In 2007, U.S.-based Forbes magazine ranked then Chinese Vice Premier Wu Yi No. 2 on its annual list of the World's 100 Most Powerful Women. Wu symbolised the influence of women in Chinese political affairs and the role of Chinese women in “holding up half the sky” (妇女能顶半边天).
2. From the 1950s, China has begun to promote gender equality in the area of education, work, marriage and family, and political participation. It made a renewed effort after 1995 when the country hosted the Fourth World Conference on Women.
3. Since 1995, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has put in place various policies and programmes to enhance gender equality. Unlike many earlier laws and policies, the new initiatives move beyond the vague recognition of the principle of gender equality, and focus more on action and implementation.
4. To encourage women's political participation, the party-state has explored different approaches such as combining multi-candidate elections with mandatory quotas. The quota system at every level serves to guarantee the presence of women in political bodies.
5. Since the late 1990s, the Central Organization Department of the CCP has made several decisions on training and selecting women cadres. Promoted by the All China Women's Federation (ACWF), women's participation has become an index for evaluating officials' performances.
6. In April 2009, China unveiled an action plan to promote human rights, including women's rights to political participation. It requires that people's congresses, political consultative conferences and governments at all levels have at least one female member in their leadership. Women should make up at least 20% of the reserve cadres at provincial, city and county levels.

7. These initiatives help to provide a stable institutional environment for advancing women's political participation. The percentage of women deputies to the National People's Congress (equivalent to congress or parliament in other countries) increased from 20.2% in 2003 to 21.3% in 2008, the largest gain in the post-Mao period.
8. From a comparative perspective, however, China still lags far behind many other countries. Though a few Chinese women are perceived as politically influential, the reality is, the gap between women's participation in different political power structures in China and in other countries has widened in recent decades.
9. Despite China's emphasis on increasing women's participation and representation, the international ranking of female deputies to People's Congress decreased from 12th in 1994 to 42nd in 2005.
10. China has a long way to go even when compared with its recent past. The proportion of female in the Central Committee of the CCP declined to 7.6% in 2002 compared with a steady increase from 5% to 13% between the 1950s and the 1970s.
11. Progress towards gender equality is difficult and uneven in the largely male-dominated society of China. Practices by a host of institutions – from the party-state down to the family – tend to reproduce gender inequality insofar as the male-centered culture remains strong.
12. Through affirmative action in women's representation in certain political bodies, the Chinese government is raising public awareness of the gender issue. While Chinese women will continue to face enormous challenges in political participation, substantial progress can be made in small steps if China maintains the momentum gained from the hosting of World Conference on Women in 1995.

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Progress in Chinese Women's Political Participation

- 1.1 In 2007, then Chinese Vice Premier Wu Yi was ranked No. 2 on the annual list of the World's 100 Most Powerful Women compiled by U.S.-based *Forbes* magazine. That was a significant indicator of the influence of women in Chinese political affairs. Indeed, women's political participation in China has gained new momentum after the country hosted the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. Though China has made substantial progress in widening women's political participation, it is still not comparable with that of other countries, especially those in the democratic West.
- 1.2 The progress in the level of women's political participation can be attributed to the economic reform and open door policy introduced in China in 1978. Women's political involvement has greatly benefited from the various gender-related institutions and policies such as the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests* (1992, 2005), the *Programme for Women Development in China (1995-2000, 2001-2010)* and documents relating to personnel appointments by the Central Organization Department (COD) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (e.g., *the Program on Deepening the Reform of Cadre and Personnel System from 2001 to 2010*).
- 1.3 The market-oriented reform has greatly facilitated the engagement of women in free market competition. As women's awareness of individual rights

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develops, the granting of political rights becomes inevitable as it serves as an extension of their material interests under the free market system. In addition, the open door policy has accelerated the alignment of Chinese women's pursuit of equal opportunity and favorable gender policy with international norms.

