

## **Is gender discrimination still apparent in China, and how does gender affect China's growth?**

Gender discrimination refers to the mistreatment of a person based on their gender, which is a social problem where women generally suffer the worse consequences. Examples of gender discrimination can come in the form of harassment, abuse, and unequal treatment, just to mention a few. Inequality is evident all over the world, especially in Asia where patriarchal values are embedded in the Asian culture such as men being given more privileges and being seen as more dominant than women. With China being a global rising power, it still faces a higher volume of gender discrimination that might cause problems in China's labor force and economy. To ensure China's forward progress, it is important for China to eliminate gender discrimination to encourage a safer and fairer society, which can also consequently lead to economic growth.

### **Documentary Summary**

In 2003, director Christine Choy produced a documentary called "Sparrow Village", which shed light on the troubles that a group of young girls in a rural village in southwestern China faced in hopes of pursuing their dreams of furthering their education and leaving the village for their desired jobs. The common factor that the girls share is that their families all have monetary issues. In the rural village, it is hard to earn a steady income, which makes it difficult to send children to school. Some parents even have to move far away from their children to find work so that they can afford the schooling fees. With their financial struggles, it is tough to provide equal opportunities to all children as families with multiple children can only afford to send one of them to school. In the documentary, one of the girls had to drop out of school so that her brother could further his studies even though she performed better academically. In their culture, boys are deemed as more important than girls because it is believed that the sons would grow to take care of their families meanwhile the daughters would be married off and would focus on their new families instead.

Not only does gender discrimination exist within families, but it can be seen in job hunting as well. Ms. Lee is a hard-working and passionate teacher looking to provide for her community, so she spends her free time helping out students' families and teaching illiterate villagers. Other than that, she also works hard to take care of her house and children. She is the only female teacher in the school, and despite her hard work and passion, she is only a substitute teacher. Even so, Ms. Lee stated that she is considered lucky as many of her female peers were unable to find jobs at all after graduation. As it can be seen, females are treated unequally in the village, and with financial issues, it puts them at a greater disadvantage. It is hard for women in the village to be independent given such circumstances and treatment as they need help from men to perform basic tasks such as reading letters that they received from their family members.

### **Personal Reaction**

As someone that was born and raised in Asia, I find that "Sparrow Village" portrayed the view on women in a similar way. The older generations in my family view an ideal wife as a woman who cooks and cleans well, and their main duty is to stay home and look after the house and family. The traditional Asian mindset is that men should be smart and intelligent, prioritizing getting a good job and providing for the family, and women should focus on house chores. My grandmother grew up in a rural area as well, and she had a big family with five brothers and three sisters. They were poor and not all of them could go to school, but all five boys went and only one of her sisters went to school. As an Asian, the documentary is relatable as I have first-hand experiences. This increases the urgency to stop gender inequality and promote a more respectable and proper way to treat women.

