

**REFORM POLICIES AND THE CHANGING
NATURE OF WOMEN'S WORK IN THE
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**

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The dissertation entitled "REFORM POLICIES AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF WOMEN'S WORK IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA" by Ms. SHREEPARNA ROY has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

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CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|---------|
| INTRODUCTION | 1-11 |
| CHAPTER I REFORM POLICIES IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND THE MEANING OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT | 12-31 |
| CHAPTER II WOMEN WORKERS IN THE URBAN INDUSTRY BEFORE THE REFORM PROCESS: TRAINING, EMPLOYMENT, WAGES AND BENEFIT | 32-55 |
| CHAPTER III POST-MAO CHANGES IN THE EDUCATION AND SKILL TRAINING FOR WOMEN WORKERS | 56-75 |
| CHAPTER IV EMPLOYMENT AVENUES: DOWNGRADING POSTS AND WAGES | 76-108 |
| CONCLUSION | 109-113 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 114-132 |

INTRODUCTION

Statistically women constitute almost half, or perhaps slightly more than half, of humanity. According to international statistics women perform two-thirds of the world's accounted labour, earn less than one-tenth of the world's income, and control less than one-hundredth of the world's property.¹ Women, thus, have remained relatively powerless and, hence, poor. As American feminist Robin Morgan points out, "Women constitute not an oppressed minority, but an oppressed majority of almost all national populations and of the entire human species." The condition of Third World women is even more deplorable compared to their counterparts in other parts of the world. In the early 1980s, around 800 million people in Third World countries lived in absolute poverty; the majority of them were women. Around 500 million people suffered from hunger and malnutrition. The worst affected were women and children. Around 20 million people die every year of hunger related causes; again, the majority of them are women and children. In the developing countries,

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1. A.K. Rajula Devi, "Women in Informal Sector", Kurukshetra, 34(3), 1985, p.15; Susan Tiano, "Gender, Work and World Capitalism: Third World Women's Role in Development" in B.B. Hess and M.M.Ferree (eds.), Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research, (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1987), p.216.

women and children constitute 90 per cent of all refugee population.²

A few decades ago, gender issues were considered an intra-national problem, and international processes were assumed to affect neither the position of women nor the relative position of women and men. In the late 1970s, with detente and increasing interaction among nations, various national issues were internationalized, the gender issue being one. The declaration of International Women's Year in 1975 was a result of the internationalization of gender issues which helped to create an environment of interest in women's economic, political and social position around the world. The United Nation's Decade of Women (1975-85) also, no doubt, generated an unprecedented consciousness of gender differentiation and gender stratification throughout the world and served to internationalize gender issues as a separate branch of study.

As a result, the emphasis on studies of women in society has changed since the 1980s. The focus has shifted from studying women's position in the family toward examining

Hema Goonatilake, Keynote Speech at "Aashi International Symposium, Oct. 23-25, 1985", Women in Changing World, (Tokyo, 1985).

women's activities outside the domestic setting and investigating their position in the broader social and economic sphere.

In the 1970s, a new international division of labour emerged due to increasing industrialization in the Third World, and the relocation of industries from developed countries to developing countries. This resulted in a dramatic increase in female labour participation in the Third World. Consequently, studies of women's issues shifted focus to economic behaviour, specially related to work roles.³

Research on the relationships between industrialization and female labour force participation in general has shown that female labour participation increases with industrialization.⁴ Research indicates that economic growth has changed the social, cultural and political atmosphere in the Third World. Broadening educational opportunities for women and greater employment opportunities with the rise of the service sector, have generated greater demand for female labour. But some scholars claim that modernization has actually narrowed women's options by either removing them

3. S.P. Joekes, Women in the World Economy, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), p.3.

4. P. Sparr (ed), Mortgaging Women's Lives: Feminist Critiques of Structural Adjustment, (London: Zed Books, 1994), p.21.

from production or by overburdening them with dual responsibilities as both paid workers and domestic labour.⁵

The objective of this study is to examine these concerns in the context of China's economic reforms since 1978 and the ensuing structural changes in the economy, particularly the relationship between post-Mao urban industrial reform and the role of women in these reforms. Literature on women in China prior to 1978 deals mainly with issues like the Chinese Communist Party's impact on the women's movement, family and kinship structures and women's place in them, rural Chinese women and government policy, and socialism and its implications for women.⁶ There is a small corpus of literature on the post-Mao period, which does deal with female labour force participation. However, the focus is mainly on the female rural labour force. There are only four or five major studies on female labour force participation in

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5. S.P. Joekes, Women in the World Economy, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. press, 1987); P. Sparr (ed), Mortgaging Women's Lives, (London, Zed Books, 1994); K. Ward (ed), Women Workers and Global Restructuring, (New York, ILR Press, 1990).
 6. Bobby Siu, Women in China: Imperialism and Women's Resistance, 1900-1949, (London; Zed Books, 1982); Kay Ann Johnson, Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China, (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983); V. Hemel and P. Sindbjerg, Women in Rural China: Policy towards Women before and after the Cultural Revolution, (London: Curzon Press, 1984); E. Croll, Feminism and Socialism in China, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

urban China.⁷ Elisabeth Croll, for example, has examined the main political and socio-economic policies of post-Mao leadership and their implications for women. She argues that in the pre-1978 period, the policies concerning women were conceived as a part of broader socio-economic strategies. The post-Mao leadership adopted some gender specific policies, but these policies are marked by an acceptance of an approach whereby gender differentiation is actually legitimised, rather than by an emphasis on the economic empowerment of women.

Margery Wolf, in discussing Chinese Women's position, argues that one of the main reasons for inequality in the urban sector is that there is a steady increase in income with age for men but women are placed in jobs where they benefit less from seniority. She is of the view that while there is equal pay for equal work, the problem lies in the type of jobs/work women perform.

Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter argue that reform impacts negatively rather than positively on urban working women. Reform policies have created an environment where women initially find it difficult to find jobs and

7. E. Croll, Chinese Women Since Mao, (London: Zed Books, 1983); M. Wolf, Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China, (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1985); E. Honig and G. Hershatter, Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s, (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1988).

subsequently find it even more difficult to keep their jobs. Every year a large number of students graduate from middle and senior middle schools and work units get a chance to select workers. Their preference is for male workers. Once in the workforce, women fear lay offs by enterprises on various grounds like profit imperatives and efficiency of the enterprises. Even after retirement, inequality persists with lower pensions for women compared to those for men.

All the authors also look at other social spheres like housework, fertility, family planning, violence against women, women's sexuality, health and welfare, and education. These studies focus on gender inequality in various aspects of life in general.