- 1.4 The advancement of women's participation in politics would not have come about without the development of many institutional factors over the past decades. Since the 1990s, the CCP has put in place various policies, or taken affirmative action, to enhance gender equality. Female representation in different political bodies has increased significantly. To encourage women's participation, the party-state has explored different approaches such as combining multi-candidate elections with mandatory quotas. The quota system at every level has guaranteed the presence of women in political bodies.
- 1.5 Since the late 1990s, the COD has made several decisions on training and selecting woman cadres. Promoted by the All China Women's Federation (ACWF), women's participation has become an index used in evaluating officials' performances, which represents a substantial leap from the initial definition in 1982 to actual implementation. These institutional initiatives have provided a stable institutional environment for advancing women's participation.
- 1.6 China still lags far behind many other countries in terms of increasing women's representation in powerful political bodies. Though a few Chinese women are perceived as politically influential worldwide, the reality is, the gap between women's participation in different political power structures in China and in other countries has widened in recent decades despite China's achievement of faster economic growth compared with most other countries today.
- 1.7 The international ranking of female deputies of People's Congress (equivalent to Congresspersons or Parliament members in other countries) decreased from

12th in 1994 to 42nd in 2005. The low women representation can also be seen in the central power structure as the proportion of females in the Central Committee of the CCP declined to 7.6% in 2002 compared with a steady increase from 5% to 13% between the 1950s and 1970s. Women face enormous challenges in terms of political participation in the largely male-dominated society of China.

The Rise of Affirmative Action

- 2.1 Equal opportunity between men and women has been a principal policy of the party and government ever since the founding of the People's Republic of China. During the Mao Zedong era, China's gender policy was to achieve Mao's ambitious goal of "women holding up half the sky." Until today, Mao was regarded as more liberal towards women participation in politics than any other leaders, including the current leadership. In fact, Mao's wife Jiang Qing (江青) was able to turn off many male Chinese politicians.
- 2.2 However, most of the provisions under this policy were too general and had no substantial impact on women's rights. China's hosting of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 was a key turning point. This event served as a catalyst to boosting women's political involvement, resulting in various gender-oriented regulations. In the closing address of the 1995 world women conference, then-President Jiang Zemin once again emphasised that "the equality between men and women is the fundamental policy of China." Following the 1995 conference, the Chinese government has been systematically supporting women's political rights.
- 2.3 As a primary provision in the 1954 Constitution, gender equality is protected constitutionally in China. The Constitution states that "all citizens of the People's Republic of China have the right to vote and stand for election." Another article states that "women in the People's Republic of China have equal rights with men in all spheres of life including the political, economic,

cultural, social and family spheres.”¹ Women’s rights are also stated in all subsequent constitutions.

- 2.4 Between the 1950s and 1970s, women’s rights were realized and protected by China’s cadre management system under which all Party cadres and government officials were appointed by the party-state. This system took gender factors into consideration when appointments were decided, leading to a great increase in the proportion of female cadres. The female proportion reached its peak in the 1970s, representing a milestone in the history of women’s political involvement in China.
- 2.5 The 1982 Constitution substantially advanced women’s political rights. Article 48 of the 1982 Constitution states that “the state.....trains and selects woman cadres.” In September 1982, the 12th Party Congress, which was held in Beijing, revised the Party Constitution. Article 34 of the Party Constitution states that “the Party selects woman cadres according to the criteria of integrity and ability.....The Party should pay great attention to cultivating and selecting woman cadres as well as minority cadres.” Both the State Constitution and Party Constitution facilitated the rise of affirmative action, in terms of promoting women’s political participation and increasing the proportion of females in different power structures. In other words, the new emphasis on women’s rights made it mandatory to realise women’s involvement.
- 2.6 Since 1982, a number of party documents and state policies have focused on female cadres’ training and selection. Various state personnel reforms have also emphasized women’s capacity building and their sharing of power in different government departments and organizations, providing women with