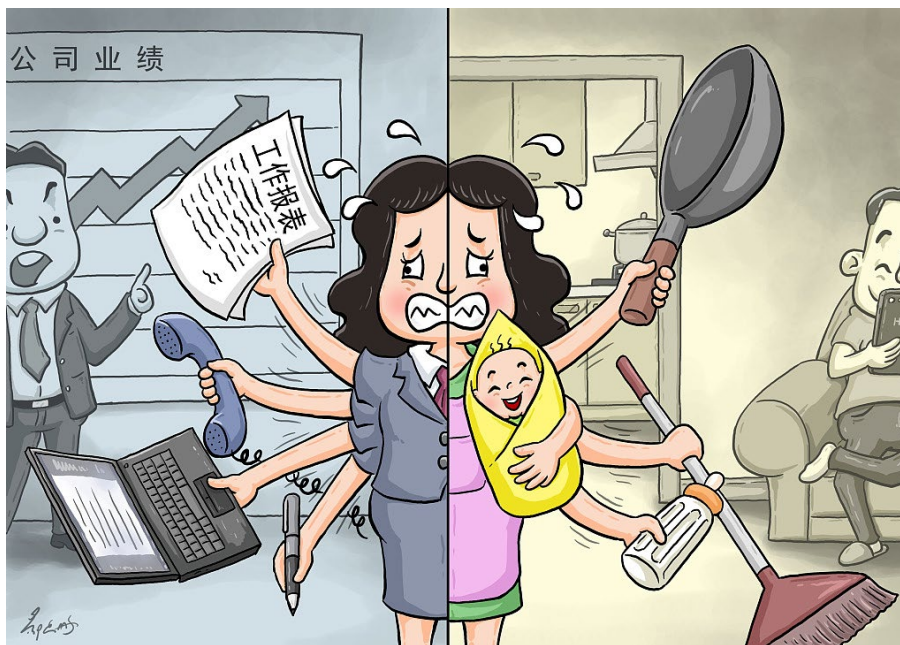
### **Relevance**

The unequal treatment of women in the documentary gives a good insight into gender discrimination in China. Following the mistreatment, women are unable to gain proper access to education and are overlooked for jobs, which directly correlates to the research and contributes to answering the question of the severity of gender inequality. Ms. Lee is expected to take care of both her children and work, which reflects the situation of the duties that women are expected to

perform, which affects their careers and progress. Although the documentary is based on a village in a rural area, it still portrays the mindset of an Asian culture where men are seen as more important.

## Answers

To further understand and evaluate gender mistreatment in China, we look into the causes of such behaviors. Under Mao's rule, his idea of equality was women taking on traditionally male roles, but they were still expected to perform their female roles (UCIL 22602, 7.4). Although women are able to obtain better roles and earn higher wages in the labor market, they are still expected to take care of the children and do house chores, which are "typical" female duties. As displayed in the picture below, women have to juggle between work and house duties, but the man only needs to care about work.



(Cheng, 2020)

This patriarchal system adopted during the Mao era still persists. Other than that, as discussed by Dr. Elena from the University of Manchester, China adopts Confucius' value of filial piety, which prioritizes carrying the family's name and taking care of the family. This contributes to gender discrimination as families in China prefer to have a son who can carry on their family name legacy and take care of them when they grow older, while daughters are expected to marry into their husband's family, leaving their birth family behind.

China's sex ratio at birth (SRB), which is the ratio of males to 100 females, is substantially high and rising. In 1990, China's SRB was 111.4, and it rose to 119.9 in 2000 and 121.2 in 2010 (Jiang, 2019). The rising SRB leads to many huge gender imbalances in China which affects China's progress. A large factor contributing to the high SRB is selective abortion; it is estimated that 20 million of the gender gap between males and females comes from female selective abortion (Jiang, 2019). The gender imbalance lowers the birth rate in China, making it an aging population and decreasing the working-age population. This can lead to a shortage in the labor force, and can also require an increase in care for the elderly.

As China progression to become a global superpower, conflicts start rising. Following the 'Thucydides trap', it explains that the power transition between a rising power and the dominant power will lead to great conflict (UCIL 22602, 5.3). This was evident when President Trump of the U.S. initiated a trade war against China due to fears of a rising trade deficit (UCIL 22602, 5.3). Because of the conflict, China under Xi's rule is moving towards decoupling with the rest of the world. Dr. Rhye from the Manchester China Forum implied that the decoupling between China and the West has already started (UCIL 22602, 3.4). Becoming a more independent country means relying more on domestic labor. With women having to earn a living and expected to perform traditional duties, this leads to women having less time dating as they focus on their jobs, which contributes to lower birth rates. This can explain one of the reasons why China is facing a declining birth rate, which is a crucial factor to consider for China's plans of decoupling as children are the country's next generation of workers.

Throughout the years, China's gender gap in labor force participation has risen from 9.4% in 1990 to 14.1% in 2020, and evidence shows that women face effects such as a "sticky floor" where they are unable to progress, or a "glass ceiling" whereby they face greater discrimination at high levels (Zhang and Huang, 2020). Avoiding hiring women due to childbirth or their family prioritization contributes to the gender gap. The mistreatment causes China to underutilize its labor force, which does not maximize production and output, slowing down economic growth.

The reduction in gender inequality and imbalance in China will improve China's economic and welfare growth. Women in China have even less access to education and healthcare due to Covid-19 (World Bank Live, 2022). According to the study by Wu et al. (2022), women's access to education, health, and employment directly correlates with economic growth. With proper access, women can live a more productive and managerial lifestyle that also boosts economic growth and welfare.

## Conclusion

As a developed country, China is still one of the countries that face a high amount of gender discrimination due to their patriarchal beliefs that male is more valuable than female, which contributes to a gender imbalance. These factors burden China's economic growth and minimizing it can benefit China greatly. All things considered, we suggest that China implement policies such as increasing investment that supports families to release the burden on women and stricter laws to prohibit gender discrimination in employment and education.

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