

A Comparative Analysis of Influencing Factors and Countermeasures of Gender Inequality in Higher Education: Based on The Comparison of Mainland China and Hong Kong, China

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Abstract. The increase in popularity of higher education has improved the talent competitiveness of China on the global stage and highlighted the function of higher education in fostering social prosperity and development. But, as higher education has continued to advance, other issues have surfaced. Although enrollment chances have risen, there is still inequity in the distribution of opportunities, particularly across genders. The gender disparity in the growth of Chinese higher education is therefore examined and discussed in this article. The analysis and comparison approach is used to explain the causes and solutions to gender inequality in Hong Kong and Mainland China's higher education stages. It is discovered that there are gender bias-causing similarities and differences between Hong Kong and Mainland China. The study's findings are that traditional Chinese beliefs have an impact on gender inequality in higher education in Hong Kong and Mainland China. In several professions and textbooks in Hong Kong, there are very serious gender stereotypes, whereas, in Mainland China, gender inequality is greatly influenced by the urban-rural divide. The remedies for gender disparity examined in this research have a mitigating impact but do not actually solve the issue. China should establish policies in the future that are better suited to its own national circumstances and guarantee that the policies are implemented effectively.

Keywords: Gender inequality, Higher education, China, Hongkong.

1. Introduction

In the late 20th century, China began to realize the role of higher education in developing a knowledge economy, so China began to strive to expand the scale of higher education institutions to meet the needs of students' learning. China's higher education has changed from an elite model to a popular, international, and global model as an outcome of the fast expansion of higher education. In the stage of massification of higher education in China, it is undeniable that the enrollment rate of Chinese higher education has increased, and the expansion has promoted social mobility, but at the same time, the phenomenon of educational inequality has also intensified. Gender inequality is one of the main manifestations of educational inequality. The disparity between the proportions of men and women pursuing higher education is the major indicator. The causes of gender disparity are numerous. Gender equality is the fifth of the 17 sustainable development objectives that the United Nations set for itself in the year 2030. Not only is gender equality a fundamental human right, but it also forms the basis for global stability, prosperity, and sustainable growth. This article analyzes the causes and measures of gender inequality by comparing Mainland China and Hong Kong, China. This article provides critical reflections on addressing gender inequality in Chinese higher education. Solving gender equality issues will lay a solid foundation for educational equality, which will have a positive impact on social development and help China transform into a knowledge-based economy.

2. Gender Inequality in Higher Education

It will still take 132 years to reach complete equality, according to the World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Gender Report. Iceland placed first in the index ranking of 146 nations this time, and the economy continues to be the primary factor in the 90% reduction in the gender gap. Contrarily,

East Asia and Central Asia are advancing to the middle level, whereas China is ranked 102nd and, despite having made some progress, is still lagging [1]. These statistics demonstrate that China still has significant gender disparity. Education, especially higher education, has undergone substantial changes in the last several decades with the evolution of society. These changes are mostly shown in the growth of enrollment opportunities and enrollment numbers.

Due to the popularization of higher education, educational inequality is becoming more and more serious, and gender inequality is one of the negative products. According to data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in 2016, the percentage of female graduates in higher education in China is 51.1, ranking 10th among 14 countries and ranking relatively low [2]. This data demonstrates that there is still a severe gender imbalance in higher education, with numerous detrimental implications on women's engagement as teachers or students [3]. The lack of female scholars in Hong Kong's higher education sector is particularly glaring, which should further demonstrate the "Matilda impact." Inequality is marked by gender, which is frequently linked to place, race, class, and other factors. China, a nation with a history spanning more than 5,000 years, also struggles with severe gender inequality issues, particularly in the area of higher education. According to the national circumstances in China, a variety of elements, including social and cultural influences, the influence of the class structure, the influence of patriarchal society, the influence of family and marriage, etc., have an impact on gender inequality [3].

3. A Comparative Analysis of Factors Affecting Gender Inequality in Mainland China and Hong Kong

3.1. Influence of Traditional Chinese Culture and Values

Due to historical factors, gender perception in ancient China was biased and twisted. China has a lengthy history. The creation of The Chou Rituals during the Western Zhou Dynasty of ancient China signaled the beginning of patriarchy and the formation of a male-dominated social system. The dominance of men in society and the family, as well as the oppression and discrimination of women, is known as patriarchy. Women and men at this time had a very unequal connection with one another. The attitude that men are superior to women is progressively taking hold in China as the country continues to develop, where planned marriages "controlled by parents and ordered by matchmakers" are the norm [4]. Therefore, women have always been at the bottom of society. For more than two thousand years, China's history of slavery and capitalism combined to create a feudal society, which has had a significant impact on the values and ways of thinking in the country [5].

Since modern times, the idea of equality has begun to spread and develop, but the development is limited. The social structure will need to undergo significant modifications to break an outdated cultural paradigm and develop a new concept. The traditional patriarchal idea started to break down when New China was established in 1949, and laws were passed to re-establish a positive interaction between the genders [4]. The idea of a discourse system with a masculine theme hasn't been fully eradicated by patriarchal culture, though; it persists in contemporary society. In both urban and rural traditional homes, there is still a bias against women by decent wives and good moms, regardless of whether society is patriarchal.