A few articles also deal with this issue, particularly with women's labour force participation. Here, too, there are more studies on rural women in the work force. However, J.C. Robinson, Richard Barret et. al., Marlyn Dalsimar and Lousie Nisonoff, and Ching Kwan Lee's work examine various aspects of urban female labour.⁸

8. J.C. Robinson, "Of Women and Washing Machine", The China Quarterly, No.10, 1985; Richard E. barrett, et.al., "Female Labour Force Participation in Urban and Rural China", Rural Sociology, 56(1), 1991; M. Dalsimer and L. Nisonoff, "The New Economic Readjustment Policies: Implications for Chinese Urban Working Women", Review of Radical Political Economics, 16(1), 1984; Ching Kwan Lee, "Engendering the Worlds of Labour", American Sociological Review, 60(3), 1995.

Robinson, like Croll, Honig and Hershatter, argues that post-Mao political and economic decisions have created conditions which impose sex differential roles on women in production and reproduction, and result in deepening social inequalities, increasing violence and discord within society. The author argues that a socialist state cannot support 'reproduction of motherhood' and 'women's full participation in the labour force' at the same time.⁹ The reason, according to the author is, that society expects both the role of mother and worker from women at the same time, and thus creates a contradiction, as women's participation in economic production is viewed as necessary for their liberation.

Richard E. Barrett, William P Bridges, Moshe Semyonov, and Xiaoyuan Gao examine the determinants of female labour force participation in both urban and rural China and argue that participation in the rural sector depends on socio-demographic factors, whereas market factors determine urban labour force participation in the urban sector. The educational levels also play a significant role in the urban sector but fertility has no effect on female labour force participation. Family structure, however, has a strong influence on female employment.¹⁰

9. J.C. Robinson, "Of Women and Washing Machines", p.34.

10. R.E. Barrett et.al. "Female Labour Force Participation in Urban and Rural China", pp.13-14.

Marlyn Dalsimer and Lourie Nisonoff examine the impact of reform policies on urban working women. They argue that gender inequality persists both in the workplace and in daily life, be it management opportunities, wages, material incentives, proper treatment from employers or equitable distribution of housework. This contradicts the All China Women's Federation's view that reform policies are positive and will benefit China's female workforce.¹¹

Ching Kwan Lee examines the diverse modes of control over women workers in the wake of worldwide economic restructuring in the Asian context, taking Shenzhen and Hongkong as case studies. The author finds that the state has less authority to determine worker's conditions of independence than the local communal institutions like localistic networks, kin and family. The author provides two examples of the diverse ways in which women's roles are constructed in the workplace. The first refers to 'maiden workers', that is, young single women with low job aspirations and low motivation to learn skills; the second category is 'matron workers' who consider work and pay as secondary to family responsibilities. Controls over women workers are shaped either by logistic despotism, i.e., making women workers docile through strict discipline, as is the

11. M. Dalsimer and L. Nisonoff, "The New Economic Readjustment Policies", pp.33-35.

case in Shenzhen, or by familial hegemony, i.e., through familial shopfloor discourses of familialism, as in Hongkong.¹²

This brief review of literature on female labour force participation in urban China reveals wide ranging perspectives on the status of urban working women in China. However, careful and specific studies on this topic are few and far between.

Since the late 1970s, China has undertaken major policy and institutional changes designed to deal with economic under-development and stimulate growth. As part of the policy of opening up and the attendant search for international finance for development and the implementation of reform policies, the PRC has had to accept conditions while accepting international loans. As well, it has had to restructure its economic institutions as well as its industries to meet the demands of profitability and efficiency in a rapidly growing "socialist market economy". The focus on profitability and efficiency has shifted the focus in the Chinese economy from the ideal of full employment and interests of labour to regarding labour as a commodity. As such, labour has become

12. Ching Kwan Lee, "Engendering the Worlds of Labour", pp.394-397.

the most obvious target for the new concern with profitability and efficiency both in relation to concerns with skill training, discipline and productivity, as well as with redundancy. This leaves labour in a very vulnerable position generally. The policy of structural adjustment has significant implications for the most vulnerable labour group in its economy - women. Women take active part in production and they also consume products and services. They are also the ones most restricted by social and institutional biases. They can thus be expected to be affected by structural adjustment programmes in a variety of ways.

A major premise of this study is that major structural adjustments in sectors where women are predominantly employed, have presented female labour with overwhelming challenges in the areas of skill training and education, employment, and benefits at work. While these challenges arise out of the reform process, they are also linked to existing structures and attitudes governing women's employment in the urban sector. As such, they have roots in existing policies of gender stratification at work, the structure of the family and the pressure created by state policy governing employment, education and reproduction.

This study is an effort to outline the issues around which an understanding of the changing nature of women's work in urban China can be constructed. At the outset it seeks to outline the features and nature of structural adjustment, and the effect of and implications for Chinese women of structural adjustment policies in China.

The second chapter discussus women's position in terms of skill training, education, employment, wages and benefits in the Maoist period.

The third chapter discusses women's education and skill training and its implications on employment in post-Mao China.

The last chapter deals with changing nature of women's employment, wages and benefit in post-Mao China.

CHAPTER-I
REFORM POLICIES IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
AND THE MEANING OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

From 1949, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was proclaimed, until 1977 the "Sovereign Socialist State" China viewed the world as divided into two camps, that of capitalists or exploiters and socialists or exploited. It pursued a largely autarkic economic policy and stayed away from most international economic organizations. But, two years after the death of Chairman Mao Zedong, in a decisive break from the earlier model, the world's largest Marxist state undertook a policy of reform and opened up to the rest of the world. The new policy has flourished despite political debate and sporadic opposition, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, who raised the slogans, "Practice is the Sole Criterion of Truth", and "Seek Truth from Facts", announcing a new flexibility and pragmatism in state policy.

The new leadership initiated the opening up to the outside world after 1978 in order to have greater and more competitive access to modern technology and capital from diverse sources. The broad policy of opening up spawned an array of policies which China planned to finance with foreign aid, preferential loans, foreign investment, and rapidly increased exports. Accordingly, the PRC assumed its seat in

the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Development Association in 1980. China became a party to GATT's Multifibre Arrangement (MFA) in 1984. In July 1986, China gave final notice of its desire to participate fully in the GATT. China also recognized that to accumulate foreign exchange, the national economy must adjust to international market pressures, and as a result, initiated financial and structural reforms and formulated a series of new economic policies.

