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## WOMEN

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False assumptions about gender equality or indifference to the status of women have replaced the outright discrimination that preceded the founding of the PRC. In the next 20 years, economic reforms in the Western Region will put extra pressure on women. The strength of market forces and the relatively reduced capacity of government could make women more vulnerable in both the labor market and within the family. Development policies should therefore include special measures to shield women from the worst effects of socioeconomic dislocation.

## Background of government policy

### THE CONSTITUTION AND GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Constitution is very explicit about the position of women in society:

**Article 48** Women in the People's Republic of China enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life, in political, economic, cultural, social and family life.

The state protects the rights and interests of women, applies the principle of equal pay for equal work to men and women alike and trains and selects cadres from among women.

The Constitution, the Marriage Law of 1980, and the Inheritance Law of 1985 all give women equal rights. The Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women of 1992 expanded and consolidated the legal position of women, stated the fundamental rights of women in more detail, and assigned responsibilities for enforcing the Law to various government agencies and to the women's federations. The official policies of the Government recognize the long history of the movement toward gender equality. They also recognize the need to promote gender equality:

... The condition of Chinese women is still not wholly satisfactory. There exist various difficulties and resistance which have prevented the full realization of equal rights to women with respect to their participation in political and government affairs, employment, access to education as well as marriage and family.<sup>1</sup>

The transition to an advanced market economy inevitably generates tension between traditional and modern views about women. The Maoist view has been that "Women hold up half of the sky." However, daily reality conforms more closely to the

traditional Confucian saying "For a woman to be without ability is a virtue."<sup>2</sup> But this does not deny the progress made by women since the 19th century when foot binding was widely practiced. Nor does it deny the contribution that the labor of women made to the revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods, a contribution often marred by extraordinary suffering through the neglect of family and self in the interests of the nation.<sup>3</sup> But the defining characteristic of policy and ideology since 1950 has been that the State gave women equality in its ideology, policies, and rhetoric while remaining relatively indifferent to what happened to them in daily life. Before the 1992 law, the official position was that government policy automatically translated into practice and hence there was no need to examine the actual roles of women. These attitudes produced a curious indifference to the question of gender equality that so preoccupied many other countries.

Women suffer from the poor definition of property rights in general. This is especially true of the Western Region with its predominantly rural population. Rural land is owned by collectives, and not by individuals. The village communities determine the actual land distribution and its redistribution, and these decisions follow the traditions of male-oriented rural society.<sup>4</sup>

### INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

International agencies providing development funds have been much exercised by the question of gender equity and have developed indicators to compare countries. Of the 168 countries ranked by the United Nations in 1998, the PRC ranked 93rd according to the Gender Development Index (GDI) and 98th according to the Human Development Index (HDI);<sup>5</sup> putting it ahead of India (ranked 128th and 129th, respectively). The difference between GDI and HDI was small, suggesting a relatively good performance by the PRC. However, there is a major problem with the UNDP definitions of HDI and GDI. Both indices use the simple average of three factors:

longevity, income, and education,<sup>6</sup> and the GDI compares the disparity in achievement between females and males.<sup>7</sup> As a rough indicator of development between different countries, these indices do reveal something of gender disparities. However, the three variables on which the index is calculated are not subtle enough to identify the nature of gender inequality that persists in the Western Region.

### WOMEN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Since the 1950s, the main contribution of women to economic development has been through their participation in the workforce. Participation rates have been very high. As Table 12-1 shows, female participation in paid labor outside the home has been higher in the Western Region than in the Eastern Region. This is no doubt driven by the demands of agriculture, which dominates the economies of the Western Region. The greater poverty in the west also compels families to maximize outside earnings through the additional labor of women. In areas where men have been attracted to off-farm jobs, the employment of women has even intensified.

Women have also had a greater role than men in unpaid household duties, while spending less time on leisure activities or sleeping. It seems that women in the PRC have been holding up more than “half the sky” for a very long time. Moreover, they have played their roles without making any special demands either on their male counterparts or on the State. Overall, they have been indifferent to the question of upward mobility, relatively unquestioning of their status, and less well informed about PRC and foreign politics than their male counterparts.

### RESEARCH IN THE PRC

In the early 1980s, the question of gender in the PRC at last emerged as a subject of inquiry and research. Research has provided the State and other agencies with more accurate information, which can be used

**Table 12-1 Female Economic Participation, by Province, 1998**

Region	Percentage of Female Population Aged 15+ in Employment (%)
<b>Central/Eastern Region</b>	
Henan	78.5
Jiangsu	76.1
Anhui	76.0
Shandong	73.9
Hubei	73.4
Hebei	72.5
Hunan	71.5
Hainan	68.4
Jiangxi	68.2
Guangdong	65.0
Liaoning	62.3
Shanghai	62.0
Jilin	60.3
Beijing	60.0
Zhejiang	59.7
Fujian	58.0
Tianjin	57.1
Shanxi	56.9
Heilongjiang	54.0
<b>Western Region</b>	
Yunnan	80.1
Sichuan	78.4
Guizhou	77.6
Gansu	76.4
Guangxi	76.2
Tibet	75.6
Ningxia	73.8
Qinghai	71.1
Shaanxi	70.1
Xinjiang	65.7
Inner Mongolia	63.6

Source: All-China Women's Federation (2001).

to close the gap between the rhetoric and the practice of gender equality.

The first all-PRC survey to examine the role and status of women, conducted in 1990–1991 by the Women's Studies Institute of the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), confirmed these general observations while also noting that, despite the disparities, women in postrevolutionary PRC were

much better off than ever before. Using various survey methods, the Federation collected information for rural and urban areas in 11 provinces including Qinghai, Gansu, and Guizhou.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, separate results for the western provinces were not reported. Nevertheless, the survey provided some useful insights into the persistence of gender inequality in the early 1990s, 12 years after the liberalization of the economy in 1978. Liberalization considerably improved the economic position and status of women, yet gender differences remained significant, especially in rural areas. The survey findings included the following:

- Eighty-six percent of rural women found employment either by taking their parent's job or by farming like their parents, compared with 76 percent of rural men. In other words, rural women were much more dependent on the traditional economy of farming than rural men.<sup>9</sup>
- Only 3 percent of rural women found employment by relying on their own ability or by passing a test, compared with 8 percent of rural men. Urban women were better able to apply their abilities than rural women, and did quite well, even compared with urban men.<sup>10</sup>
- Women were paid less for "holding up half the sky" than men: about 79 percent of urban women but only 64 percent of urban men, earned less than 2,400 yuan per year.<sup>11</sup>
- The wage gap between rural women and rural men was smaller than that between urban women and urban men, but it was still significant, with 81 percent of rural women, but only 68 percent of rural men, earning less than 1,500 yuan a year.<sup>12</sup>
- There was considerable discrimination in favor of men in the matter of social security payments, including medical insurance, the one exception being the payment of salaries for maternity leave.<sup>13</sup>
- Men worked an average of 1.31 hours longer than women; in rural areas men worked an

average of 1.47 hours longer than women and in urban areas, 54 minutes longer.<sup>14</sup>

Counterbalancing this difference was the greater number of hours that women spent on housework.<sup>15</sup>

- Women had much less knowledge of politics.<sup>16</sup>

With few exceptions, rural women were worse off in status, remuneration, and other indicators than their urban counterparts. As in other parts of the world, urbanization has brought with it many economic and social advantages, especially for women. In fact, the participation of women in the urban workforce is one of the highest in the world, with nine out of ten in employment.<sup>17</sup> However, the Western Region remains primarily rural (Chapter 11), and women are in a particularly disadvantageous position simply because of this.