Hong Kong has also been influenced by many traditional concepts. According to a survey of Hong Kong from 1971 to 2001, Hong Kong families showed the same tendency toward patriarchy as mainland families. According to a poll conducted in Hong Kong between 1971 and 2001, Hong Kong households had the same patriarchal tendencies as families on the mainland. The biggest expression is that they prefer to provide men the chance to attend university instead of women because of things like high tuition costs and low family income. When it came to continuing their education after high school and attending a university in 1971, women in Hong Kong faced a twofold disadvantage. The situation is beginning to improve as a result of initiatives to end child labor and introduce nine-year compulsory schooling, as well as rising household income [6]. In 2015, just 28.0% of women over the age of 15 had a tertiary degree, compared to 34.2% of men. In 2015, the proportion of men and

women with higher education rose by 95.8% and 96.6%, respectively [7]. The conventional idea of women's duties within and outside the family has not entirely been abandoned, though, and this is mirrored in the unequal treatment of women in the workplace once they have obtained employment.

3.2.Educational Impact: The Case of Textbooks

Not simply enrolment, but many facets of the educational process show gender inequality. Textbooks are how people learn new things. Books serve as a reflection of social reality and an essential instrument for teaching pupils about morals and the world.

According to studies, men and women are treated considerably differently in textbooks in Hong Kong, China. In comparison to Hong Kong's general population, just one-thirtieth of a sample of Chinese history and social studies textbooks mention women [8]. One could argue that gender bias in textbooks is highly implicit and has a suggestive effect. Students will have false perceptions as a result of misleading gender in textbooks. Such problems were also found in the Hong Kong Primary School Reading Plan proposed in Hong Kong in 2000. Male characters are more likely than female characters to appear on their own in the samples that were taken, and the proportion of male characters is higher than that of female characters. In terms of themes, most of the reading topics about women are dance and crafts, which is also in line with traditional Chinese cultural concepts, while the topics related to men are often adventure, sports, etc. In terms of family roles, women appear more than men, especially when the word "shopping" is mentioned, it is exclusively for men. Words describing men, such as father, are often followed by transitive verbs, while words describing women, such as "She", are followed by 89 transitive words related to clothing and objects [9]. They could also indicate that Hong Kong has not properly restricted publications, particularly sexist reading material.

On the other hand, similar occurrences are also present in textbooks published in mainland China, particularly in Chinese textbooks. There are few female characters and only a small number of extremely well-known female poets and authors in the Chinese textbooks of the standard high school courses published by People's Education Press, including Li Qingzhao and others [10].

The basis for higher education is being laid by all three levels of education: primary, middle, and high school. The bias in the educational materials children use, and the knowledge, culture, and concepts they are exposed to early on will affect how future students create their beliefs, and it will also prevent students from developing gender awareness and equality.

3.3.Other Aspects

3.3.1 Gender stereotypes: the case of the missing women in STEM education and academia in Hong Kong

Certain activities or behaviors that are considered more suitable for men or women are obvious barriers that directly limit the entry of men or women into the sector and are known as gender stereotypes. Another factor contributing to gender imbalance in higher education in China is gender stereotypes. The capacity for scientific and technological advancement of a nation reflects that nation's overall competitiveness. As a result, several nations now have STEM education as their primary educational objective. When compared to traditional education, STEM education places more emphasis on the interaction inside the course as well as the dual application of knowledge and abilities. But with the vigorous development of STEM education, it is found that gender imbalance is prevalent in STEM in the process. Young people's academic and career choices are influenced by their learning experiences throughout their educational journey, which are in turn influenced by their subjective perceptions of traditional stereotypes, in addition to their strengths.

Even if women have good STEM research abilities, it was discovered while constructing STEM education programs in Hong Kong, China, that they will not pick this area and still believe that the majority of technology-related occupations will favor men [11]. Besides that, gender norms are frequently ignored in China's educational system. For example, various sports are taught to boys and girls in physical education, and there are separate clothing requirements in schools [12]. Gender stereotypes contribute to the low number of women in higher education among the employed

population. Through case studies of the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the amount and importance of senior leaders in Hong Kong are investigated. The findings indicate that there are surprisingly few women holding high-level leadership positions in Hong Kong. Women scholars wrote fewer publications than men, received less outside money, and had worse chances of being tenured [13]. Women's advancement is significantly influenced by university ideals. Women are expected to be virtuous and honest in traditional Chinese society, as well as to care for the family and children. They are forced into a teaching position rather than a leading one by this thinking. Contrarily, male university presidents who were interviewed in Hong Kong hold the opinion that gender is not a factor in career advancement. Although they are more disposed towards values and excellent workability, they may also be influenced by gender stereotypes and may have a negative view of married female teachers [14].