One of the most remarkable features of the post Second World War period has been the expansion and the expanding influence of international markets. Various international organizations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund were set up as a result of an attempt by major western powers to draw up a scheme to reconstruct the war-torn economies and to present a framework for international monetary cooperation. Over the years, the functioning of these organizations and their active intervention in the world economy has increased the pressure for integration and economic interdependence among nations, thus becoming a significant factor in creating a new world economy.¹

By the end of the 1970s, the world economy was facing a widespread inflation, a deceleration of economic growth in

1. Susan P. Joekes, Women in the World Economy: An INSTRAW Study, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), pp.117-118.

reaction to the preceding high rate of expansion and a massive disequilibrium in international payments. The acceleration of inflation was compounded by the upsurge of most primary commodity prices in the wake of the widespread economic boom and by the steep escalation in the price of oil. Unprecedented and unusual changes occurred in the current account balances of individual countries and in the whole structure of balance of payments relationships between oil importing and oil exporting countries. These changes, together with associated shifts in capital flows, taxed the capacity and the adaptability of the financial institutions and arrangements available for the necessary channelling of funds from countries with current accounts surpluses to those with current accounts deficits.

The developing countries were the worst affected by this development. Macro economic problems, such as large balance of payment deficits, high inflation rates and low growth rates in Third World countries had weakened their economies. Higher oil prices, increases in the real rate of interest on international commercial loans and the pressure to export primary products at lower prices created serious shortages of foreign exchange. The urgent need was for a greater financial inflow to the numerous developing countries in order to avoid the collapse of the financial system. Many developing countries have had no other choice but to seek loans from the IMF and the WB to tide over balance of

payments deficits and to cater to the needs of capital intensive projects. It is against this background that the notion of "structural adjustments" and economic stabilisation gained importance. As a condition of assistance from the IMF and the WB, developing countries have to undertake programmes aimed at structural changes in existing industrial and trade sectors. These are to be implemented under the direct supervision of the IMF and the WB. WB economists believe that these programmes will reduce inflation and increase the rate of growth and productivity while raising efficiency.²

Structural adjustment, in its broadest sense, is a generic term to describe a "conscious change in the fundamental nature of economic relationships within a society"³ But the term has a more specific meaning in the present context. It refers to the policy package on the basis of which the majority of the developing countries are trying to strengthen their economies. This package is first and foremost a free market solution to the economic crisis of the developing countries.

The objectives of structural adjustment policies are to stabilize the economy, to improve the allocation of resources

2. Pamela Sparr, "What is structural adjustment?" in P. Sparr (ed.), Mortgaging Women's Lives : Feminist Critiques of Structural Adjustment, (London: Zed Books, 1994), p.7.

3. Ibid., p.1.

and to achieve higher levels of savings and a more efficient use of capital in order to raise the rate of production. The policy measures include liberalization of imports, removing price controls, promoting export oriented industrialization, deregulating industrial production, reducing taxes, and toning down budgetary support to the public sector. This, in other words, means marketisation, privatisation, liberalisation and globalisation. The idea is to free the market from state intervention so as to allow market signals to determine the allocation and use of resources and provide incentives for the absorption of cost reducing technologies which would enhance productivity and efficiency, and thus would step up the growth rate and generate resources.

The structural adjustment strategy is often introduced during economic crises, consequently measures to improve relative prices are accompanied by measures to control the rate of increase in the general level of prices, and monetary and fiscal policies and financial reforms are emphasized. As a result, adjustment policies are not only concerned with short-run readjustment and reconstruction of the national economy, in terms of the restoration of macro-economic balance, they are also concerned with micro-economic issues which can enhance long-term growth.

In the developing countries, a major element of this strategy is to allow the urban-based private business sector greater freedom, with this sector becoming responsible for generating backward and forward linkages with the rest of the economy.⁴ The state only provides a stable economic environment by using stabilisation policy in which the private sector can flourish. A relative and separate element of this strategy is to minimize government involvement in the economy by denationalizing state owned enterprises. Legislation to reduce trade union power is also a part of this strategy.⁵

While WB economists believe that these programmes reduce inflation, increase the rate of growth, productivity and efficiency, critics view this as a measure to mould the economies of the developing countries to suit and serve the interests and to resuscitate the recession-hit economies of the West. They argue that the West is using the IMF and the WB and their structural adjustment policies in their own interest. Further, the structural adjustment programme is a response to the fact that the Western monopoly in technology and innovation was being undermined by the developing countries through widespread violations of Western patent

4. K. Haq and U. Kirdar (eds.), Human Development, Adjustment and Growth, (Islamabad: North South Roundtable, 1987), p.4.

5. Ibid.

rights and by state protection of Third World domestic markets. In the name of integration with the world economy, the West is trying to open the vast and untapped markets of the Third World for its own economic interest. That is why the structural adjustment policies are not negotiated, but are part of the loan-package.⁶

As part of this package, there are generally two types of lending: stabilization lending and structural adjustment lending. The IMF extends stabilization loans to countries which are in immediate need of foreign currency to pay for needed imports or to make foreign debt payments. These loans generally run for a short period and are intended to control inflation quickly, creating a favorable balance of payments position and overcoming budget deficits. This reduces domestic demand to an affordable level. The policies implemented involve devaluation of currency, slashing budget deficits, abolishing subsidies and removing price controls.

After an economy is stabilized, long term reshaping of the economy is financed through structural adjustment loans. These loans are meant to promote long run growth and economic efficiency. A developing nation can obtain these loans from the IMF, but other countries have to avail it from the WB. Unlike the IMF loan conditions, nations seeking WB loan must

6. J.P.Singh, "Lending policies of Fund-Bank", Mainstream, 33 (13), 1995, pp.19-21.

agree to a set of conditions aimed at policy changes in the domestic economy. An acceptance of WB condition is seen to demonstrate the recipient's commitment to make the structural changes necessary to achieve WB objectives. Sectoral adjustment loans are a new feature which focus on assistance to changes in any particular sector.

At present, more than two-thirds of the developing countries have adopted structural adjustment policy packages. Consequently, a profound political shift in development strategies has occurred in the developing world. These nations have moved away from the more nationalistic, inward-oriented, state interventionist and socialist models towards laissez-faire capitalism.⁷

China's current economic reform follows the same direction. The historic Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Committee of the Communist Party of China held in 1978, decided to shift the focus of development to modernize agriculture, industry, defence, and science and technology. At a Work Conference in April 1979, the CPC formulated the policy of "readjusting", "reconstruction", "consolidation" and "improving" the economy. *Readjusting* referred to the necessary changes in priorities for the allocation of

7. Pamela Sparr, (1994), "What is Structural Adjustment?" in Mortgaging Women's Lives, p.2; Haq and Kirdar, (1987), Human Development, Adjustment and Growth, p.4.

investment and inputs aimed at correcting imbalances in the economy. *Restructuring* dealt with the reform in the economic system and was aimed at achieving greater efficiency. It involved giving greater decision making powers to local units of production and increasing the role of the market. *Consolidation* referred to the weeding out or amalgamation of those enterprises that were not only suffering losses, but were wasting real resources. *Improving* focussed on attempts to elevate the level of technology and manage real skills and practices in China's economy. The Work Conference also stressed the need to promote economic and technological cooperation with other countries. The new policy provided the framework for post-Mao reforms and China's opening up to the outside world.⁸

The new economic policy includes the following measures:

- (i) decentralising decision-making power to the production units, whether enterprise in the urban state sector or household rural sector;
- (ii) enhancing material incentives to stimulate economic efficiency and productivity;

8. N.T. Wang (1984) China's Modernization and Corporations, Lexington, Lexington Books, pp.18-20.

- (iii) replacing administrative planning methods with economic levers, i.e., credit control, interest rates, taxes and prices;
- (iv) ending egalitarianism and substituting it by an improved system of individual motivation and reward;
- (v) allowing the market mechanism to play a role in resource mobilization and allocation;
- (vi) changing the ownership system; and
- (vii) stimulating foreign investment and improving foreign trade.