#### **THE GENDER-WAGE GAP IN URBAN PRC**

Whilst urbanization will bring many benefits to the socioeconomic status of women in the Western Region, it will not by itself deliver equal wages and opportunities for equal work and equal talent. Thus, the State will need to play some role in ensuring that gender discrimination does not become an endemic characteristic of the Western Region.

#### **Gender-wage gap, 1988 to 1994**

This first systematic study of female wages in the PRC, by Margaret Maurer-Fazio et al.,<sup>18</sup> covered the urban labor market in the period 1988 to 1994. It showed that regular female employees as a percentage of the urban labor force hardly changed, rising from 37 percent to 38 percent during this six-year period. At the same time, the wage gap between female and male labor increased significantly. The basic conclusions of the study can be summarized as follows:

- The average (unadjusted) wage of women in urban jobs was 55 percent of the average male wage in 1988, and fell to 42 percent of the male average in 1994.

- When adjusted for type of ownership and location, the female wage rate fell from 66 percent of the male rate in 1988 to 46 percent of the male rate in 1994.
- When adjusted for sector of employment and location, the wage rate for women fell from 86 percent of the male rate in 1988 to 75 percent of the male rate in 1994.

By all measures, female wages were considerably less than male wages and indeed fell between 1988 and 1994. Urban wages for women were relatively closer to male wages whenever the comparison was made *within an industrial sector*; but vast differentials opened up whenever female and male wages were compared *between industries* (Table 12-2).

Female employment was predominantly in low-wage sectors, which also utilize relatively low levels of technology and scientific input. For example, urban women made up 55 percent of the workforce in healthcare, services, and hotels, and 40 percent to 41 percent of the workforce in primary schools, agriculture, and social welfare.<sup>19</sup> Female employment in the high-wage sectors was very low: only 16 percent of the workforce in waterways was female; in geological prospecting it was 23 percent; air transport, 27 percent; civil engineering and railways, 20 percent each.

Wage rates in Central SOEs, the category with the lowest representation of women, are much higher than wage rates in prefecture-level SOEs and county-level SOEs. When Maurer-Fazio et al. (1999) compared trends in the gender-wage gap in the Western Region with those in eastern and central PRC, their basic characterization of the wage gap was confirmed. In the Western Region, both the adjusted and unadjusted wage ratio progressively worsened for women in the period 1988–1994. In 1994, the unadjusted female wage in the Western Region was about 43 percent of the male wage; this was much better than the unadjusted ratio in central PRC, which was only 23 percent, but not as good as the unadjusted ratio of almost 50 percent in eastern PRC. But when adjusted for economic sector and type of ownership, the wage ratio for women in the Western Region increased to 56 percent of the male wage. This was, however, still lower than the wage ratio for women in eastern PRC (57 percent) and central PRC (65 percent).

#### Gender-wage gap, 1994 to 2000

In 1994, the Government introduced the Labor Law of 1994. The law is quite explicit on the rights of women to employment:

**Table 12-2 Time Trends in the Ratio of Urban Female Wages to Urban Male Wages, by Major Region, 1988–1994**

Year	Eastern Region			Central Region			Western Region		
	Ratio <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Ratio <sup>b</sup>	No. of Observations	Ratio <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Ratio <sup>b</sup>	No. of Observations	Ratio <sup>a</sup>	Adjusted Ratio <sup>b</sup>	No. of Observations
1988	0.637	0.734	1,421	0.417	0.646	1,103	0.517	0.956	1,011
1989	0.628	0.734	1,472	0.416	0.716	1,123	0.494	0.940	1,026
1990	0.596	0.832	1,171	0.338	0.800	870	0.466	0.656	824
1991	0.612	0.827	1,177	0.333	0.831	881	0.469	0.713	821
1992	0.594	0.746	1,206	0.284	0.883	901	0.413	0.548	841
1993	0.549	0.661	958	0.283	0.693	712	0.491	1.017	557
1994	0.495	0.571	1,017	0.235	0.649	758	0.427	0.563	720

Source: Maurer-Fazio et al. (1999), Table 11, p. 78.

Notes: Eastern Region: Beijing, Tianjin, Liaoning, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Shandong, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan. Central Region: Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, Henan, Hubei, Hunan. Western Region: Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Tibet, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Yunnan.

<sup>a</sup> Based on the total wage gap.

<sup>b</sup> Based on the wage gap after controlling for economic sector and ownership type.

**Article 13** Women shall enjoy equal right, with men, to employment. With the exception of the special types of work or posts unsuitable for women as prescribed by the State, no unit may, in employing staff and workers, refuse to employ women by reason of sex or raise the employment standards for women.

The observations of Maurer-Fazio et al. are confirmed by other studies<sup>20</sup> and by recent government statistics. Between 1978 and 1994, female employment as a percentage of total employment in urban enterprises grew steadily. However, it seems that once economic reforms began to bite, women lost their jobs at a faster rate than men. The percentage of females in the SOE workforce is especially low in those SOEs under the Central Government (Table 12-3).

In the Western Region the employment of women in SOEs and COEs is no higher than in the rest of the PRC. In the case of prefecture-level SOEs, county-level SOEs, and COEs it is actually lower. Employment in the Western Region is predominantly in agriculture—57.0 percent in the northwest and 63.6 percent in the southwest in 2000. Women account for 47.1 percent of rural laborers, a proportion that has been gradually increasing because of women’s lack of access to nonfarm employment.

A recent survey by the State Statistical Bureau and the ACWF provide data on the wage gap in 1999.<sup>21</sup> In 1999, the average annual income of female employees in urban areas was 7,410 yuan, which was 70.1 percent of male incomes. The

average annual income of females who were mainly engaged in farming, forestry, animal husbandry, and fishery was 2,369 yuan, only 59.6 percent of male incomes in rural areas. The income gap in 1999 was 19.4 percent higher than in 1990. In terms of income distribution, 47.4 percent of urban female employees had yearly incomes below 5,000 yuan, and 6.1 percent had yearly incomes over 15,000 yuan. Women with low incomes outnumbered their male counterparts by 19.3 percent, and women with above-mid-level incomes were 6.6 percent fewer than men with the same income level. In urban areas, the income gap between males and females is directly related to employment status and profession. Most females are engaged in low-income work. For the same work, women generally hold lower position levels than the men, although data indicate that the number of women in responsible positions has increased, and there is a greater proportion of female than male technical personnel of every kind.

#### OTHER ASPECTS THAT CREATE GENDER INEQUALITIES IN THE LABOR MARKET

In fact, when nonquantitative factors are taken into account, the gender gap is even wider. The following practices of managers of urban enterprises, in particular, contribute to discrimination against women:

- The official retirement age of women is five years earlier than for men.
- In SOEs whose operations are being downsized or rationalized, women are typically laid off before men.

**Table 12-3** Female Employment as a Percentage of Total Employment in Different Types of Enterprise, 1999

Region	Central SOEs (%)	Provincial SOEs (%)	Prefectural SOEs (%)	County SOEs (%)	Urban COEs (%)	Other (%)
<b>Eastern</b>	31.3	34.2	41.3	38.8	41.5	44.5
<b>Central</b>	31.5	33.3	40.4	36.4	41.6	38.8
<b>Western</b>						
Southwest	34.1	35.8	40.5	35.5	37.7	38.3
Northwest	36.0	35.0	40.2	37.0	40.9	41.5
<b>PRC</b>	<b>32.5</b>	<b>34.2</b>	<b>40.8</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>41.1</b>	<b>42.4</b>

Source: China Labor Statistical Yearbook 2000.