In general, gender stereotypes have a subtle effect, and varied perspectives on gender lead to a deviation from the understanding of accurate gender notions.

3.3.2 Difference between urban and rural areas in Mainland China

Mainland China has a distinctive regional composition. The location where the majority of the non-agricultural people resides is known as the city, and the countryside is the region where the agricultural population is concentrated. The imbalanced economic development that characterizes these two regions most is what also causes educational inequality. The gender ratio of higher education between urban and urbanised areas is therefore unbalanced. According to a study of the gender gap in higher education between cities and rural places between 1982 and 2015, rural females typically attend regular colleges or junior colleges. In rural China in 1982, the gender gap index was only 0.13. Gender parity had been reached by 2010. the better [15].

In a broad sense, cities and towns with higher economic status see less gender discrimination in higher education. The survey's findings indicate that in 2021 when the per capita GDP is less than 120,000girls are more likely than boys to enroll in a junior college, but as the per capita GDP rises, the odds will be nearby. The amount spent on schooling is influenced by economic status. The proportion of women enrolling in junior colleges is high when the cost is less than 5,880 CNY. The likelihood of men attending a specialist is higher than that of women when the cost exceeds 5880 CNY [16].

Towns and villages have different levels of economic, educational, and cultural development, and these factors have influenced the concept of parenting in traditional families. Children of more educated parents and those who have achieved more career success tend to be more educated themselves, and this effect is stronger for daughters [17]. Since parents frequently give up their daughter's right to an education in rural areas when the family income is insufficient to finance two children's attendance at a school.

4. Analysis of Existing Measures to Address Gender Inequality

The issue of gender inequality in higher education has been receiving attention, and there are many measures to help solve gender inequality, such as holding many seminars on gender issues in Asian non-governmental organizations, using a combination of theory and practice to help correct Misconceptions about gender, the urgency to reduce gender inequality [3]. More than 20 laws have been passed in China to defend the rights of women, including the PRC Women's Rights and Interests Protection Law [18]. In mainland China, the establishment of female-only private higher education institutions may help to mitigate the negative impacts of gender inequality [3]. The use of new media has improved the understanding of gender inequality with the advancement of science and technology, particularly in rural areas. In daily life, people use new media to spread the correct concept of gender relations [19].

With the establishment of the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) in 1996, Hong Kong, China, has also implemented a number of relevant policies to address gender disparity. A variety of laws

have been passed, including those prohibiting gender discrimination and mandating three days of paternity leave [7]. Strengthen public education and gender training for institutes of higher learning. By fostering a welcoming and diverse campus community, the University of Hong Kong has devised its regulations to guarantee equality between male and female teachers [14].

5. Enlightenment

Gender inequality is still a serious issue in China today. First, China should incorporate the genuine circumstances in the country in addition to studying from the great experience of other nations. The nation should implement more appropriate and focused policies to lessen the effects of gender disparity. Education is a key means of knowledge transmission for the significant divide between urban and rural growth, and the community as a whole has a duty to disseminate pertinent information. Second, whether it is higher education or compulsory education, the teaching of material relating to gender equality should be incorporated into the curriculum, maybe as the first lesson every year. Digitalization makes it easier for people to communicate and discover new ideas. It is also an efficient means of communication that can inspire teachers to create brief movies with essential material and convey it in a lighthearted manner. The Education Department should review school textbooks once more, do a good job of protecting kids, and assist pupils in acquiring critical reading abilities and the capacity to tell right from wrong.

6. Conclusion

This article discusses and contrasts the root reasons for gender inequality in higher education in Hong Kong and Mainland China, as well as the current solutions. Gender inequality in higher education in China is still a major problem at the moment and is influenced by traditional Chinese values, educational resources, gender stereotypes, and urban-rural inequalities. Although existing solutions are effective, such as gender seminars to help people establish correct gender awareness, gender legislation helps people assert their rights. In practice, however, the effectiveness of these measures is limited.

Using the most recent information and comparative techniques, this article integrates and explores the factors that contribute to gender inequality in higher education. The relative parity of the sexes in higher education, the issue of uneven access to educational resources, and the advancement of higher education can all be aided by research on gender inequality. The best way to create a harmonious society is to protect everyone's right to education since education has the power to change destiny.

But this article still has many limitations. First, only a few of the elements that affect gender equality are listed in this article, which limits the reliability of the results. Second, it is difficult to compare the current gender disparity statistics at the higher education stage in Mainland China and Hong Kong because full statistical data on gender inequality in Mainland China and Hong Kong, China, cannot be obtained when looking for literature. Finally, this article's range of applicability is somewhat limited. It only applies to the analysis of gender disparity in higher education in China and not to gender inequality in other areas of social development.

The results of this research show that the effectiveness of existing policies and measures is limited, and the proportion of women in some professional fields is low. There is a lack of female scholars, and the phenomenon that females are not valued is still very significant. Future study directions should pay greater attention to the implementation effect of the measures presented in the hope of helping solve the problem of gender disparity, in addition to how to protect the equal rights of females and males.

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