

# Examining women discrimination in china sociology essay



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“ When a son is born, let him sleep on the bed, clothe him with fine clothes, and give him jade to play...when a daughter is born, let her sleep on the ground, her in common wrappings, and give her broken tiles to play.” This Chinese song written 1000 years ago, still rings true today in China as it did in the past. For generation after generation, females in China have been seen as inferior to men. Quite clearly shown from the traditional foot binding that men consider ‘ beautiful’, where a woman has to break her feet and bound them to make them only 3 inches long; or the fact that the emperors always had a whole harem of concubines ready for him to ‘ enjoy’. But as times have changed, many past ideals and views have changed with it. Including a woman’s worth in society; the problem is whether or not women have obtained the same rights both in society and in law. The reality is that though there has been major improvement in gender equality in China, discrimination against women remains prevalent in rural areas, evident through gender imbalance, traditional views of a woman’s role in society, and education and job opportunities.

One of the most apparent evidence that women in China are not seen as equal importance to men is from the severe gender imbalance taking place. This is caused by various different reasons, for instance the one child policy. In 1979 China enforced the one child policy, changing the fertility rate drastically, but what it did not change, was the son preference. The National Census Bureau established in 1990 made it clear that China’s sex ratio at birth (SRB) was male biased - reflecting on the discrimination towards girls. But ever since then, not only has the gender imbalance remained, in fact the numbers of sons kept rising. In 1970, before the one child policy there were

106 boys per 100 girls, when the one child policy took effect the ratio became 111 boys per 100 girls, then gradually 114 boys, by year 2000 there were 117 boys per 100 girls! From here, the statistics don't seem so horrifying, but when you multiply that ratio with the population of China, the results are shocking, for this is the cause of over 4 million girls 'missing'. Experts estimate, that if this trend continues, in 10 years China will have approximately 40 to 60 million girls missing. As to why the one child policy was able to tip the gender imbalance even more, was because since only one child is allowed, many people wanted sons over daughters, and the technology now a days, makes the gender selection of a child an easy thing to do.

Technology plays a great part in this is because with the improvement of technology, things such as ultrasounds allow parents expecting babies to find out the gender of their child. Which causes a lot of female child abortions and infanticide, for often the case is: if the child is a girl, the family will abort the baby. As a response to these issues, in 1994 China banned the use of ultrasounds for the use of sex selection, but in an interview from BBC with an ultrasound technician, he claimed that "people...offer me money to tell them [the sex of their baby]." According to the studies of a Sociology professor in Northridge University, Wendy Wang, shows that "parents with son preference value consider their daughters to be less valuable and therefore provide inferior care to daughters in terms of food allocation, prevention of disease and accidents, and treatment of sick children," another main cause of the dramatic decrease in female infants. Through this, it is clear that females are not seen as the same value as sons; even in the

process of giving birth to the child is an evident case of female inferiority and discrimination. For instance, there are many mothers in China who do not want to give up their girls, but their husbands 'encourage' them to. Xinran Xue, a former radio host, had received hundreds of letters from women who felt that they were pressured and forced to abort their daughters; one woman wrote "I would rather suffer this dark hole inside me if... [my daughter] can have a better life." This being the case, there are thousands of couples in China who have girls, abandon them; resulting more than 160,000 girls in orphanages across the whole country. To top it off, the lack of girls in China has affected the ways of society so much, that people are so desperate that the United Nations stated that there were about 250,000 Chinese women and children kidnapped in 2003, sold to people as wives.

Another factor to the gender imbalance in China is the indifference of the people towards the situation. Being an issue discussed worldwide, many Chinese are definitely aware of the situation, but they seem to turn a blind eye. For the parents want sons, and therefore discriminate girls, causing the SRB to become more and more male biased instead. What they might have not predicted, was that since most everyone wanted a boy, how would there be enough girls for the boys to 'hitch'. An estimate by Zhai Zhenwia, a professor at People's university in Beijing, shows that there are "already about 20 million boys who will never be able to marry, because there aren't enough women." Things have gone so desperate, that some guys even put ads on the newspaper in search of a wife. But there are also people who couldn't care less about the situation, "Am I worried I won't find a wife? No, because the world is so big." The Chinese government is finding ways to