¹ The 1954 Constitution also stated that the “People’s Republic of China abolishes the feudal system and constraints of women.” See: <http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/common/zw.jsp?label=WXZLK&id=4264>

special protection and benefits. The party has also made efforts to recruit women to meet the target of training and selecting woman cadres.²

- 2.7 In 1992, the first law on women's rights, *The PRC Law on the Protection of Women's Rights*, was enacted. It was amended in 2005. The law reiterated that "the state should actively train and select female cadres. The state organs, civil organizations, enterprises and institutions must insist on the principle of gender equality in the appointment of cadres and they are to foster and promote female cadres into leadership positions. The state pays attention to training and selecting minority woman cadres as well."³ These provisions have generated a positive impact on women's political participation.
- 2.8 According to these policy initiatives, the government should play a leading role in policy implementation and bear full responsibility for it. In 1995, China's first gender equality programme -- *Programme for Women Development in China* -- was enacted. A second version (2001-2010) of the programme was developed in 2000, indicating that women's political participation has become a part of governmental actions. Various concrete objectives established in the programme have advanced the goals of women's political participation.
- 2.9 In April 2009, the Information Office of the State Council published National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2009-2010). This action plan pays much heed to women's political participation. In particular, people's congresses, political consultative conferences and governments at all levels should have at least one female member in their leadership. The same applies to at least half of the agencies in central government ministries, provincial governments and

² The key documents include *The Programme of Building National Leadership Bodies of the Party and Government during 1998-2003*; *The Program on Deepening the Reform of Cadres and Personnel System during 2001-2010*; *The Interim of Reserve Cadres of the Party and Government* enacted in 2000. There were also pertinent policies and measures which were co-enacted by the ACWF and the COD between the late 1990s and 2002.

³ Articles 10 and 11 of *PRC Law on the Protection of Women's Rights*, in the Working Committee of Law in the Standing Committee of the NPC, eds., *The Current Laws and Regulations of the PRC (Volume I, Laws)*, Beijing, The Intellectual Property Publishing House, 2002, pp.1677-82.

city governments, and women should make up at least 20% of the reserve cadres at provincial, city and county levels.⁴ The action plan represents a new effort to guarantee women's rights to political participation.

Benefits from the Affirmative Action

- 3.1 Progress in women's political participation achieved since 1949 can be divided into three stages. The first stage began in 1949 with the establishment of the People's Republic, lasting until the mid-1960s during which affirmative action and other mandatory measures enabled women to take up a relatively high proportion in political power structures. The top-down appointment system, especially its quota measures, guaranteed women's political involvement. Consequently, women's representation in party and government organs at all levels expanded considerably.
- 3.2 Various indicators point to achievements in terms of women's political participation, which ranges from women occupying leadership positions in top offices to those in grassroots bodies. The proportion of women in the National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultant Conference (CPPCC) has increased over time. The first NPC (1954) had 147 female representatives, accounting for 12% of the total number of representatives. The second NPC (1959) had 150, accounting for 12.2%. The third NPC (1964) had 542, accounting for 17.9%. The first CPPCC (1954) had 12 female representatives, accounting for 6.6%. The second CPPCC (1959) had 83, accounting for 11.4%. The third CPPCC (1964) had 87, accounting for 8.1%.⁵ In 1964, there were two women in various committees of the Central Government, accounting for 3.1% of the total number of members. Out of a total of six vice presidents, there was only one female. There were 20 women in positions at or above the vice ministerial level, accounting for 4%

⁴ http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2009-04/13/content_11177926.htm

⁵ The Green Book of Women, *Report on Women's Development in China*. http://www.china.com.cn/zhanti2005/node_6151922.htm

of the total.⁶ In the 1950s, local governments at all levels had female cadres. Nationwide, about 70% of townships had female directors or deputy directors.⁷

3.3 During the second stage in the 1970s, women's political participation reached its peak. Due to the affirmative action and implementation of mandatory measures, the 1970s became the most remarkable era for women's political participation in contemporary China. In 1975, at the Fourth NPC, woman representatives accounted for 22.6% of the total. About one in four Standing Committee members was female, indicating that female cadres made up a high proportion of government officials at all levels, since members of the Standing Committees of NPC were usually selected from among key position holders in various functional departments of the government.