China's reform first took place in the countryside. In the early eighties, the people's communes, which integrated government administrative and economic management, were abolished, and the household contract responsibility system, with remuneration linked to output, was introduced. China almost entirely did away with the unified purchase of farm products by the state according to fixed quotas and lifted price controls over most products.

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In the early eighties, China declared as well, that the major issues in future economic work would be structural reform of the economic management system, and opening to the outside world. The main task would be to reform the system of state controls in the economy through state planning so as to exercise better control over major issues while being flexible on minor ones. This was the formula for reform of

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the urban economic structure.⁹ Before formulating concrete policies for the industrial sector, China created suitable conditions for the implementation of new policies. For example, a tax system in state owned enterprises was introduced in two phases. In the first phase, in June 1983, China replaced the profit appropriation system with a tax system. Industries paid both taxes and a portion of their profit to the State. In the second phase, in October 1984, it was totally replaced by tax payments, but the amount was larger.¹⁰

However, in 1984, with the aim of making the urban sector more efficient, China formulated a series of policies. The main features of the reform policies were :

- (i) state owned industries could produce for the open market after the target assigned by the plan was achieved. Thus industries could market their surplus product;
- (ii) as incentive, enterprises were permitted to retain a share of their profit;
- (iii) in addition, funds at the disposal of the enterprise were further supplemented by increasing the share of

9. State Councillor and Minister in charge of the State Planning Commission, Song Ping in a report on the 1984 Economic Plan at the second session of the Sixth NPC. Beijing Review, 27(20), May 28, 1984, p.20.

10. "Second Step in Economic Reform", Beijing Review, 27(29), July 16, 1984, p.9.

depreciation funds retained by the enterprise from 40 to 60 per cent;

(iv) enterprises could retain profits earned for the first two years for expansion or renovation of its production facilities;

(v) enterprises could export their surplus production, retain a share of foreign exchange earnings to import new technology and other inputs;

(vi) as an incentive to workers, enterprises could distribute bonus out of their retained profit; and,

(vii) significantly, enterprises could directly recruit and hire and fire workers, enforce labour discipline on all workers including party secretaries and factory directors.

In addition to reform in state owned enterprises, private business and collective enterprises were also encouraged by the government.

Chinese foreign economic policy consists of three major issues: foreign trade, foreign investment, and establishment of special Economic Zones(SEZs). In 1980, China adopted flexible economic policies in the SEZs to attract foreign investors. Later, fourteen coastal cities were opened with similar advantages to those practised in the SEZs to attract foreign capital through joint ventures and direct foreign investments.

To keep pace with the reform, the need was felt to reform the system of wages, labour, prices, taxes, taxes and circulation system.¹¹ All these form a significant part of the economic restructuring programme.

In the fall of 1988, reacting to rising unemployment and inflation, signs of social and political dissent, the Chinese government initiated a readjustment programme. Besides other measures it reiterated further refinement of reform measures so as to establish an overall management system in harmony with a mixed planned and market economy.

In the 8th Five Year Plan (1991-95) period, China's reforms took a new turn. The 14th National Congress of the CPC confirmed the development of the "socialist market economy"(SME), a highly significant action in the history of a socialist state. This marked an epoch making change in China's planned economy.

Under the SME system, China has removed price controls over most consumer goods, and some unbudgeted capital goods such as crude oil, refined oil, steel products and pig iron. Other related reforms are also under way. These include

11. "Report on the Work of the Government", Beijing Review, 27(24), June 11, 1984, pp.I-XVI.

reform of banking, planning, commodity distribution, finance, housing, social insurance and medicare systems. Shanghai is the pilot city to experiment with the stock system. China instituted shareholding system as an effective way of raising funds for economic development and ensuring supervision of the management of enterprises. In the field of financial restructuring, China has introduced a dual budget system for the state. Foreign banks were allowed to establish branches in seven more coastal open cities, beginning from June 1992, in addition to the SEZs and Shanghai, for the purpose of foreign currency loans, foreign trade settlement of accounts, stock and securities issuance and investment. China lowered tariffs in a bid to increase foreign trade. The import duty rate was lowered by more than eight per cent in 1993. In the industrial sector, China put forward several measures to revitalize large and medium sized state-owned enterprises. Among other powers enterprises were granted specific powers in relation to :

- (i) production and management decision making;
- (ii) deciding price levels;
- (iii) taking investment decisions;
- (iv) handling their import-export business;
- (v) hiring labour;
- (vi) fixing wages and bonus;

- (vii) shifting production;
- (viii) and disbanding enterprises.¹²

It is clear from the above discussion on structural adjustment that China, like other developing countries, has adopted the structural adjustment policies in accordance with the conditions set by the IMF and the WB. It is beyond the scope of this study to debate whether China's adoption of reform was not undertaken on IMF-WB pressure since China joined these organizations after it started its reform policy in 1978. Yet it is significant that the major structural adjustment package adopted in China's urban sector reform in 1984 came only after it had joined the international organizations, which stress mainly urban sector reform.¹³

While the urban working class is affected by structural adjustment, women as the most vulnerable section of that class increasingly bear the burnt of the new arguments for efficiency and profitability. If labour, as the Chinese state seems increasingly to be arguing, is merely a commodity in the market-place then factors like the conditions of work and the nature of work are no longer legitimate arguments in

12. Ricky Tung, "Transforming the management of mainland China's state owned enterprises", Issues and Studies, 29(12), 1993, pp.5-7.

13. Haq and Kirdar (eds.), Human Development, Adjustment and Growth, (Islamabad: North South Roundtable, 1987), p.4.

favour of labour, its wages and the benefits that it can demand. Less so are they for female labour, traditionally and currently on the lowest rung of the employment and wages ladder. As a commodity to be exploited in the market-place, female labour, though increasingly visible in the market, seems to be even less in a position to expect or demand a relative increase in status. This is especially so when employment and wage status is linked directly to skills, education levels, the feminine responsibilities of home-making, and child rearing, and with social bias inherent in employers' attitudes and paternalistic state legislation. The concern with the market, and the concern over the market have given rise to two schools of thought regarding the impact of structural adjustment policies on women.