- There is a tendency to assign greater value to the work of the least capable male employees than to the work of the most capable female employees.
- Employers are often reluctant to employ women in the first place because of the indirect costs of providing childcare facilities and maternity leave.<sup>22</sup>

These nonquantifiable labor practices are likely to grow in importance as industry seeks to become more competitive following WTO entry. As Table 12-4 shows, the proportion of women employed in urban enterprises in the Western Region does not differ markedly from the all-PRC average of 29.6 percent but is only slightly lower.

Table 12-4 also compares the proportion of female employees with the proportion of registered unemployed and laid-off workers (this figure relates exclusively to SOEs). The proportions of female unemployed and laid-off workers exceed the proportion of females in the workforce.

## Economic and social position of women

### LONGEVITY

An important measure of the socioeconomic position of women in contemporary PRC is their longevity, or life expectancy at birth. All the indicators for this are positive. As Table 12-5 shows, in 1999, women in the PRC compared relatively well with women in the second largest rural economy in the world, India. Life expectancy at birth for women in the PRC was 71.3 years, 3.2 years higher than for men in the PRC. This is good performance, given that the maximum difference between female and male longevity in developed countries like Australia is about five or six years. Compared with women in India, in 1999, women in the PRC were expected to live almost 10 years longer.

The longevity of women will continue to improve while that of men will lag significantly not

**Table 12-4** Female Employees as Percentage of Total Employees in Different Workforce Categories, 1999

Region	Employed <sup>a</sup>	Registered Unemployed During the Year	Unemployed at Year-End	Laid Off
<b>Eastern</b>	30.8	48.1	51.5	47.8
<b>Central</b>	28.1	49.8	50.3	46.6
<b>Western</b>				
Southwest	29.2	48.1	49.3	47.4
Northwest	29.2	46.1	48.1	44.9
<b>PRC</b>	<b>29.6</b>	<b>48.5</b>	<b>50.4</b>	<b>46.9</b>

Source: Calculated by consultants from *China Labor Statistical Yearbook 2000*.  
<sup>a</sup> Excludes laid-off employees.

**Table 12-5** Longevity of Women in the PRC, 1999

Country	Total Fertility Rate		Probability of Dying (per 1,000)				Life Expectancy at Birth (years)	
			Under 5 Years		5-59 Years		Male	Female
	1990	1999	Male	Female	Male	Female		
PRC	2.2	1.8	35	40	170	125	68.1	71.3
India	3.8	3.0	97	104	275	217	59.6	61.2
Brazil	2.7	2.2	47	42	295	157	63.7	71.7
Argentina	2.9	2.6	23	20	178	92	70.6	77.8
Australia	1.9	1.8	7	5	94	53	76.8	82.2

Source: World Health Organization (2001), in [www.who.org](http://www.who.org), accessed in June 2001.

only for natural biomedical reasons but also because men in the PRC are heavy smokers of tobacco. Each year 3.5 million people die of tobacco-related deaths, and this figure will rise to 10 million in the first decade of the 21st century, according to WHO. In the PRC, this epidemic of tobacco-related deaths is expected to kill about 100 million of the 300 million men now under 29 years, half of these in middle age.<sup>23</sup>

However, longevity is not the only measure of welfare. Women may live longer, but this does not necessarily mean that their mental and physical health is consistent with the PRC's development goals. The country's excellent record in improving the life of women since 1950 has been marred by the high suicide rate and significant failures in daily health and hygiene (see the section "Physical Health as an Indicator of the Position of Women," below).

### **UNFAVORABLE SEX RATIO**

Counterbalancing the record on longevity, however, is the higher-than-normal infant mortality of females. Typically, for every 100 female births, between 105 and 106 males are born to compensate for the biological weakness of males. In 1994, the sex ratio was 116.3 male births for every 100 female births, indicating that cultural and social practices in favor of male births had seriously biased the sex ratio.<sup>24</sup> In Gansu, the sex ratio was especially unfavorable to girls. The preference for sons has been strongest in rural areas because, in the absence of social security, the primary burden of caring for old parents falls on the boys. Girls normally leave home at the time of marriage and live with the husband's parents. Even among minorities with matriarchal traditions, the married girl eventually leaves her parents' home. In the case of the Zhuang, for example, this move may be delayed until pregnancy, when the taboo against giving birth in the maternal home forces a move.<sup>25</sup> A study of attitudes toward infant gender in Qinghai showed that among the Tu minority more women and families "longed in their hearts to see the birth

of a boy to boost the morale."<sup>26</sup> The failure to have a son could lead to exclusion from ancestral graves and village weddings and funerals.<sup>27</sup> Even if the first child were male, the longing for more sons did not stop. Tu women felt under such pressure to give birth to boys that their physical and psychological health suffered.<sup>28</sup> Even among the Lahu, who observe the matrilineal custom of married men living with the families of their wives, there is a strong desire for male children. There are popular sayings expressing this desire but no similar sayings about female children, for example: "It is better to have a son sooner than to make a fortune sooner" and "The earlier one has a son, the earlier one enjoys happiness."<sup>29</sup> Instead of the scarcity of girls increasing their value, it is actually worsening their status by encouraging the abduction and kidnapping of potential wives.<sup>30</sup>

### **MENTAL STRESSES OF ECONOMIC REFORM**

Economic reform has had a contradictory impact on women. On the one hand, it has improved the position of women in the labor market and brought more general economic growth and prosperity to agriculture.<sup>31</sup> It has loosened the constraints on family life and production, and this in itself has been of benefit to women. It has increased the range of economic options for women, many of the older ones using their experience to set up small private businesses. Many of these women lacked the educational skills to find employment in other areas outside of agriculture.

Despite these improvements, the new position of women in the labor market since 1978 has not automatically increased their welfare. The decollectivization of agriculture has produced a world of uncertainty and risk that has placed a special burden on women, who are disproportionately represented in the rural workforce relative to men.<sup>32</sup> The fiscal problems of the central, provincial, county, and township governments have also had a negative impact on women by reducing the capacity of the State to provide adequate social assistance. In

particular, the shift away from free medical care to a fee-for-service system has placed extra burdens on women.

In addition to these burdens of rural life, women are increasingly left behind as husbands seek off-farm employment in towns and cities. This not merely increases the burden of work but also heightens the sense of dislocation. One indicator of the negative impact of all these changes on rural women is the high suicide rate. The family minidramas sometimes end up in suicide not because these were actually intended but because deadly poisons, few of which have antidotes, were available. Rural women have little knowledge of “attempted suicides”; most attempts turn out to be fatal. These minidramas are driven by deeper family and gender conflicts, many of which arise from the tension between traditional and modern expectations.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH AS AN INDICATOR OF THE POSITION OF WOMEN

### Morbidity

Women in the PRC may live longer than men, but there is evidence to show that their daily health and welfare is far from satisfactory, especially in rural areas (Table 12-6). Morbidity has a detrimental impact on female productivity and their happiness. The poor health of rural women arises from both poverty and the traditional attitudes of family members, particularly husbands, toward women. The case of minority women in rural areas is slightly worse because they often live in more isolated villages.

### Gynecological disease and poverty

Vaginitis and cervicitis are common in the PRC, but especially so in rural areas where clean water is scarce or difficult to come by. Field studies in rural Sichuan show that few women know how these diseases originate, blaming themselves for having acquired them and shunning family and society in shame. In the worst cases, the women have been subject to abuse and divorce for rejecting the sexual

**Table 12-6 Morbidity Rates, by Sex and Locality, 1998**

Region <sup>a</sup>	Illness		Chronic Illness	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
<b>PRC</b>	<b>26.8</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>23.1</b>	<b>28.4</b>
Western Region				
Provincial cities	42.6	46.6	22.3	23.9
Prefecture cities	37.6	43.8	15.9	17.7
Southwest counties	27.0	33.6	8.8	10.6
Northwest counties	23.7	32.6	10.2	14.6

Source: Calculated from Ministry of Health (1999).

