

Gender Equality in Higher Education of China

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Abstract. This paper will discuss whether the expansion of gender equality will promote gender equality in China. It will begin with the definition of gender equality and higher Education. The main founding of this paper: gender equality achieved progress in Higher Education, but the women in rural areas still suffer from gender inequality and have little opportunity to access higher Education. Furthermore, some measurements and advice in school, community, and government will be listed.

Keywords: Gender equality in China; Higher education; Higher education expansion.

1. Introduction

China has seen an impressive boost in the popularity of higher Education caused by the economy's growth recent years. The consequence is that it can offer more chances to the individual to enter higher education and promote social harmony in China. Will the disadvantaged group-women also have equal opportunities to access higher Education? Will the massive increase in higher Education promote gender equality? Also, will women in rural area can have equal opportunity to access to higher education? It is vital to answer these questions and examine whether higher Education promotes gender equality.

Although several studies focus on whether higher Education affects gender equality globally, there is little study on China [1]. China can be a complex sample since the influence of Confucians and the dramatic development currently in many aspects. This article will provide some angles to find the link of gender equality and higher Education in China. It would be helpful to offer some new perspectives in gender equality in the world. This article will be divided into three parts: the definition of gender equality and higher Education, the history of female's status and expansion of higher Education, gender equality in China nowadays, and the implication.

2. Higher education and gender equality in China

2.1 The definition of gender equality and higher education

The true way to assess gender equality that entails understanding the social construction of gender identity [2], which can be supported by two trusted beliefs: (a) what positions are suitable for men or women to do in a specific context; (b) what is accomplished by men and women is valued, socially and economically. For instance, some common norms about what roles and activities for women and men and how they will be valued are depended on what opportunities they get. To be specific, some education opportunities for women are likely to be lower than men in certain countries due to their belief, religion, or poverty.

Higher education is referred as high school and university and colleges with offering a degree. In a historical view, John Dewey emphasized that the purpose of higher education is to foster learners to improve the society and sustain their ways of life [3]. In present, the purpose is still not changed. Bock mentioned that the aim of most universities is to educate an elite group of young people with academically specialization and social leadership [4].

2.2 Women's status in the history of China and expansion of higher education in China

China is a country fulfilling several historical legacies, and Confucianism is an ethical and philosophical ideology which effect China a long period [5]. Confucianism has undoubtedly shaped

Chinese people's behavior and social interactions for several thousand years and kept Chinese society and families together [6]. Confucianism has brought some virtues such as the “Wu chang”, including ren (kindness), Yi (integrity), li (manner), Zhi (intelligent), and Xin (trust), which are referred to as human principles and will be contributed to a harmonious society [7]. Although Confucius has come up with some virtues, it also can bring a dark side: disadvantaged females [8]. In Confucianism, the restrictions placed on women include three subordinations and four virtues. The "three subordinations" stressed that women should follow their fathers, listen to their husbands, and obey their sons when they were widowed [7]. The contents of the "four virtues" are ethics, words, modesty e.g. (women's appearance), and diligence e.g. (women's work) [7]. Furthermore, it is commonly used for women to bind feet and prevent women from participating in various social life. According to an old Chinese Confucian proverb, schooling was only available to boys: "A woman without talent is a virtue."

Some may argue that Confucianism's influence in China was gradually weakened after the May 4th Movement in 1919 and the establishment of China in 1949 [5]. For instance, the feminist movement flourished under the enlightening effect of the May Fourth Movement. Under the influence of the May Fourth ideology, people tend to embrace and develop the definition of gender equality and equal right [9]. Moreover, it ultimately caused the National Party-controlled Congress to pass a bill called "Resolution on the Women's Movement," guaranteeing female's property rights in the late 1920s [9]. However, the book of Liji recording the ritual and customs system of the Zhou dynasty, and it illustrated that women cannot have or make decisions on their own property [10]. The act's passing symbolized that women have the right to own and decide property and change their status in some ways. Although the law can legally enforce this bill, it is difficult to apply in China, especially in rural areas, due to the significant disparity and vast gap socioeconomic classes. The huge gap between rural and urban areas will also affect gender equality in higher Education and will be explained in the following paragraph.

China conducted two policies to develop and expand higher education system. Firstly, the "Great Leap Forward" strategy was adopted from 1949 to 1976, and it built over 1,060 new higher education institutions by 1960 [11]. However, this attempt failed because of the state governments' shortage of funding, the economic crisis from 1960 to 1962, and the Cultural revolution. In the last of Mao Zedong stage, the "user pays" system and sectors emphasizing efficiency were adopted in higher Education. Secondly, China tried to expand higher Education by increasing tuition fees, government-encouraged land concessions, and bank credit leverage in 1999. It turned into a successful and sustainable act. China arrived the phase of widespread higher Education in 2002, and the gross enrolment rate topped at 16%, a significant increase from 1.55% in 1978 [11]. Statistical Bulletin of National Education Development showed that 54.4% of Chinese were enrolled in higher Education in 2020, compared with only 0.26% in the founding of new China in 1949 [12]. China has one of the world's largest higher education systems, with 27 million university students. It can be seen as a successful movement and supported by the government to recruit more talents. The expansion of higher education can provide opportunities for the young to attend higher education.