The first emerges from studies by national and international institutions and some non-governmental organizations, and argues that there is nothing inherently wrong with the free market economic model. The system works better with women's active participation. For this reason, women have to be put on an equal footing with men legally, educationally, economically, socially and politically. Women are seen as a resource, which can be exploited effectively.¹⁴

14. Pamela Sparr, "Banking on women: where do we go from here?" in P. Sparr (ed.), Mortgaging Women's Lives, (London: Zed Books, 1994), pp.183-184.

Since the Nairobi Conference in 1985, another stream has emerged which believes that structural adjustments not only oppress women, but also depend on female labour in order to function. As Pamela Sparr notes :

The problem with structural adjustment policies is not that they assume women are outside to development and need to be brought in... but that they "are actually grounded in a gender ideology which is deeply, and fundamentally exploitative of women's time/work and sexuality."¹⁵

There is no doubt that the changes triggered by the implementation of structural adjustment policies have influenced the direction of industrial development, and concomitantly the economic participation, and status of women.

First of all, as countries adopt these policies, they pursue a strategy of reducing their social and economic commitments to the middle and working classes, including women. Since state run development projects enhanced political, social and economic rights of women, women are hurt by the abandonment of welfare projects.

15. Peggy Antrobus, as quoted in Pamela Sparr , Mortgaging Women's Lives, (1994), p.183.

An immediate and negative impact of structural adjustment policies for women is the collapse of many small and home-based industries, in some of which women have been engaged traditionally, such as handlooms. The withdrawal of government protections to these industries in terms of access to raw materials, marketing assistance etc. exposes them to competition in the open market. In terms of quality and cost, these goods are unable to compete with cheap imports and with the output of large scale enterprises. Small industries also find it difficult to meet the rising costs of production as prices of raw materials increase with price decontrols. On the other hand, traditional industries where skilled male labour is employed, such as carpentry, brassware, etc. are less affected, since they did not face competition from imports.

Another aspect of structural adjustment policies is the move toward a more flexible structure of labour market, i.e., moving towards the informalization and decentralization of employment. Firms prefer to employ flexible labour that can be laid off if necessary, after a specific job is completed. This has increased the use of part-time, temporary and contract labour in industry affecting job security and labour morale. These techniques also reduce employment and the employee's income security. Cheap labour reduces wage cost.

It also reduces non-wage costs or employment benefits costs for an enterprise since this labour is non-permanent. In many countries, these changes in labour practices were accompanied by the feminization of employment in some sectors. There was a substantial increase in the use of cheap, unskilled and seasonal female labour. These changes in both employment conditions and the gender composition of employment have been referred to as feminization through flexible labour.¹⁶

Promotion of export-oriented industrialization, which has become largely dependent on the use of low-cost labour to reduce production costs, has created another sector where female labour is increasing. Units of export oriented industries prefer employing women as blue collar workers. It is argued that women have particular advantages as workers in manufacturing in export-oriented industries since these sectors generate employment for women.¹⁷ Experts, however, see the basic rationale is in the low cost of female labour. Since women perceive their income as supplementary to family income, they are less likely to demand higher wages.¹⁸ In most countries women workers have been major contributors to

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16. Guy Standing, "Global feminization through flexible labour". World Development, Vol.17, No.7, 1989.
 17. Susan P. Joeekes, Women in the World Economy: An INSTRAW Study, (Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), pp.80-83.
 18. "Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific, 1991", New York, United Nations, 1992.

the manufacturing exports, and generation of foreign exchange revenues. Since industries in this sector are labour intensive that demand semi-skilled labour with very little on-the-job training, they are more likely to employ cheap and semi-skilled female labour.

The impact of structural adjustments as part of the new reform package in the PRC is undeniable. Government legislation, the incentives to joint investment companies, foreign direct investment and the drive towards exports competitiveness in the world market, all reveal the commitment to the programme. What remains to be seen, however, is the extent to which the Dengist reforms actually affect the real interests of women in the workplace and whether women workers can retrieve for themselves a space in which to manoeuvre a better deal.

CHAPTER-II

WOMEN WORKERS IN THE URBAN INDUSTRY BEFORE THE REFORM PROCESS: TRAINING, EMPLOYMENT, WAGES AND BENEFIT

In traditional Confucian society, women's personality was burried under three bonds of obedience : to fathers when young, hushands when married and adult sons when widowed. Though in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Chinese criticized this tradition and a consciousness of the blatant abuse of women emerged among the intelligentsia, it was finally the Communist Party, and the Communist government which effectively initiated the liberation of Chinese women.

In 1949, when China embraced Marxim as a guiding principle, a sea change occurred in women's position. Marxism looks forward to sexual equality and the full participation of women in public affairs. The status of inequality, according to Engels, started with the emergence of private property. In "The Origin", Engels argues that in primitive society men and women belonged to a large group and since productive resource or property was owned by the whole group, there was no concept of family and the relations between men and women were based on mutual dependence. The shift in ownership relations from the community to the individual marked the beginning of private property and emergence of family as an economic unit. Here, women became dependent on men, and thus the seed of women's exploitation was sown. In

both "German Ideology" and "Capital", Marx observed that the compulsion of monogamy gave rise to the concept of family as a unit of economy and since the husband is empowered to dispose of his wife's labour power, it produces something like a class relationship within the family, and allows a materialist account of women's oppression in it. Thus, the Marxists identify women's oppression with (i) capitalist mode of production, i.e., by capitalist exploitation and (ii) domestic mode of production, i.e., by patriarchal exploitation.¹

The socialist solution to women's oppression has mainly stressed abolition of family and socialization of household work to release women for work outside the domestic sphere. Abolition of private property was thought to have made more egalitarian relations possible within the family. The equality of women outside the family was sought to be promoted by providing legal equality, opportunities for education and training and encouraging women to join the workforce. Thus, the entry into the wage labour market was seen to be the only way through which women could emancipate themselves in the working class struggle against capital, as members of the working class. The working class struggle would result in the abolition of private property, the basis

1. Suguna Paul, "The Economics of Women's Oppression" in S. Kaushik (ed.), Women's Oppression: Patterns and Perspective, (Delhi: Shakti Books, 1985), p.32.

of women's oppression. With the common ownership of the means of production, the single family would cease to be the economic unit, and all functions of household management would now become a public industry.

Mao Zedong's personal view also converged with the Communist theory. As early as 1927, he urged an end of the feudal patriarchal domination of women. He encouraged women to participate actively in agricultural work, industrial production and political activities. Therefore, the Maoist programme for women's liberation in China has not been separate from the socialist transformation of society that started with the Communist takeover of China in 1949, but an integral part of the continuing revolution.