<sup>a</sup> The survey covered particular localities only, and these may not have been fully representative of each type of area.

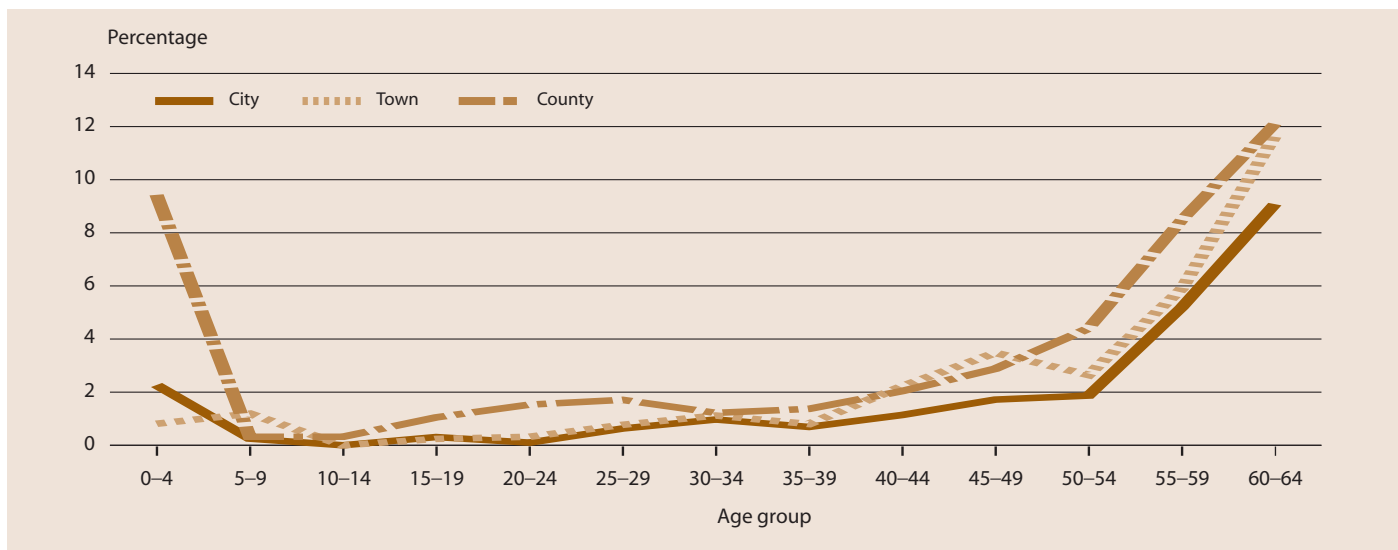
advances of their husbands, who cannot understand why they are in pain. It is assumed that wives are simply being difficult or that they have contracted the illnesses through infidelity, when in fact poverty and the lack of clean water are the main causes. Given the lack of rural resources, women wash their panties in dirty pool water contaminated by animal and human waste.<sup>33</sup> There is not enough water for daily baths for women and men (baths take place only every three or four days in summer and every 15 days in winter), and men rarely wash their genitals before intercourse.<sup>34</sup> Occasionally, however, one comes across accounts of traditional practices that conform to modern hygienic practices. For example, Zhuang women successfully sterilize menstruation pads by “cleaning plant ashes with water, drying them in the sun, and then putting them in clear, long cloth bags.”<sup>35</sup> Research has shown that quite often in the countryside neither women nor men know the relationship between poor hygiene and infection.

### Mortality

In the PRC, the mortality rates for women are much higher in the countryside than in the cities (Figure 12-1).

There is a big difference in neonatal mortality, and in childbearing years. Age-specific mortality rates for women are not available for the Western Region.

**Figure 12-1 Female Mortality, by Age Group and Residence**



However, it is likely that they are higher because of remoteness from health services and the higher incidence of poverty.

#### **Contraception and abortion**

The one-child policy has put enormous pressure on women to avoid pregnancy and, in the event of contraceptive failure, to resort to abortions. The minorities are not unaffected by the one-child policy either, because it is a condition of government employment. Hence, upwardly mobile minority couples are under as much pressure as the rest.

Despite the official pressure to contain fertility, knowledge about effective contraception and reproductive health is surprisingly poor, even in sophisticated Beijing. In part, this reflects the fact that sex is a taboo subject between men and women and even among women.<sup>36</sup> This taboo shows itself in a combination of factors that give rise to unwanted pregnancies and a high rate of abortions, namely:

- Lack of adequate knowledge about what causes pregnancy and how it might be prevented
- Sexual demands of husbands and their refusal to use condoms<sup>37</sup>
- High failure rate of modern contraception. An estimated 90.6 percent of women use contraceptives, yet the abortion rate has been rising, from about 13.8 percent in 1976 to 27.5 percent in 1987.<sup>38</sup>
- High rate of unwanted pregnancies among unmarried women<sup>39</sup>

The high failure rate of modern contraception calls for special remedies. One study of 370 women in Urumqi (187 Uygur and 183 Han, aged 20 to 50, from urban and rural backgrounds) over 80 percent (168 Uygur and 154 Han women, or 89.8 percent and 84.1 percent, respectively) had had abortions. Among the Uygur women, abortions were caused by the failure of the intrauterine device (IUD) and the contraceptive pill in 29.2 percent and 22.0 percent, respectively. In the case of the Han women, the respective figures were 37.0 percent and 23.4 percent.<sup>40</sup> Tubal ligations were much more successful, with abortions for only four Uygur women and two Han women who had undergone ligation.

#### **Illiteracy and gynecological diseases**

Field studies from the poverty counties of Shaanxi province have drawn attention to the lack of prenatal checkups and the lack of sufficiently trained midwives. Moreover, the midwives need to be women, given the discomfort women feel when being attended by a male nurse. The lack of attention to the health needs of pregnant women manifests itself later in gynecological diseases, which, although not necessarily lethal, reduce the productive capacity of women and their general welfare. There is an enormous employment opportunity in training more female doctors, nurses, and midwives to handle gynecological problems, given the universal reluctance of women to undergo physical examination by male attendants. Another major opportunity is in the use of ICT technologies to advise

women of the importance of prenatal checkups. Other means of disseminating information, for example, via billboards, posters, and bulletins, have been unreliable partly because they are distributed only in towns but also because they assume a significant degree of literacy among women—levels that many rural women have not attained.<sup>41</sup>

### Recent ACWF work

Since 1991 the ACWF has recognized the serious impact of these health problems on the lives and productivity of women in the Western Region and has initiated a series of training programs in midwifery and other fields. Each year three counties in a minority area have been selected for the program, which has so far covered Yunnan, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Sichuan, and Guizhou.<sup>42</sup> In focusing on midwifery, the ACWF hopes to deal with various problems simultaneously: reduction of maternal mortality, reduction of neonatal mortality, and earlier detection of uterine cancers.<sup>43</sup> The State Council has supported these initiatives and allocated 200 million yuan a year for the reduction of death rates in the Western Region; however, only a tiny fraction of this money (10,000 yuan) was allocated for the training of midwives.

### HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN

The status of women is affected not only by their health but also the health of their children, since the women are the primary caregivers when their

children fall sick. Thus, while economic reform has expanded the employment possibilities for women, it has also added an extra burden because of the contraction of healthcare and health infrastructure. These extra burdens reduce the capacity of women to contribute to productivity, despite the fact that they work longer hours. Expenditure on health services as a proportion of GDP has been falling and the PRC now ranks 139 among WHO countries in health expenditure per capita (Chapter 5). Rural areas have very poor access to health services, and where services exist, fees are less and less affordable. The gap between the Western Region and the east is particularly pronounced on this issue. Table 12-7 shows the detrimental effect which shrinking government funding is having on immunization programs in rural areas, particularly in Guizhou.