Therefore, it is an interesting question to explore whether the significant increase in the higher education enrolment rate would contribute to gender equality in China. Although the negative status of women weakened in the Nineteenth century, this male-dominated trend continued into the recent years [13].

To conclude, China is one of the countries that are affected mainly by Confucius's culture. It can be believed that Confucius brings some positive sides about some virtues. However, it discriminates against the status of women, including unequal opportunities to get into school. Some researchers argued that the dark side of Confucius eroded after the 19th century since the May Fourth movement. The most crucial point is that the growth of tertiary education brings a fresh perspective to examine whether gender gap showed in China.

2.3 Gender equality of higher education in China

This section will discuss gender differences in enrolling in higher Education and causes of gender inequality in Education in countryside of China. To examine whether the expansion of higher education influences gender equality, there are some critical points. Firstly, social class and gender are closely associated with each other in reality [14]. Sullivan and other researchers believed that class inequality is much greater than gender inequality [15]. Secondly, there are different angles to assess gender equality, such as various categories of companies, the level of their degree, and the area they worked. It showed that it is complex to use gender as a social construct.

As for gender differences in enrolling in university, women students in higher education have continuously grown and even surpassed males. In 2009, about 10.82 million women university students exceeded men for the first time, only 10.62 million male students [16].

When reviewing the vertical dimensions of higher education admissions access, the national survey data from 2011 to 2012 showed that the different opportunities for entering universities (including key universities, no-key universities, and colleges) for males and females decreased [16]. Similarly, Yan and other researchers did a survey in some Chinese universities in 2012 and found whether there is a gender gap admitting higher education [11]. Their data showed no gender difference entering top university, which symbolize those female students in China can have an equal opportunity to receive higher Education.

However, Yan also found that women are 66% less likely than men to enroll in top elite universities in rural areas [11]. The worst rates happen among ethnic minority populations, where women's chances are about 85% lower than men's. Ro and her colleagues also pointed out that urban female students are a large part of entering top universities (211 universities funded by the Chinese government and supported the founding of higher education through building 100 universities), and rural female students are for only entering non-top universities [16].

The cause of the gender difference in rural areas can be that they prefer sons and invest money in sons' Education. In many countryside places of China, sons are considered as the main supporters and parents are more likely to spend money in their sons [17]. Research in a countryside of Yunnan Province showed that mothers tend to expect more from their sons' support in more remote and poorer places [17]. Additionally, the hope for future backing was also linked to whether to support or invest in children's education [18]. Specifically, women are not supported or relied on in the rural area, and their parents are not likely to invest money in their further Education. There is also other evidence showing that poverty is related to gender equality. It argued that women schooling is a "luxury" and it is less likely to be returned than male schooling [19]. Similarly, Hannum found out that the girls who lived in a wealthier village and they tend to benefit more than boys in terms of school attendance [19].

To conclude, this part discussed that gender equality could be difficult to assess since it relates to social class and huge differences between rural-urban areas. Gender equality in China has achieved some progress in recent years. However, there is still a gender gap in rural areas, and the cause may be related to old or traditional beliefs about sons and the countryside's poverty.

2.4 Implications

China achieved some successful improvements in gender equality in tertiary education, but some females in rural Education still struggle with getting an education. Some measures or suggestions can contribute to gender equality in China. It will divide into three parts, school, community, and government.

As for schools or universities, gender study should be listed in junior, senior high school, or higher education curricula. It can help students develop gender concepts when they are young and will build a solid foundation for gender study and help them develop a future interest.

Some universities should conduct a more detailed analysis of trends to ensure that gender equality policies are effectively implemented. The most effective way to address gender inequality is to enhance the number of women in STEM fields. However, not all women in STEM fields are

underrepresented; for instance, the number of female students surpassed male students in the life sciences. However, male students are underrepresented in several 'caring' subjects, such as psychology, Education, or linguistics. It implicated that males and female in particular fields should not be neglected.

Community staff of rural areas should focus on talking to some parents about their traditional beliefs about boys. They should also develop an environment of gender equality, such as holding some meetings or lectures. Furthermore, the community should encourage some organizations to concentrate on gender equality, and they will broadly spread the concept or the implementation of gender equality.

Governments should invest in funding education in rural areas since the poverty of rural areas may also cause less opportunity for women to go to school. They should also hold meetings with community staff or schoolteachers about the development and implementation of gender equality.

3. Conclusion

To start with conclusion, it can answer the questions raised in introduction. The expansion of higher education surely provided more chances to women and helped them to admitted in universities. The data showed that the proportion of female who got admitted by higher education even surpassed the men [19]. However, women in rural area are still suffer from gender inequality and they even do not have equal opportunity to attend compulsory education.

This paper discusses the definitions of gender equality and higher Education, the history of female's roles influenced by Confucian and the expansion of higher Education, women in higher Education of China currently, and some advice. It was a huge success for women in China, and they partly achieved gender equality because of the hard work of Chinese women in history, like the policy that came up in the May fourth movement. The central thesis of this paper is that there is no gender difference gap in admitting to higher Education currently. However, some gaps in rural areas are still caused by traditional beliefs or poverty. The government, community, and schools must make some changes to address this problem.

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