After the revolution, the new Government adopted a number of measures and programmes to redefine women's position both within and outside the family. In 1949, the Common Programme enjoined that "women shall enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic, cultural, education and social life."(article 6). This right was later incorporated in China's Constitution (article 96). The Marriage Law promulgated in May 1950, and the Agrarian Law of 1950 outlawed the extreme forms of abuse and legally women gained equal rights. Special efforts were made to implement many of these legal provisions through all forms of mass media. Propaganda teams were organized to acquaint women with

their new rights. The All China Democratic Women's Federation was formed with the same purpose. In towns, local residents' committees or street associations played a role in providing opportunities for women to involve themselves in the socio-political world outside their homes. Thus, some fundamental changes in the position of women were achieved all over China in the early years of Mao's era.

But, beginning with the first Five Year Plan, economic reconstruction took precedence over political struggle. Consequently women's liberation movement dissolved into broader socio-economic strategies, as economic development was seen as the best way to liberate women. In other words, women should gain equality with economic development.

Between 1949 and 1978, the economic development was quite impressive. National income rose a little more than eight times, from 35,800 million yuan to 3,01,000 million yuan. The combined value of agriculture and industrial output increased a little more than twelve times, from 46.6 billion yuan to 563.4 billion in 1978. The growth of agricultural production, however, was much less than that in industry. The agricultural output value increased five times, from 32.6 billion yuan to 156.7 billion yuan, as against industrial output which increased twenty nine times from 14.0 billion yuan to 406.7 billion yuan. Within the industrial sector, the growth of heavy industry was much faster than that of light

industry. The value of heavy industry output increased from 3.7 billion yuan to 231.4 billion yuan, a growth of 63 times. For light industry, the growth was by 17 times, from 10.3 billion yuan to 175.3 billion yuan.²

The economic development shows that China attached great importance to the industrial sector. In fact this policy was declared as early as in 1953 in the People's Daily: "What is the foundation of developing production? Simply, the expansion of industry and agriculture; and of the two, industry comes first, in particular heavy industry. Only if there is development in heavy industry... can China be guaranteed complete economic independence and security of national defence... and only in this way will the livelihood of the people continually improve."³

A brief discussion on the structure of industry seems necessary to analyse women's place and development as far as the industrial sector is concerned. The Chinese economic structure in the Maoist era was essentially a combination of three elements: the Soviet model (the centralized planned economic system), the Stalinist development strategy (the 'big push') and the Maoist ideology (the radical principles).

2. Kalipada Deb, The Chinese Economy: Changes & Challenges in the Post-Mao Era, (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1993), pp.12-14.

3. People's Daily, December 16, 1953.

In the industrial sector, the Soviet model enforced the nationalization of means of production. Under this system, central planners control the mobilization and allocation of resources. The Stalinist strategy implies heavy emphasis on a high rate of investment and speedy growth in heavy industrial production, especially the basic metals (iron and steel etc.) and machine building industries. The Maoist ideology can be summarised in a few points:

- (i) self sufficiency in all levels, (regional and national) and limited dependence on foreign trade and aid;
- (ii) elimination or reduction of private income earning opportunities outside the socialist sector;
- (iii) mass participation in decision making;
- (iv) promoting egalitarianism and normative incentives by reducing direct relation between income of individuals, small groups/units and the quantity or quality of job they accomplished;
- (v) reduced emphasis on economic rationality in terms of economic cost and benefit calculation.

China launched its first Five Year Plan (1953-57) in accordance with these policies. Under the plan, 46.5 per cent of state appropriations went to heavy industry and capital construction, whereas light industry received 5.9

per cent of capital investment.⁴ The course of events since 1957 is less clear due to constant political and ideological shifts from one policy to the other.

If we break up the Maoist period on the basis of economic achievement, as can see that the first phase, from 1949 to 1952 was a phase of recovery and rehabilitation. The second phase 1952-59 was the fastest growth period. This includes the first Five Year Plan and the Great Leap Foward. The industrial output was highest, an average of 20.52 per cent per annum.⁵ The third phase (1959-61) was the period of great depression in which institutional reform was carried out in a complete reversal of the Great Leap polities. The fourth phase (1961-70) was marked by economic readjustment and the launching of the Cultural Revolution. Due to readjustment policies, the Chinese economy was brought back on track but politically, the situation remained difficult. The internal political struggle land groupism in the Communist Party led to the disastrous Cultural Revolution. The last phase (1970-77) was a period of struggle to recover from the economic problems and domestic political strife. The Chinese economy broke out of the international isolation of the past ten years.

4. Rosaline L. Tung, Chinese Industrial Society After Mao, (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1982), p.59.

5. Christopher Howe, China's Economy: A Basic Guide, (London : Elek Books Ltd.,1978), p.xxiii.

Thus, the whole Maoist period witnessed a cyclical pattern of economic stability and crisis and, political and ideological shift from orthodoxy to flexibility and vice-versa. The degree of women's development and women's status, in terms of their education and employment naturally varied from time to time depending on the major economic, political or ideological shifts.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION :

In 1949, when the Communist Party of China came to power, the population was approximately 500 million, of which 70-80 per cent was illiterate. Only one out of every four school age children, or 17 million attended primary school. Less than 10 per cent of those who finished primary education went on to secondary school (a little over 1 million). There were only 180 institutes of higher learning and a mere 80,000 students were enrolled in these institutions.⁶ Official sources, however, put the number of institutions of higher learning at 205 with 1,116,000 students.⁷ With a total of 600 university graduates, women were only a handful in this small number who got a chance to educate themselves.⁸ Women were

6. Suzanne Pepper, "Education and Revolution: the 'Chinese model' revised", Asian Survey 18(9), 1978, pp.847-48.

7. Beijing Review 34(48), Dec. 2, 1991, p.26.

8. Ibid.

also the historically disadvantageous group educationally, and hardly had anykind of skill training. When the first Five Year Plan commenced in 1953, women, with almost no education, were not fit for the jobs, that were created since these jobs in heavy industry demanded specific skills. Moreover, the stress on heavy industry resulted into a need for experts and for highly educated personnel. The government encouraged science and engineering courses and at the same time discouraged enrollment in social science and humanity, where women generally tended to enrol. This education policy naturally gave little chance to women to acquire an education. This was compounded by the fact that at the lower levels of the job structure, the training necessary for a technical job required at least a middle school education, which Chinese women did not have. It was only during the Great Leap Foward (GLF) in 1958 that Mao Zedong encouraged a new education policy of combining education with productive labour. This meant that factories were to run schools and schools were to run factories. The policy was named the "proletarian education line" and was a part-time study and part-time work course which would benefit workers interested in upward job mobility.⁹ These work-study progrmmes and