In both cases, immunization is well below the national level for all childhood killers. In the case of measles (possibly the biggest child killer of all), as many as 47 percent of children in rural Guizhou had not been vaccinated; in rural PRC, the figure was 27 percent. These high rates for nonimmunized children suggest high rates of morbidity, if not mortality, and the burden is borne by women, who not only suffer the stress of dealing with the illness of children but also forgo opportunities in the workplace. One Australian aid project in Altai prefecture (Xinjiang), has as one of its objectives the establishment of a 60 percent immunization rate for four vaccines for children under 1 year old.<sup>44</sup>

**Table 12-7 Immunization Coverage, 1993**

Area	BCG Vaccine (%)		Polio Vaccine (%)		Diphtheria Vaccine (%)		Measles <sup>a</sup> Vaccine (%)	
National	90	96 <sup>b</sup>	88	97 <sup>b</sup>	86	96 <sup>b</sup>	85	95 <sup>b</sup>
Urban	95	- <sup>c</sup>	94	-	93	-	85	-
Rural	85	-	86	-	84	-	73	-
Rural Guizhou	72	-	74	-	67	-	53	-

Source: Zhu Ling (2000).

<sup>a</sup>National, urban, and rural figures for measles are inconsistent.

<sup>b</sup>Figures refer to the year 1997; see United Nations Children's Fund (1997), p.33.

<sup>c</sup>No data are available.

Table 12-8 shows that, except in Sichuan and Chongqing, the infant mortality rate is significantly higher than the average for the entire PRC.

**Table 12-8 Infant Mortality, by Province, 1998**

Province	Infant Mortality		Newborn Infant Mortality	
	No. of Deaths	Rate (‰)	No. of Deaths	Rate (‰)
<b>PRC</b>	<b>22,931</b>	<b>20.93</b>	<b>156,956</b>	<b>14.32</b>
Inner Mongolia	7,169	37.15	5,365	27.80
Chongqing	16,423	21.36	9,506	12.36
Sichuan	3,089	16.76	1,835	9.95
Guizhou	18,714	38.27	10,912	22.05
Yunnan	19,256	39.84	11,925	24.67
Tibet	933	41.62	484	21.39
Shaanxi	6,765	23.81	4,832	17.01
Gansu	9,609	32.33	6,820	22.94
Qinghai	3,046	46.45	2,112	32.21
Ningxia	1,917	28.27	1,310	19.32
Xinjiang	6,070	30.66	2,909	14.69

Source: All-China Women's Federation (2001).

In Inner Mongolia, Guizhou, Yunnan, Tibet, and Qinghai, the rate is double the national average. Some of the deaths under the age of one year are due to poor immunization practices and coverage. Inadequate training is as much to blame as inadequate expenditure on equipment and buildings.<sup>45</sup>

### **ECONOMIC REFORM AND THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN**

While the literacy of women has been steadily rising since 1950 and the level of educational achievement also creeping upward, there is evidence that the economic opportunities created by the reforms since 1978 have contributed to a decline in the educational level of young women. An ACWF study in Jiahong, rural Sichuan, in the early 1990s compared young women aged 17–21 with those in the 22–27 age group. Only 50.4 percent of the younger group had completed junior middle school and only 1.6 percent had completed senior middle school, versus 55 percent and 5.1 percent, respectively, for the older

age group.<sup>46</sup> The ACWF offered three explanations for the puzzling decline in the level of education despite the rapid growth in rural incomes and prosperity:<sup>47</sup>

- With rural prosperity, the tempo of life has increased, adults are working more and so young girls are “burdened with housework and have no time to do homework”; interest in schooling is falling and the dropout rate rising as a result.
- Farmers respond to the short-term opportunities for prosperity by putting children to work. They do not appreciate the long-term returns to family income from higher levels of education.
- Rural employment is still largely labor-intensive with minimal technical and scientific skills. This devalues the importance of higher levels of education.

In Jiahong, the lack of employment opportunities outside agriculture has also pushed young women in the direction of more housework. The companion study of Hengtang township in Jiangsu (Eastern Region) showed that between 1978 and 1986 the proportion of women employed in nonagricultural jobs increased from 5.4 percent to 33.3 percent; at the same time the proportion employed in agriculture fell from 86.5 percent to 56.8 percent and the proportion employed in housework increased only marginally from 8.1 percent to 9.9 percent. This pattern contrasted sharply with what happened in Jiahong, where the proportion of women employed in agriculture also declined but the proportion of women employed in housework rose from 17.8 percent to 29 percent, and the proportion of women with nonagricultural jobs actually fell from 2.7 percent to 2.3 percent.<sup>48</sup> The essential difference was that Hengtang was in a province that had a higher overall level of economic development with diversified employment opportunities. Despite rural prosperity in Sichuan, women in Jiahong did not benefit to the same degree as women in the east because the provincial economy lacked the diversification of Hengtang.

The preference for educating boys to higher levels than girls comes on top of local customs that already favor boys. Even among western minorities with residual matrilineal traditions, boys take priority in education. In the birthing ceremonies of the Zhuang, for example, boys are greeted with the cry, "Grow up quickly to follow us to school," while the girls are greeted with the cry, "Grow up quickly to follow us to pick green feed for pigs."<sup>49</sup>

### PERSISTENT HIGH ILLITERACY AMONG WOMEN AGED 15 AND UP

Despite improvements in basic literacy since 1950, rates of illiteracy and semiliteracy in the Western Region, especially in the southwest, significantly exceed the national average. This reality is not always revealed by the official statistics, which rarely take the problem of semiliteracy into account. However, Table 12-9 is based on a survey undertaken by the ACWF in late 1990 and provides more reliable indicators.

In 1998, about 16 percent of the PRC population aged 15 years and over was illiterate or semiliterate.

Female illiteracy and semiliteracy was about 2.5 times that of men. The proportions are the same in the Western Region. However, in Inner Mongolia, Chongqing, Sichuan, and Shannxi the levels of illiteracy and semiliteracy are very close to the averages for the entire country. Xinjiang, however, has a much smaller illiteracy problem: only about 11 percent of the population are illiterate and the difference between female illiteracy (13 percent) and male illiteracy (10 percent) is also smaller. At the other extreme, female illiteracy is extremely high in Tibet (69 percent), Qinghai (55 percent), Guizhou (43 percent), Yunnan (34 percent), and Ningxia (35 percent). Provincial human development indicators published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1990, 1995, and 1997 all confirm that Xinjiang sits apart from the other western provinces. Table 12-10 shows that the literacy index for Xinjiang is the highest among the western provinces. This and life expectancy taken together gives Xinjiang a ranking of 15 out of 32 PRC provinces, according to the Human Development Index (HDI).

**Table 12-9 Percentage of Illiterates and Semiliterates Aged 15 and Up, by Sex and Province, 1998**

Province	Population of Illiterates and Semiliterates Aged 15 and Up			Percentage of Illiterates and Semiliterates Relative to Population Aged 15 and Up		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
<b>PRC</b>	<b>148,522</b>	<b>105,918</b>	<b>42,603</b>	<b>15.78</b>	<b>22.61</b>	<b>9.01</b>
Inner Mongolia	2,885	1,936	949	15.83	21.66	10.22
Chongqing	3,688	2,596	1,092	15.45	21.93	9.07
Sichuan	10,427	7,300	3,128	15.70	21.97	9.42
Guizhou	7,621	5,355	2,266	28.98	42.78	16.44
Yunnan	7,809	5,220	2,589	25.48	34.17	16.84
Tibet	1,037	614	423	59.97	*69.41	*50.09
Shaanxi	4,324	2,939	1,385	16.52	22.74	10.45
Gansu	5,313	3,569	1,744	28.65	39.08	18.53
Qinghai	1,571	1,001	570	42.92	54.95	31.00
Ningxia	971	659	311	25.56	35.14	16.20
Xinjiang	1,403	807	596	11.44	*13.31	*9.61

Source: All-China Women's Federation (2001).