3.4 After a decline between the 1980s and the early 1990s, the third stage of progress in women's political participation took place in the mid-1990s. Affirmative action was re-established and effectively taken as China responded to the international community before and after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, as well as four meetings held by the COD and the ACWF on issues related to women's political participation. Various programmes on training and selecting woman cadres followed. Since then, the compulsory quota system has played a crucial role in increasing the proportion of females in party and government bodies. Overall, women's political participation during this period was spurred by international factors and intervention in the form of women-oriented strategies and policies by the party-state.

3.5 In the 1990s, the quota of woman cadres saw a steady increase. Statistics show there were 10 million female governmental officials across the country in 1991, accounting for 31.2% of the total. The figure rose to 12.4 million in

⁶ *Women in Contemporary China (Dangdai Zhongguo Funv)*, Beijing: The Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1994, p.33.

⁷ Fenghua Wang, "Impacts of the Party's Leadership on Women's Political Participation," *Journal of China Women's University (Social Science Edition)*, no 3, 2001. Statistics show that 70% of townships had female Directors and that female cadres accounted for 7% of all county cadres.

1994, or 32.5%; 13.8 million in 1997, or 34.4%; 14.9 million in 2000, or 36.2%; and 15.026 million in 2005, accounting for 38.9%.⁸ Women were also recruited to senior official positions. In 1994, there were one woman vice premier in the State Council, 16 female ministers and deputy ministers, more than 300 female mayors and deputy majors; and 21,012 women judges in the country.⁹

3.6 Meanwhile, the proportion of female party members also saw a slow but steady increase. The number of female party members reached 8.2 million by the end of 1993, accounting for 15.13% of total party membership. The figure increased to 8.9 million in 1994, accounting for 15.6% of the total; 11.2 million in 2000, or 17.4%; 11.6 million in 2002, or 17.5%;¹⁰ 13.6 million in end 2005, or 19.2% of the total.¹¹

3.7 The share of women among NPC representatives also expanded. There were 626 woman representatives at the Eighth NPC in 1993, accounting for 21% of the total, and 19 female Standing Committee members, making up 12.3%, 2 percentage points higher than the previous committee.¹² There were 650 female representatives at the Ninth NPC in 1998, accounting for 21.8% of the total 2,979.¹³ The State Council had one female vice premier and one female state counselor.¹⁴

⁸ See, www.npc.gov.cn

⁹ See, www.npc.gov.cn

¹⁰ Jiane Sun, "Research on the Law of Women's Political Participation since the 4th Plenum of 13th Party Congress, *Journal of Hunan Administration Institute*, no.6, 2002.

¹¹ See http://www.bjd.com.cn/jryw/200608/t20060825_74807.htm

¹² "The Development of Human Rights in China", see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/20/content_697637.htm

¹³ Jiane Sun, "Research on the Law of Women's Political Participation since the 4th Plenum of 13th Party Congress."

¹⁴ Shuna Tang, "The Impacts of the Third Generation of the CCP on Women Work," sources from the Collection of Master Degree Dissertations (Year 2005), Hunan Normal University, May 2005.

- 3.8 There were 193 female committee members at the Eighth CPPCC in 1993, accounting for 9.2% of the total; 341 female committee members at the Ninth CPPCC in 1998, accounting for 15.5%, and 27 female Standing Committee members, accounting for 9%, representing 12 more, or 3.1 percentage points more than at the Eighth CPPCC; and 375 female members at the Tenth CPPCC in 2003, accounting for 16.8%.¹⁵
- 3.9 The key to the progress was affirmative action and its implementation on the part of the party and the state. The state, together with the Women's Federation, explored diverse approaches including combining multi-candidate elections with mandatory quotas to promote women's political participation. The government established regulations to guarantee women's representatives in government organisations. More importantly, the COD enacted a series of policies on women's political participation and initiated regular programmes to train and select woman cadres. The establishment of an index of women's participation in the officials' evaluation criteria provided a strong incentive for policy implementation.