9. Chinese Sociology and Anthropology Vol.2, Nos.1-2, Fall/
Winter, 1969-70, pp.42-43.

in-plant technical courses for upgrading skills benefited women, specially women in the textile industry.¹⁰ The expansion of primary education was also emphasized. However, after the disastrous end of the GLF, the work-study programmes decreased significantly in the early 1960s. The entire decade after liberation saw little progress in women's education and skill training. This is evident from the percentges for women of the total number of students enrolled.¹¹..ls1

| Year | Institutes of higher learning | Technical middle schools | Middle schools | Primary schools |
|------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1949 | 17.8 | 21.1 | 20.0 | 25.5 |
| 1952 | 19.8 | 24.9 | 23.5 | 32.9 |
| 1957 | 23.9 | 26.5 | 30.8 | 34.5 |
| 1958 | 23.3 | 27.0 | 31.3 | 38.5 |

In the first half of the 1960s, vocational training was emphasized. Achieving universal primary education and expanding secondary enrollments remained the goals throughout the decade. But the successive political and ideological conflicts between Maoists and Liuists prevented the desired result. During the Socialist Education Movement, Mao again

 10. Phyllis Andors, The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women, p.42.

11. Ibid., p.43.

emphasized the work-study programmes. Toward the end of 1965, a National Conference on Part-Work Part-Study Education in cities promoted the work study programme as the means to channel the largest possible number of primary school graduates who could not enter junior-middle schools, but could be mobilized to find employment and at the same time continue their education ¹². There were regular full-day schools also along with these part work part study schools.

During the Cultural Revolution, this two track education system was abolished and common high schools were developed all over China. Before the Cultural Revolution, career oriented students sought admission to various full time schools, keypoint schools and vocational schools. The majority of them, however, were male students. There were a few girls' schools as well. But all schools closed in 1966. Primary and secondary education however, resumed after three years, but institutions of higher learning did not re-open on a regular basis until 1970-72.¹³ The middle school graduates who had been absorbed by part work part study programmes were sent to the countryside to solve the crisis of urban unemployment.

12. Suzanne Pepper, "Education and Revolution: the 'Chinese Model' Revised", Asian Survey, 18(9), 1978, p.851.

13. Suzanne Pepper, "Chinese Education after Mao", The China Quarterly, No.81, 1980, p.2.

The major political struggle, political instability and frequent switch from one education policy to the other affected the education of young Chinese as a whole. The Cultural Revolution was a severe blow to the development of education and skill-training. While higher education had suffered the most, women were always a minority there. At the lower levels, there was some improvement but whatever skill women acquired, was mainly through the work study programmes, which was unable to fetch them good jobs. Thus, women remained low on skills and still lower on formal education.

EMPLOYMENT :

In the four years from 1949 to 1953, the female labour force rose from about 600,000 (7.5%) to about 2,132,000 (11.0%).¹⁴ Urban industry was at the time dominated by light industry, and most women workers were employed in this sector. Expansion of the service industries, primarily education and health was also an important reason for the growth of female employment.

But the development strategy of the first Five Year Plan (1953-57) changed the nature and composition of the urban labour force. Under the Soviet model which was adopted

14. Phyllis Andors, The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women, p.30.

in the Plan, the planning and management system was centralised. Until 1956, the pattern of enterprise management was basically one man management, namely the director who performed the role of chief executive. He was assisted by two other executives, the chief engineer, technical director or production manager and the chief accountant or controller. The director was personally responsible for the fulfilment of annual targets. Economic planning and management required trained and skilled personnel. Chinese women at this stage were not trained to undertake any such responsibility. As a result women's employment avenues were confined to traditionally female oriented industries, such as textiles and tobacco. Since light industry and private enterprises were not priority areas for state investment, and stagnated relative to heavy industry there was little, if any, expansion of the female labour force in this sector. During the first Five Year Plan period, urban population grew at 5.7 per cent per year due to the addition of 8 million peasant migrants to Chinese cities.¹⁵ Male migrants took jobs that female urban residents otherwise would have filled. As well, while urban population grew at the rate of 5.7 per cent employment grew at an annual average rate of only 1.3 per cent.¹⁶ This created massive urban unemployment in the first decade after liberation.

15. J.P. Emerson, "Chinese Communist Party Views on Labour Utilization before and after 1958", Current Scene, 1(30), 1964, pp.1-4.

16. Ibid.

As a way out of this, the Party tried to reconcile realities and ideology by glorifying the role of housewife, as one who contributed to socialist construction by providing important moral support and unpaid services to her husband, and thus making the husband play a direct role in the ongoing socialist construction. Thus the new ideology emphasized the housewife's selfless service to the society over her need for paid employment outside the home.¹⁷

The yearly trend in this period went like this:¹⁸

| Year | Total workers and employees (in thousand) | Female workers and employees (in thousand) | Female as per cent of total |
|------|---|--|-----------------------------|
| 1949 | 8,004 | 600 | 7.5 |
| 1950 | 10,239 | not available(n.a) | n.a. |
| 1951 | 12,815 | n.a. | n.a. |
| 1952 | 15,804 | 1,848 | 11.7 |
| 1953 | 18,256 | 2,132 | 11.7 |
| 1954 | 18,809 | 2,435 | 12.9 |
| 1955 | 19,076 | 2,473 | 13.0 |
| 1956 | 24,230 | 3,266 | 13.5 |
| 1957 | 24,506 | 3,286 | 13.4 |

 17. Sheila G. Leader, "Emancipation of Chinese Women", World Politics 26, 1973, pp 77-79.

18. Phyllis Andors. The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women, p.36.

Though the number of women workers increased as a percentage of the total, it increased only by 5.9 per cent while the work force tripled in the same period. Moreover, women continued to cluster in the same female oriented light industries, where they were before 1953. The first Five Year Plan period contributed little in terms of women's employment opportunities. As jobs became available in the expanding heavy industry sector, as well as in other sectors, they went to men because of better education and skill.

Women's employment jumped to a record high during the GLF of 1958. By the end of the first Five Year Plan, China faced a series of problems. Growing urban unemployment, slow growth in agriculture and worsening relations with the Soviet Union led Mao to launch the GLF. Mao urged a change in the pattern of ownership and organization, together with a radical psychological transformation of the population to stimulate people to work more intensively. In narrower economic terms, the GLF can be seen as a movement to increase job opportunity and an effort to make use of under-utilized local resources like coal and iron ore. Local initiative, especially in the development of small scale industry and local economic self-sufficiency were stressed. Under the impact of such a philosophy and its consequent goals, women were required to enter into economic production and political activities together with men. Though emancipation of women

was not a major focus of the GLF, lack of capital and low level of technology compelled China to depend largely on human labour, and women's labour was certainly not excluded. Many of the tasks which kept women busy at home, were collectivized and, especially in the urban areas, had become part of an integrated form of social production.