**Table 12-10 Human Development Index, by Province, 1997**

Province	Life Expectancy Index	Education Index	GDP Index	GDP Rank	HDI	HDI Rank
Shanghai	0.832	0.824	0.975	1	0.877	1
Beijing	0.798	0.840	0.963	2	0.867	2
Tianjin	0.789	0.810	0.957	3	0.852	3
Guangdong	0.792	0.789	0.949	4	0.843	4
Liaoning	0.754	0.801	0.939	8	0.831	5
Zhejiang	0.780	0.735	0.949	4	0.821	6
Jiangsu	0.773	0.735	0.945	6	0.817	7
Fujian	0.726	0.737	0.944	7	0.802	8
Shandong	0.760	0.702	0.849	9	0.770	9
Heilongjiang	0.700	0.790	0.809	10	0.766	10
Hebei	0.756	0.759	0.676	11	0.730	11
Jilin	0.716	0.804	0.610	15	0.710	12
Hainan	0.750	0.745	0.632	14	0.709	13
Hubei	0.704	0.761	0.655	13	0.707	14
Xinjiang	0.627	0.773	0.656	12	0.685	15
Shanxi	0.733	0.782	0.522	16	0.679	16
Hunan	0.699	0.776	0.511	18	0.662	17
Henan	0.753	0.745	0.487	19	0.611	18
Guangxi	0.729	0.741	0.478	21	0.649	19
Anhui	0.741	0.713	0.482	20	0.646	20
Inner Mongolia	0.678	0.740	0.517	17	0.645	21
Chongqing	0.689	0.727	0.489	22	0.635	22
Jiangxi	0.685	0.764	0.455	22	0.635	22
Sichuan	0.689	0.723	0.441	26	0.617	24
Shaanxi	0.707	0.741	0.404	28	0.617	25
Ningxia	0.699	0.669	0.440	27	0.603	26
Yunnan	0.642	0.665	0.442	25	0.583	27
Gansu	0.704	0.667	0.339	30	0.570	28
Qinghai	0.593	0.545	0.445	24	0.528	29
Guizhou	0.655	0.659	0.233	31	0.516	30
Tibet	0.577	0.435	0.345	29	0.542	31

Source: United Nations Development Program (2000), p. 96; *China Population Statistical Yearbook 1998*; All-China's Women's Federation and State Statistical Bureau (n.d.); *China Statistical Yearbook 1998*; *China Population Statistical Yearbook 1995*; *China Education Statistical Yearbook 1995*; State Statistical Bureau 1997.

Indeed, Xinjiang's literacy levels are surprisingly high for its level of GDP per capita. Low levels of illiteracy among women and men in Xinjiang compare favorably with the situation in the eastern provinces. A partial explanation could be that the Uygur have better-than-average literacy relative to other minorities. This could stem from the long tradition of courtly culture, literacy, and literary achievement among the Uygur in their native language.

#### **WOMEN AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP ROLES**

The ACWF is aware of the reticent attitude of the women of the Western Region toward participation in leadership roles. The ACWF has responded by running leadership training courses, the first in late

2000 and the second in May 2001. On each occasion about 100 women from the Western Region took part. Leadership training is important because it is only through articulate and confident women that the necessary changes in economic, health, and literacy policy and practices can be achieved. Women need to participate in the process of formulating and implementing policies, and for this leadership training can provide the necessary impetus.

Despite the role of the ACWF in promoting the cause of women since 1950, the current placement of women in positions of political responsibility still falls far short of their percentage in the total population, as Table 12-11 shows.

The PRC also has proportionately fewer women political leaders than other countries in East Asia.

Table 12-12 shows that while the PRC (6.4 percent) compares well with Japan (6.7 percent) and the Philippines (8.3 percent) in the presence of women at the ministerial level, at the subministerial level representation is very low: only 3.5 percent for the PRC relative to 26.3 percent for Japan and for the Philippines. In fact, at the subministerial level the PRC's record is worse than Malaysia's, which is also low (4.7 percent). In other words, the political visibility of women in the PRC is not as impressive as the rhetoric of gender equality in official documents would make it out to be. Unless the participation by women in high-level decision making improves, policies for reducing the vulnerability of women in the labor market and in the family are unlikely to be drafted or implemented satisfactorily.

So the lack of political leadership is something noticeable not merely at the national or provincial levels, but also at the local level, within the prefectures and counties.<sup>50</sup>

### WOMEN AS THE POOREST OF THE POOR

Women in the PRC have difficulty accessing programs designed to help the poor. The deficiencies of village infrastructure often affect women the most: women have primary responsibility for hauling water, collecting firewood, tending to farm animals, collecting fodder, selling agricultural produce, and accompanying small children to and from school. International aid agencies have sought to improve the status of women by empowering them economically. It is ironic, however, that where aid programs succeed in improving the economic prosperity of rural families they also typically increase the workload on women. According to one UNDP report, the distribution of microfinance had resulted in a 33 percent increase in the female workload.<sup>51</sup> This increased burden, however, needs to be assessed against positive evidence showing that the new microcredit schemes enabled village women in Inner Mongolia to develop economic networks beyond the village. The women attend briefings at the UNDP microcredit center and frequent local

**Table 12-11 Women Political Leaders, at the End of 2000**

Position	No.	Percentage
Government officers	14,895	36.2
Officers above section chief	77,300	15.1
Party leaders	4	n.a.
Ministers and deputy ministers of 29 ministries	18	n.a.
Mayors or vice mayors	400 of 1,360 (in 680 cities)	29.0
NPC delegates, 1998	65	21.8
9th National policy negotiation	341	15.5

Source: All-China Women's Federation, Department of Urban and Rural Work, Beijing, 21 May 2001.

**Table 12-12 Women Asian Political Leaders, 1995–1996**

Country	Ministerial	Subministerial
PRC	6.4	3.5
Japan	6.7	26.3
Philippines	8.3	26.3
Malaysia	7.7	4.7

Source: Asian Development Bank (1998), Table 5, p. 12.

markets to sell animals six to seven times a year, instead of the old pattern of once or twice a year. The training programs that have accompanied the microcredit schemes have also improved the confidence of women by giving them better knowledge about husbandry and the details of how and what to feed farm animals to maximize the growth of their herds. Some women in the UNDP-assisted village were demanding the establishment of a domestic violence center to provide women with a refuge from beatings. This was perhaps the most radical indicator of their growing sense of confidence and importance.

On the other hand, there is evidence from southern Xinjiang that the women who have received microcredit advances for the weaving of carpets have not experienced a net benefit. In the Hotan area, the women now weave in addition to their other work, but it is the men who sell the carpets and usually pocket the earnings.

**Table 12-13** Dependency Ratios<sup>a</sup> of the Aged, 1999

Region	Cities	Towns	Counties
Eastern	13.0	10.9	12.3
Central	10.5	9.7	10.3
Southwest	13.8	15.3	10.3
Northwest	10.3	8.6	8.2
<b>PRC</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>10.8</b>

Source: *China Population Statistical Yearbook, 2000.*

<sup>a</sup> Population aged 65 and over, as a percentage of the population aged 15 to 64.

There is no guarantee, therefore, that programs designed to give women new opportunities to earn extra income by increasing either their participation in the labor force or their productivity in new cottage industries will automatically improve their status in the economy or at home. The implementation of new development policies must therefore pay attention to how women could become more rather than less vulnerable as a result of socioeconomic change. Potential opportunities need to be converted into genuine opportunities that improve the lives of women.