Implementation Problems and Policy Retreats

- 4.1 The development of the party-state-led programme of women's participation has been to a large degree determined by general policy orientation in different eras. Despite enormous efforts to promote women's political participation by the party-state, the affirmative action policies encounter strong resistance from time to time. For example, when government policies are focused on achieving planned targets such as economic growth and material prosperity, the goals of gender equity are subordinated and become poorly implemented. The gendered effects of economic restructuring in turn are reflected in the political sphere. As a result, the number of woman representatives in party-state hierarchies at all levels declines from time to time.

¹⁵ Jiane Sun, "Research on the Law of Women's Political Participation since the 4th Plenum of 13th Party Congress."

4.2 The first decline occurred after the mid-1970s. The proportion of female NPC representatives decreased sharply in 1978. The lowest point was in 1983. In the 20 years from 1978 to 1998, the proportion of females in the NPC stood at about 21%, representing an increase of 0.78 percentage point in 1998 from 1993. There was, however, a drop of 0.79 percentage point after five years (2003). Table 1 shows this trend.

TABLE 1 WOMAN REPRESENTATIVES IN THE NPC AND ITS STANDING COMMITTEE (%)¹⁶

Year	1954	1959	1964	1975	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008
Woman Representatives	12	12.3	17.8	22.6	21.2	21.1	21.3	21.0	21.8	20.2	21.3
Women in Standing Committee	5	6.3	17.4	25.1	21	9	11.9	12.3	12.7	13.2	16.6

4.3 The low level of women's participation was also reflected in the leadership of the ruling party. Female members (including reserve members) in the Central Committee of the CCP accounted for only 7.6% in 2002, only higher than the 4.7 percent of the 1950s. There was actually an increase from 4.7% in the 1950s to 12.9% in the 1970s, but an apparent decline took place after 1977, reaching a lowest point of 4.1% in 1982. Since 1982, the level has increased, albeit at a lower level than that of the 1960s (Table 2).

¹⁶ For data from 1954 to 2003, see Ling Tan, Yongping Jiang and Xiuhua Jiang, eds., *Green Book of Women: Report on Gender Equality and Women Development in China (1995-2005)*, Beijing: China Academic of Social Sciences Press, 2005, p.56. For data of 2008, see <http://www.cntheory.com/news/2008lianghcz/2008/229/0822993151ECG78AF4BKDK5IB67KG9.html> and http://news.xinhuanet.com/misc/2008-03/15/content_7794828.htm

TABLE 2 MALE AND FEMALE MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEES OF THE CCP¹⁷

The Party Congress (Years)	Numbers	Percentage of female
8 th Party Congress (1956)	170	4.7
9 th Party Congress (1959)	279	8.2
10 th Party Congress (1973)	319	12.9
11 th Party Congress (1977)	333	11.4
12 th Party Congress (1982)	338	4.1
13 th Party Congress (1987)	285	7.7
14 th Party Congress (1992)	319	7.5
15 th Party Congress (1997)	349	7.3
16 th Party Congress (2002)	356	7.6
17 th Party Congress (2007)	371	10.0

4.4 Women's political participation shrank not only in the CCP and NPC, but also in all other areas. The comprehensive indexes of women's participation in the party, government, legislature (NPC), CPPCC and grassroots leaderships show the same trend. Based on data from 1995 to 2004, Table 3 shows the development of women's involvement in the political and decision making processes.¹⁸