improve the situation such as making the year 2004 the “Year of the Girl” - promoting the idea “girls are as good as boys!” or offering some parts of the country better housing, lower school fees and pensions for elderly parents who don't have boys- if they would give birth to a girl. The goal was set to settle the situation of gender imbalance by 2010 (this year), but it is quite evident it hasn't exactly been as affective as the government hoped. Most likely is because son preference is a traditional value that has been implanted in the Chinese so strongly, that it has even brought gender imbalance to places like the United States. Generally speaking in the States, the ratio of more boys being born than girls is 1.05 to 1, which seems pretty much okay. The problem is when it comes to American-Chinese, Korean or Indian families. Since there is no one child policy in the U. S, families can have all the babies they want, therefore causing the likelihood of having a boy if the first child was a girl to increase to 1.17 to 1; if both the children are girls, the ratio of the third child to be male was 1.51 to 1, in other words 50% greater chance. This is an especially big problem in New York where about every 1000 births, there are 558 boys born, as opposed to the typical account of 515 boys. Even doctors from fertility and sex-selection clinics have noticed this trend; like Dr. Norbert Gleicher, medical director of the Center for Human Reproduction stated that from what he knows from experience, is that most people want girls, except for Asians and Middle Easterners. Thus the indifference people have towards the gender imbalance is emphasized by the fact that the statistics still aren't changing. Which shows that women aren't exactly considered highly important in Chinese society other than being baby-making machines.

Other than being the role of a housewife, mother, and sex objects for men, women in pre-revolutionary China had no status in their family or society. Till now in rural China, these traditional beliefs of a woman's role have not changed much. In order to fully understand the situation of why couples in especially rural China, have such a strong preference to sons, is to first understand what were the traditional ideals of a perfect Chinese family. First of all it was best to have 4 generations living together, with of course as many males as possible; because men were the dominant ones in the family. They were responsible of taking care of the family's financial source, traditional customs and rituals, and to add on top of that the family lineage is only allowed to be continued by a male child. Therefore the males are expected to maintain financial and social ties to household for life. Whereas daughters in a traditional ideal Chinese family are taught to be good housewives; basically translates to being obedient, and "to place their happiness on the goodness of their husbands". Another reason daughters are not considered a good 'thing' to invest in for living expenses, education, is because once they get married, daughters are no longer considered to be part of the family, instead she becomes part of her husband's family. Therefore parents don't see the point in investing much to raise their daughter(s), when they will gain no benefits from her in the future. Adding on to all that tradition, even the most respected man in Chinese history, Confucius, stated that "one of the three grave unfilial acts is to fail to have a son"; which in pre-revolutionary times, if a wife was to fail to have a son, she could get kicked out of the household.

As to why 'rural China' and 'urban China' tends to be separated when discussing the discrimination towards girls, is because when it comes to son preference, and traditional views, the urban and rural Chinese are quite different. In a research conducted by Wendy Wang, a professor in sociology claims that a parent's income and education level influences their values toward their child's gender. In urban families, there is none or hardly any gender bias, this is because parents have higher education, and therefore more open minded, also since the parents have a better income, and the one child policy is strictly practiced in urban areas, therefore they only need to provide/invest one child with better educational and living conditions, they also don't need to worry about who will take care of them when they grow old because there is retirement funds, and their amount of income is able to support them in the future. Whereas parents in rural areas, 2 children are allowed, therefore parents would provide more favorable conditions to boys. Also there are no retirement pension programs, nor are the income or jobs of parents from rural areas, as high and good as parents from urban areas, and therefore they need to have someone to look after, and provide for them when they are old. This now comes in a full circle on how traditional beliefs fit into this cycle of women discrimination, because due to traditional family values, the sons are the one expected to maintain financial and social ties to household, meaning they are expected to take care of their parents. Girls on the other hand who are expected to become part of her husband's household; the parents believe is not beneficial to invest in daughters for they, according to tradition, will not provide for them, also daughters are typically viewed as weak, and obedient, with no use except for being a housewife. Theses discriminations towards girls, and the stereotypical view <https://assignbuster.com/examining-women-discrimination-in-china-sociology-essay/>

of how girls are to a family of traditional Chinese values, is proof that females in present China still are not looked as equals with men. And it therefore constricts females from getting equal opportunities as guys, which includes preventing girls to have the education and job opportunities that they deserve.

When it comes down to the opportunities, chances, the male population in China still has an upper hand. Due to family conditions and traditional values, many girls aren't able to receive the same benefits guys have, especially in their level of education and job employment. As stated before, families in urban areas and in rural areas, tend to have different views due to their living conditions. So when it comes to education, girls in urban areas have more equal education to guys than girls in rural areas. First of all, like when it come to gender preference of their child, parents of urban areas, show none or hardly any gender bias because of their higher education, and better higher income. Therefore they can provide for themselves, and therefore do not need to depend on child (son), so they are fine with whom they invest money in to educate: girl or guy. Also the because of the strictly practiced one child policy in urban areas, the parents only need to provide one child, no matter the gender, with better educational opportunities. This being the case, girls in rural areas have significantly worse education opportunities than the sons. In 1990 census showed that on average rural females only complete about 4. 74 years of elementary. (urban females complete about 7. 64 years). This is because in rural areas 2 children are allowed; therefore parents would provide more favorable conditions to boys because the parent's investment in a child's education is based on the future