### WOMEN IN RETIREMENT

Increasing the role, remuneration, and security of the women of the Western Region in the labor force by 2020 is critical not only for the welfare of women but for the economy as a whole. In 2020 not only will the size of the PRC's labor force peak, but the aging of the population will also reach a critical dimension. By 2020, an estimated 18 percent of the population will be over 75 years of age. About 230 million people will be over 60 years old, and the proportion of the population over 65 will be larger than the proportion of those under the age of 19 years.<sup>52</sup> This aged dependency burden will fall heavily on women for four reasons:

- The longevity of women will continue to exceed that of men by some years.
- Women typically retire earlier than men, at 55 instead of 60.<sup>53</sup>

- The pressure for retirement on older female workers frequently comes on top of the psychological and physical problems they face during menopause, thereby giving rise to further social disorientation.<sup>54</sup>
- The capacity of women to provide for their own security in old age is reduced by the lower wages they receive relative to men.

The age structure of the Western Region (Table 12-13) is such that in the rural areas the aged dependency burden is smaller than for the PRC as a whole.

In the cities and towns of the northwest the burden is also smaller. But in the cities and towns of the southwest it is higher. Migration out of the Western Region (see Chapter 11) will increase the dependency ratio.

## Implications for policies

### PROMOTING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE

To promote female participation in the labor force, education, labor, and social security policies should include the following objectives:

- Diversifying the occupations that women take up, in particular to encourage them to move into jobs with a higher technology and science content, especially off-farm jobs, because it is in the rural areas where all the constraints on development are most obvious
- Expanding reemployment support services for women in a manner that compensates for their unfair treatment in SOE retrenchments, reduces the pressure on their early retirement, allows them to provide for their own pensions, and helps them deal more effectively with menopause
- Enforcing the provisions of the Labor Law of 1994 regarding the fair treatment of women
- Improving job opportunities for women in areas where clients would prefer to have access to female expertise, for example, in health and

mental health care. On this particular point, there is no significant difference between the preferences of Muslim and non-Muslim women in the PRC.

- Improving the possibilities of self-employment by giving women access to microcredit schemes so that they can breed farm animals, plant vegetables and fruit trees, or produce handicrafts
- Improving technical training programs for women so that they improve their knowledge of better farming practices and develop the self-confidence that goes with more knowledge
- Increasing government investment in educational infrastructure specifically designed to reduce female illiteracy and semiliteracy, prolonging the years of schooling for girls, and ensuring that a greater percentage of women enter tertiary education of a technical or academic kind

Mental health has been a neglected area of public health and the consequences have been disastrous especially for women. The neglect by the State is serious, given the manner in which contemporary PRC stigmatizes the mentally ill. Hence, an educational campaign is also needed to better integrate those people who have manageable mental disorders into the workforce.

### **NEED TO INTEGRATE WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROGRAMS WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

There is a wide range of legal policies and constitutional safeguards that provide women with the necessary framework to develop their rights and move in the direction of more gender equality. What has been lacking is an integrated economic program capable of giving women the ability to make those laws meaningful. In particular, this applies to the needs of women from minority communities who, because of their greater isolation, require more consideration. As outlined in the previous section, a range of policy options is available to remedy this situation.

### **NEED TO EDUCATE AND INFORM WOMEN ABOUT THEIR LEGAL AND COMMERCIAL RIGHTS**

The second requirement is for women to become aware of their rights and how to safeguard them. The ACWF has identified this as a priority for its programs. The Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests of 1992 is being revised to take into account the new situations that economic reform is creating.<sup>55</sup> The revision requires the involvement of women, and the ACWF has been promoting leadership training for minority women lawyers. The present programs focus on marriage laws, which are under review because of the shifts in ownership from public to private property since the promulgation of the Family Law of 1980. As the private sector grows, the drafting of new laws and regulations should recognize the rights of women to private property within and outside the family. The revisions in the property laws and marriage laws are proceeding in tandem. Other social pressures emerging as a result of economic changes need to be taken into account when formulating new marriage and property laws:

- Men are more mobile now, and this has created special opportunities for them and also difficulties for the wives who are left behind to manage the family farm or business. The new responsibilities of women need to be reflected in new rights.
- The ACWF is concerned that the new mobility of men will increase the divorce rate and create larger numbers of single-parent households headed by women. Again, special legal provisions need to be made to protect the rights of women and their dependents.

The diversification of types of enterprise and rural-urban migration have rendered the notion of a homogeneous "women's interest" increasingly untenable. This is making it much harder for the ACWF to tackle the full range of women's issues effectively.<sup>56</sup> The ACWF has tried to cope with this challenge by establishing new associations such as the China Socialist Women's Entrepreneurs' Association, and new services such as the

Re-employment Guidance Centers. The Government should continue to facilitate the formation of new women's groups so that there can be a better and faster response to emerging women's needs. In the field of employment, there is a need to achieve much better enforcement of women's rights under the Labor Law of 1994.

**NEED TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT MORE ACWF ACTIVITIES IN THE WESTERN REGION**

The ACWF has played an important role in disseminating information about the rights of women. However, there has been a lack of funds and integration with the activities of bureaus charged with administering poverty and minorities affairs. In particular, the ACWF has not been especially focused on the needs of the Western Region or the women and minorities. As a semiofficial agency, the ACWF has been limited by the general assumption that the declaration of appropriate gender-sensitive policies will automatically translate into a changed situation and attitude at the local level. Strengthened national leadership is needed in order to increase the economic resources allocated for programs to improve the conditions of women in the Western Region.

That this has not happened has been recognized by the ACWF, which has responded during the last two years with a range of projects directly aimed at women and minority women in the Western Region. Table 12-14 gives an indication of the range of activities that have been undertaken in order to focus on the special needs of minority women. In addition to these, the ACWF has conducted two leadership training courses for women from the Western Region in late 2000 and in May 2001. These have not been focused exclusively on minority women, but some minority women have been involved.

While many of the activities of the ACWF appear to be related to economic development programs, in reality few of them go beyond informing women of the existence of these programs, how to access them, and their legal and commercial rights.<sup>57</sup>

Four other regional projects will be completed by the ACWF at the end of 2001:<sup>58</sup>

- Sichuan Women Technicians Project
- Gansu Women's Environmental Protection Project
- Education of women in Guangxi autonomous province
- Shaanxi Women's Entrepreneurship Project

**Table 12-14 Activities of Provincial ACWF Branches among Minority Women, 1998**

Activity	Provincial ACWF Office
Ethnic union and social stability	Xinjiang
Microcredit and poverty alleviation	Guangxi
Ethnic union and regional economic development	Tibet
Increase in the number and success of women's cadres	Guizhou
Ethnic equality and legal protection for women	Jiangsu
Improvement of employment opportunities for women and facilitation of universal development of programs for ethnic people, Project 1	Hunan
Healthcare for women and women's work in healthcare, Project 2	Hunan
Work for a national union of women	Shanghai
Poverty reduction and progress for minority women	Fujian
Improvement of employment opportunities for minority women and other conditions	Jilin
Poverty alleviation for women	Inner Mongolia

Source: All-China Women's Federation (1998).

These focus on providing women with special training to diversify their employment possibilities.

### RURAL WATER SUPPLY

The deficiencies in women's health in rural areas reinforce the need to attach a much higher priority to rural water supply in conjunction with health and hygiene education (Chapter 5). The Government's Trinity project (water environmental hygiene and health education) is a good model, but the coverage has been inadequate. There is also a need to improve the health infrastructure in a way that caters to the special needs of women and children, for example, by ensuring more effective modern contraception.