4.5 Table 3 shows an increase of 3.13% in the integrated index between 1995 and 2004. However, that happened mainly during the first five years (1995-2000), after which the index was seen to hover around 40%. This demonstrates the trend of women's representation at different levels of the party-state's leading decision making bodies. The low representation of women was prevalent at all levels.¹⁹

¹⁷ Department of Population, Society, Science and Technology of the State Statistical Bureau of China, ed., *Women and Men in China: Figures and Facts*, Beijing: China Statistics Publishing House, 2004, p.83. For 2007, see http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2007-10/21/content_6917500.htm

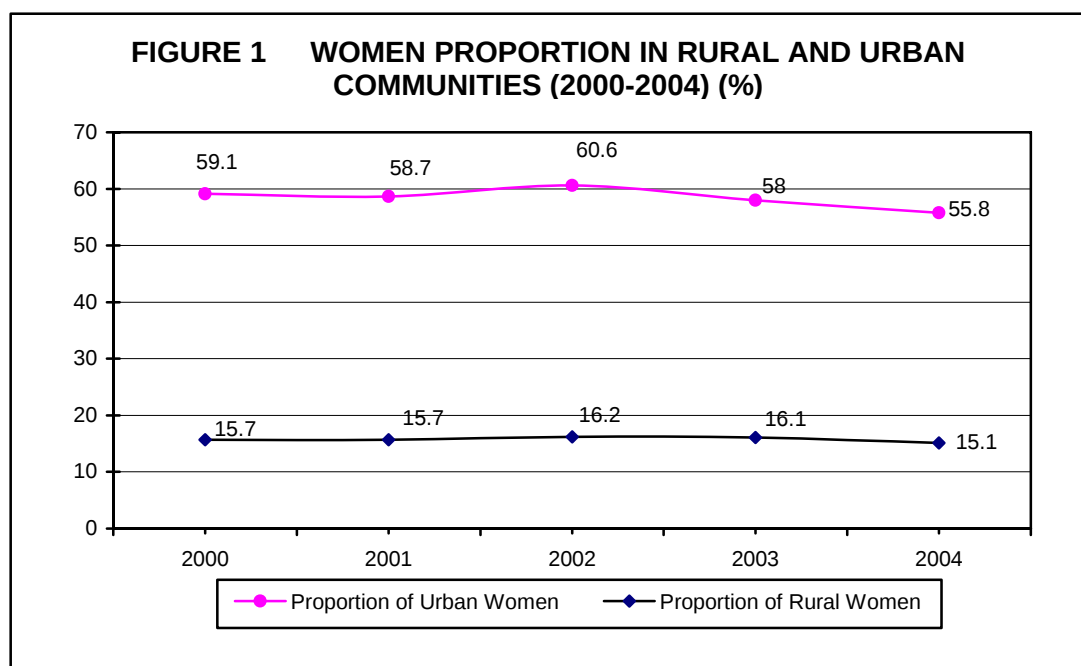
¹⁸ Jiang, Jiang and Jia, eds., *Report on Gender Equality and Women's Development in China*. See, <http://www.studa.net/tongjixue/070521/15232668.html>

¹⁹ Jiang, Jiang and Jia, eds., *Report on Gender Equality and Women's Development in China*.

**TABLE 3 ASSESSED RESULTS OF NATIONAL GENDER EQUALITY
AND WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT IN POLITICS AND DECISION MAKING
IN CHINA (1995-2004)**

Years	Integrated Index	Party-state	Legislature	CPPCC	Grassroots
1995	37.53	24.02	35.30	22.07	--
2000	40.08	27.74	36.34	29.52	65.70
2001	40.15	28.14	36.34	29.52	65.50
2002	40.80	29.19	34.34	30.61	66.20
2003	40.69	29.51	34.84	32.43	66.10
2004	40.66	30.21	34.84	32.43	65.10

4.6 In general, women's political participation at grassroots levels was more extensive than at higher levels, meaning that urban community committees saw a higher proportion of women. However, even at this level, a similar trend of decline occurred after 2000, as shown in Figure 1.²⁰



²⁰ Department of Population, Society, Science and Technology of the State Statistical Bureau of China, ed., *Women and Men in China*. p.83. Also see, Tan, Jiang and Jiang, eds., *Green Book of Women*.