returns. Since men are offered better employment opportunities and higher income; therefore the son is given the better education. Also there is no retirement pension program, and the income for parents in rural areas are not as high as parents from urban areas, and opposite of parents from urban area, they need to have someone to look after, and provide for them when they are old, therefore the role of the sons to maintain financial and social ties to household is crucial to them. So for girls, who are expected to become part of her husband's household, they believe is not beneficial to invest in daughter's education. Like a popular expression in China " Raising a daughter is like watering someone else's garden."

One of the reasons that some parents choose to invest in their son than their daughter's education, is because sons have better employment and higher income - even if the girl has better qualities. Here, no longer is discrimination against girls only towards girls from rural areas, but most all of China. Urban girls have lower employment rate than guys and rural girls, because jobs they apply for, are given first priority to the males, the only way they could win a job over from a male, is if she is very overly achieved; even if a girl qualifies for the job a bit more than a guy applicant, the job would still be given to the male. The bit that stands out though, is that girls in rural areas have higher employment rate, from this it seems like it means that rural girls seem to be fairly equal to men, but that is not actually the case. Girls in rural areas, from ages 15-19 year old have a higher employment rate than boys, because those girls are not provided to go to school, whereas most teenage boys are still being educated. So the girls are forced to go and work to help support the family instead of receiving an

education. The problem is that with the development of China, many jobs require at least secondary school education, whereas most women in rural areas only have education up to elementary level, suggesting that in the near future, these jobs these women have may be gone. Although many women across China urban and rural are employed, but they have a lower salary than guys in the same job, and their jobs are mostly lower positions. For women in rural areas, it's mostly all labor work. Another point to pick out is that males have first priority before the girls when applying for jobs, not only that but they receive higher income than females, and their positions tend to be much higher than women.

The gender biased in employment is also caused by the fact that women are traditionally, viewed as weak, venerable, naïve, and therefore cannot do work as well as males. There is even a saying among hiring agencies and employers, that " No one wants a female except when one want a wife" though it's a bit of an exaggeration, but the main point is true: employers do not want women in their company as much as they want men. Comments on a bank's application for women says it all, for it had comments from employers such as: " appearance - a little ugly; height - 1. 56 M, too short" or " appearance - four eyes; height - 1. 63 M, Ok; weight 105kg - too fat". This helps create even more prejudice against female children, and affects the treatment they receive at home and the education opportunities they get to receive because their parents don't find it worth it. This type of biased and stereotype of thinking is evident from China's government itself; only 21% of 3000 delegates in the National's people congress are women, and less than 8% of the China's ruling Communist party is women. To add on to that no

woman has ever been selected to be part of the Politburo, the group of nine people who hold ultimate power in China. Even statistics show that women now make up more than 60% of the agricultural labor in China, while in the Chinese parliament there are less than 20% of women.

Regarding incidents where women have been repeatedly pushed down because of their gender are far too many to count, but during Professor Wendy Wang's research she had a chance to interview some people, and got to know their story. One of them was a pretty well known story. It was about a student Zhang Yuan, who was accepted to Zhongshan University, one of the top schools. As Zhang Yuan was interviewed and he stated that his younger sister, who was one grade lower than him, had outstanding academic achievement that she even managed to skip to his grade. But because his parents only wanted to invest on his education, she was sent to a poor high school. At the year of the exams for college she ended up getting the top score among the entire country! But his parents shocked many people by making her apply for "Train and Railroad College". People of the same village had the same thoughts about investing money on daughters as Zhang Yuan's parents, stating "Why should I invest in my daughter's education? ...All she needs is basic reading and writing that she can learn in elementary school. When she gets married she will be a mother and housewife, and her husband will not need a lot of opinion and knowledge from her." This is probably one of the strongest examples of how females in society are put down to such an extent that they lose even the most basic chances to shine, and are bound to chains of traditional beliefs that should have long ago been renewed.

This is a dilemma that should be taken seriously, for women play a great role not only in China, but everywhere; like Mao Zedong once said “ women hold up half the sky”. Discrimination towards girls are not only unjust to girls that deserve the same opportunities guys have, discrimination also brings down a country as a whole, for women are a big, powerful force everywhere.

Therefore, gender equality has definitely not been achieved yet in China, despite the slow and gradual improvement, for there is still heavy discrimination against women, apparent through son preference, the traditional role of women, and the difference between education and job opportunities for male and female. These are clear evidences that women in China are not seen as equal importance to men, and are still overall considered more inferior.