## Notes

- 1 State Council Information Office (1994), Foreword.
- 2 Judd (1994), p. 1.
- 3 Croll (1995), pp. 87–90.
- 4 Zhu Ling and Jiang Zhangyi (2001).
- 5 United Nations Development Program (1998), p. 32.
- 6 United Nations Development Program (1997), p. 12.
- 7 United Nations Development Program (1997), p. 14.
- 8 All-China Women's Federation (1995), p. 43. About 6,000 questionnaires were distributed to a roughly equal proportion of men and women in these three western provinces.
- 9 All-China Women's Federation (1995), Table 4-10, p. 85.
- 10 All-China Women's Federation (1995), Table 4-10, p. 85.
- 11 All-China Women's Federation (1995), p. 93. Gives the monthly income, which the consultants have converted to annual income to make it comparable to the income for rural residents.
- 12 All-China Women's Federation (1995), p. 96. Rural incomes were on average much lower than urban incomes, in conformity with global trends.
- 13 All-China Women's Federation (1995), p. 98.
- 14 All-China Women's Federation (1995), pp. 205–206. Hours worked were 5.74 for rural women, 7.21 for rural men, 7.05 for urban women, and 7.59 hours for urban men.
- 15 All-China Women's Federation (1995), Table 8-5, p. 210.
- 16 All-China Women's Federation (1995), Table 6-16, p. 170.
- 17 Bauer et al. (1992), p. 350.
- 18 Maurer-Fazio et al. (1999).
- 19 Maurer-Fazio et al. (1999), Table 10.
- 20 For example, Bauer et al. (1999), Table 8, p. 358, and pp. 359–360.
- 21 All-China Women's Federation and State Statistical Bureau (2001).
- 22 All-China Women's Federation and State Statistical Bureau (2001), pp. 362–364.
- 23 Brundtland (1998).
- 24 United Nations Development Program (1997), p. 48.
- 25 Liu Xujin et al. (1995), p. 474. The Zhuang are one of the largest minorities in the PRC with an estimated population in excess of 15 million. Most of them live in the eastern provinces, but more than a million are scattered throughout Yunnan, Sichuan, and other provinces bordering the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (pp. 470–471).
- 26 Dang Huiqiao (1995), p. 369. In Qinghai, there are 42 minorities including the Tu who live mainly in the Huzhu Tu Autonomous County in eastern Qinghai (p. 367).
- 27 Dang Huiqiao (1995), pp. 371–372.
- 28 Dang Huiqiao (1995), p. 371.
- 29 Wang Xueling et al. (1995), p. 462.
- 30 Wang Xueling et al. (1995), p. 462.
- 31 For an example of the positive impact of economic reform on the industrial and agricultural output of rural western PRC, see the case study on Jiahong, Sichuan, in All-China Women's Federation (1993), especially Table 2.3, p. 13.
- 32 Phillips (1998), p. 3.
- 33 Sun Rong and Duan Chengde (1995), p. 293.

- 34 Sun Rong and Duan Chengde (1995), p. 294
- 35 Liu Xujin et al. (1995), p. 485.
- 36 Xiao Yang et al. (1995), p. 236.
- 37 Xiao Yang et al. (1995), pp. 239–241.
- 38 Xiao Yang et al. (1995), p. 226.
- 39 About a quarter of the abortions in the PRC are performed on unmarried women. (Xiao Yang et al. [1995], p. 245.
- 40 Du Peiling et al. (1995), p. 395.
- 41 Gaol Xiaoxian and Dun Li (1995).
- 42 Interview with Shu Guang, Minority Group Division, All-China Women's Federation, Beijing, 4 June 2001.
- 43 Shu Guang pointed out that even the female employees of the Women's Federation were not free of the threat of cancer. She cited the recent death of a colleague from uterine cancer.
- 44 United Nations Development Program (1999b), p. 14.
- 45 In an isolated Lahu village in Lancang County, Yunnan, a mere 70 km from the Burmese border town of Money and 150 km from Ruile (the major southern border town of Yunnan province), team members discovered in April 2001 that the village midwife was not aware of the threat of HIV/AIDS. The township authorities had supplied her with two pressure cookers for the sterilization of syringes. Among her duties, she was required to immunize children and provide other medicines and vaccinations. But the pressure cookers were too heavy to carry to neighboring villages, so she had acquired a small metal box in which she was able to boil up to 10 syringes at a time. It was not clear whether the box could contain sufficient water to adequately sterilize all the syringes at once. But the midwife did say that she boiled the syringes until all the water had evaporated. The reason she owned two pressure cookers was that the local town had recently given her a new cooker to replace the old one. Clearly they did not know that the old cooker had never been used and that the midwife had no intention of using the new cooker either. Both cookers were shown to the consultant. They were covered with copious amounts of dust.
- 46 All-China Women's Federation (1993), p.24 and Table 3.6.
- 47 All-China Women's Federation (1993), p. 25.
- 48 All-China Women's Federation (1993), pp.30–31 and Table 3.9.
- 49 Liu Xujin et al. (1995), p. 491.
- 50 During visits to the poverty counties of Yunnan and Xinjiang, team members encountered only two women in significant leadership positions—one was the Director of the Planning Committee of Wushi County in Aksu Prefecture and the other the head of the Ili municipality (interviews with Hong Lin Fang in Wushi County, Aksu Prefecture, 27 April 2001). Team members met other women who were heads of county departments, but there were few of these except for the county office of Wushi in Aksu prefecture. The most visible presence of women in leadership roles was within ACWF offices at all levels; needless to say, all leadership positions were filled by women. However, these women were not influential in affecting the direction of development planning. In discussions with representatives of the ACWF in Yunnan and Xinjiang, team members asked about examples of prominent women leaders outside the ACWF. The typical response was that there were many, but hardly any names came to mind.
- 51 United Nations Development Program (1999c).
- 52 Brundtland (1998).
- 53 Bauer et al. (1992), p. 353.
- 54 Ge Meiyun and Shen Meihua (1995).
- 55 Interview with Cui Shu Hui, Section Chief, Department of Rights and Interests, All-China Women's Federation, Beijing 4 June 2001.
- 56 Howell (2000).
- 57 The international team members reached this conclusion from visits to Yunnan and Xinjiang. The one exception encountered was in Lancang County (Yunnan), where the Women's Federation had decided to focus all of its energies on a single microcredit project based in the township of Xin Cheng, Simao prefecture. The annual value of the project was 1.5 million yuan, of which 1.0 million

yuan was provided by the ABC and the remainder by the government of Yunnan. Between May 1997 and March 2001, the All-China Women's Federation received 4.3 million yuan to disburse as microcredit in the county. In the three years since the start of the pilot project the ACWF could point to numerous success stories of women who had received loans and produced commercially successful outcomes. One such story was a woman from a poor family who took out a microcredit loan three years earlier in order to buy a tractor. The family prospered and branched out by opening up a small restaurant that served meals around the clock and sold the locally made corn wine. The family was now building a new house. The ACWF in Lancang County was realistic in recognizing that the model of Xin Cheng would not be replicated in

the more remote areas of the Western Region for the simple reason that the success of microcredit depends on the beneficiaries living near a regular weekly market so that the produce generated by the microcredit loan could be sold. At the same time, the success of the Xin Cheng experiment provides further evidence for the need to encourage the rapid development of local markets. The information about this project was gathered during interviews with the ACWF in Lancang county on 20 April 2001. A team member spoke to Lien Ping (Chairman), Xu Jianping (Vice Chairman), and Li Yanmei (Director of the Office for Lancang County).

58 Interview with Associate Professor Jhang, Director, Women's Research Institute, ACWF, Beijing, 30 May 2001.