4.7 The low level of women's representation in leading positions is also seen at the county level. A White Paper of the Chinese government (2005) proclaimed that the state has clearly defined the objective for training and selecting women cadres, and has strengthened the work of training and selecting women cadres.²¹ Furthermore, a general target to have at least one female cadre in each "leading group" at the county level had been set out in a 2001 document titled "Opinions on taking further measures to do well in works to train and select female cadres and to develop female Party members."²² Apparently, the party-state had not been able to meet its targets of promoting women to leading government and Party positions. Males accounted for an overwhelming proportion of government leaders at the local level. Data collected from 11 autonomous counties show that woman leaders roughly accounted for 5%, while men accounted for 95%.²³

Policy Remedy and Prospects of Improvement

5.1 One of the deeper and major causes for the low level of women's participation in Party and government bodies is that the existing gender policy or affirmative action merely covers the "four leading bodies" (*si tao ban zi*) which refer to the Party, government, NPC and CPPCC. The affirmative policy provides only a general guideline for women's representation while no other quantitative index exists to measure female participation in various Party

²¹ Information Office of the State Council, *Gender Equality and Women's Development in China*. See, http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2005-08/24/content_3395409.htm

²² The Central Organization Department, "Notice of the CCP Organization Department on the issuing of the 'opinions on taking further measures to do well in work to train and select female cadres and to develop female Party members'", in the Organization Bureau of the CCP Organization Department, ed., *A selection of commonly used documents in the Party's grassroots organization work*, volume 5, Beijing: The Party Construction Readings Press, 2003, p.788.

²³ Ian Seckington, "County Leadership in China: A Baseline Survey," China Discussion Paper-Issue 17, China Policy Institute, University of Nottingham, 2007. Data was collected from 11 autonomous counties, 9.5% of the national total. The 11 counties include Rongshui Miao Autonomous County, Guangxi; Sanjiang Tong Autonomous County, Guangxi; Baima Yao Autonomous County, Guangxi; Jingzhou Miao Autonomous County, Hunan; Mayang Miao Autonomous County, Hunan; Tongdao Tong Autonomous County, Hunan; Zhijiang Tong Autonomous County, Hunan; Qian Guerlos Mongolian Autonomous County, Jilin; Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, Qinghai; Minhe Hui Autonomous County, Qinghai; and Shilin Yi Autonomous County, Yunnan. See: http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/china-policy-institute/publications/documents/Discussion_Paper_17_County_Leadership.pdf

and government committees, including standing committees. Affirmative action remains to a large extent at a superficial level and has fallen short of bringing a substantial improvement to women's inclusion in power structures.

- 5.2 The policy wording on women's inclusion in power structures is often vague. The inexplicit phrase "should" has usually been used in defining women's participation. For example, Article 3 of the third amended **Law of Elections for NPC and Provincial People's Congress** in 1995 specifies that "the NPC and provincial People's Congress at all levels should have an appropriate women number, and gradually advance women's proportion." Article 9 of the **Organic Law of China Village Election** in 1998 defines that "there should be an appropriate number of women in each village committee." In practice, "an appropriate number" has become the operating concept in China's gender policy on women's political involvement since the 1990s. Such policy discourse has failed to substantially advance women's share in decision making bodies in China.
- 5.3 This non-scientific description of women's share has made it difficult to achieve substantial progress. The current widely used definition is "at least one woman or more," instead of the quantitative index in percentage terms used internationally. Put into practice, "one woman or more" has often been translated into a figure of around 10% of a given Party and government body at the provincial level or higher, with the percentage hardly reaching 30% of the total at the township and lower levels. This regulation has thus actually restrained women's participation.
- 5.4 This in turn has resulted in ineffective implementation of the gender policy. The concept of "at least one woman" has gradually transformed into "only one woman" during the process of policy implementation over time, often leading to fierce competition among competent and talented women, rather than fair competition between men and women.
- 5.5 Furthermore, the lack of a system of policy supervision and assessment has resulted in inadequate implementation of affirmative action. Many laws and

policies associated with women's participation are formalistic and largely symbolic, barely exerting any concrete policy pressure on the male-dominated Party and government organisations. The rise and fall in women's participation over the past decades demonstrates the frequently interrupted process of policy implementation at different times when policy priorities are adjusted.

- 5.6 In responding to the decline in female representation, the ACWF has continuously made efforts to promote and reemphasise affirmative action since the 1990s. Several specific policy documents which the ACWF helped to formulate successfully translated mandatory indexes of women's political involvement into practical actions, consequently ending the trend of decline after the 1994 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The affirmative action began to take effect, leading to the enactment of the Programme for Women Development in China (2001-2010) and two additional meetings on selection and cultivation of women's cadres in 2001 and 2002, which re-focused political attention on issues concerning women's involvement.
- 5.7 The decline in women's participation has also attracted the Chinese government's attention, leading to efforts to supervise and assess the process of implementing the gender policy. The Women Work Committee under the State Council organised 15 national policy assessment and supervision groups led by 29 leaders of the provinces and ministries. The aim was to make a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the Programme for Women Development in China. Such supervision and assessment will help to continuously realise the indexes proposed in the Programme.
- 5.8 China's first *Green Book on Women* prepared by scholars and practitioners was published in 2006. The research team was organised by the ACWF and sponsored by the government. The Report titled "Gender Equality and Women Development in China" not only collected different policy ideas and proposals, it also provided a comprehensive evaluation of the situation of Chinese women following the programme's implementation. The report

provided the public, the party and the government with factual figures and the status of women's lives from every aspect, including political participation.

5.9 More recently, the decision on women's representation made by the NPC in March 2007 explicitly defined that the percentage of females, rather than female quotas, must reach no less than 22% of the total number of representatives of the 11th plenum of the NPC in 2008. This is a significant turning point as it is the first explicit regulation on women's participation since the reform and open door policy was introduced in 1978. This regulation clarified the previously ambiguous phrasing of women's participation by using numerical terms. Again, this regulation can be regarded as part of the party-state efforts to boost women's participation.

5.10 Indicators show an upward trend in women's shares coinciding with these efforts. Statistics show that the number of female cadres accounts for close to 40% of the total cadres in China. A 17% increase took place at all levels, which included leadership positions taken up by women at the provincial, prefecture, county and township levels.²⁴ The 17th Party Congress in 2007 had 445 women representatives, 63 more than the previous session, representing a 20.1% increase. The Central Committee of the CCP had 371 members, among which 37 were women, accounting for about 10% of the total,²⁵ more than the 7.6 percent at the 16th Party Congress in 2002. With Wu Yi's retirement from the Political Bureau, Liu Yandong, Head of the Party's United Front Department, was appointed a new member. One can assume that not only are the party and government aware of the importance of women's participation, they have also taken different approaches to improve women's political participation. Nevertheless, it is not an easy task to achieve equality for women in the male-dominated Chinese society.

²⁴ Huang Qingyi, deputy director of the State Council Women and Children Work Committee, and Vice Chairman of the ACWF and First Secretary, addressed a press conference about the implementation of the Outline of the Development of China's Women and Children (2001-2005), reporting "China's Steady Growth in the Number of Female officials, accounting for 40% of the total number of the cadres." The press conference took place on 15 July 2007 in Beijing. See: http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2007-05/15/content_6101129.htm.

²⁵ <http://news.xmnext.com/domestic/special/zg17d/zxxx/2007/10/21/936598.html>