The GLF provided two kinds of female employment in urban China.¹⁹ First was entry into regular industrial positions. Women were recruited to take over the basic and simpler tasks, thus freeing men for more complex tasks. The movement to 'substitute women for men' was an attempt to solve an anticipated labour shortage in the rapidly expanding industrial sector, and allow women to enter regular industry, especially light industry, service and commerce.²⁰ Street industry provided the second type of female employment. Women themselves took initiatives, which were based on their traditional housework skills. The urban communes and neighbourhood service centres also provided jobs to many women. According to 1959 statistics, the number of women workers had more than doubled in 1957-58, from 3 million to 7.5 million. By March of 1959, in 22 cities alone, 530,000

19. Phyllis Andors, The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women, pp.61-62.

20. Ibid.

housewives had set up 40,000 small plants and workshops.²¹ The decade of the 1950s actually saw a growth in female employment from 7.5 per cent which included all female workers in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors in 1949 to nearly 17 per cent of total non-agricultural employment in this period, with the period of GLF accounting for the highest increase.²²

After the disastrous economic consequences of the GLF, and a spate of natural disasters, from 1961 to 1964, the country attempted industrial reform and China reintroduced the earlier practice completely reversing GLF policies. Propaganda again stressed traditional values for women such as respect for the aged, kinship obligations, and the importance of women as mothers and housewives.

By the Cultural Revolution, in the mid and late 1960s, the Party had moved to viewing women's emancipation as an integral part of the Revolution. Any move to consider women's issues as a feminist movement was viewed as counter-revolutionary. During the ideological fervour of the Cultural Revolution, traditional family structure, and hierarchical social relations were again seen as obstacles to the

21. "Women workers in the Great Leap Foward", Beijing Review March 17, 1959, p.14.

22. Barry M. Richman, Industrial Society in Communist China, (London: Random House, 1969), pp.303-306.

revolution. Thus, once again women's active participation in economy and politics was stressed. As a result, women's employment ratio in the non-agricultural sector rose to 25 per cent.²³ The assessment of women's status during the Cultural Revolution period, however, remained unclear and is still debatable.

WAGES :

The whole Maoist period witnessed a cyclical pattern of shift between theory and practical reality in regard to women workers. But be it during the realistic period of 1953-57, 1961-64 or the period of ideological fervour like the GLF or the Cultural Revolution, the nature of women's job was always low, women had always worked in low paying jobs, and as a result, earned lower wages. The traditional female labour oriented industries historically had lower wage scales than the few heavy industries which existed in pre-1949 China. After 1949, the government kept all wages low as a policy. Although the extremely low wages of the pre-1949 period were raised substantially, wages were kept at a level, where an additional income would help make ends meet. The official low wage policy and difficult living conditions were a strong incentive for women to work particularly during the GLF period, since most males did not earn a sufficient wage to

23. Ibid.

support families.²⁴ Since wages in general were low, and wages in light industry lower still, this is clear indication that women were employed in jobs which offered low wage. The first Five Year Plan emphasized heavy industry, where women's representation was low, and those who did work in heavy industry, were employed at the lowest level. The new wage system institutionalized under Soviet guidance in 1956 strictly graded administrative personnel into 30 salary grades, with technicians into 18 grades, industrial workers into 8 grades and so forth.²⁵ Industrial workers were paid much less than the technicians and highly qualified and highly skilled technicians were generally males. Workers were divided into 8 grades according to their skills and since women were less qualified, they clustered in the lower wage scales in general. This system remained essentially intact until the Cultural Revolution, when the radicals gained control and tried to promote a more egalitarian system. There were provisions for prizes and bonuses for exceptional performance in the Soviet wage system. Yet many women workers who earned bonus by working hard were asked by the radicals not to accept them and many women voluntarily did not accept

24. Martin K. Whyte and William L. Parish, Urban Life in Contemporary China, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), p.200.

25. Ibid., p.43.

extra money. However, though women earned low wage, services and benefits provided by the government and factories balanced the low wages in many ways.

The major issues during the Cultural Revolution was the use of material incentives and the piece rate system, the rules and regulations that controlled the workers, control over technical innovation and the hierarchical and bureaucratic organization within the factory. As a result of this radicalism, women lost the opportunity to earn extra money as bonus.²⁶

BENEFITS:

This was one area where the PRC government from the outset left no room for complaint, at least in regular state owned heavy and light industries, and in joint state-private industries.

In 1951, the First National Conference on Labour Protection worked out the "Draft Resolution on Protection for Women Workers". In the following year, the Ministry of Textile Industry and the National Committee of All China Textile Workers Trade Union jointly put out the "Memorandum

26. Phyllis Andors, The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women, p.72.

on Protection for Women Workers and Pregnant Women." These laws provided wide protection to women workers, which included the injunction that feminine concessions like marriage, pregnancy, childbirth or breast-feeding should not be used as a reason to dismiss a woman worker or cut her wages, women were to get equal pay for equal work, women should not be given exceptionally heavy work which may affect her health, etc. Nursing mothers were exempted from night duty. Nursing rooms, childcare facilities, medical benefits, educational institutions to increase skills and technical ability were the norm. Both small and big industries provided these facilities almost exclusively in the cities.²⁷ In the textile mills, the contract system of work was abolished and a system of a normal industrial six days week , and eight-hour day, was established . Women's duties as mother, wife and homemaker were taken over by nurseries, mess halls, and service stations during the GLF period to free women for outside work. In Shanghai alone 667 mess halls provided meals for 400,000 people, 2,117 nurseries cared for 130,000 children, and 3,274 service stations provided services for housekeeping and family living. urban communes in Harbin province absorbed 162,000 people who were fed in 356 mess

27. Phyllis Andors, "Social Revolution and Women's Emancipation: China during the GLF", Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, 7(1), 1975, p.34.

halls and where children were cared for in 433 nurseries and 184 kindergartens.²⁸

Women workers in irregular industries, like street industries, however, were much less benefited, falling outside the official or planned industrial system, these industries were given no monetary help or training. With poor equipment and low grade resources and material these industries were unable to provide a standard wage and benefits to workers. Child care, sick leave or maternity pay were almost totally absent in these industries. Neighbourhood factories also faced the same problem. Women accepted these low paid and less beneficial jobs in these industries because they were situated close to their homes, and they were able to take care of household responsibilities along with prescribed jobs.

Hence, though women were brought into the urban labour force, they were brought in on an unequal basis. The workplace provided only limited opportunity to participate in economic development by providing only the most elementary skills to women workers. Even during the GLF period women were absorbed at the lowest levels of industry, they filled the places vacated by male workers, whose position was

28. John E. Dixon, The Chinese Welfare System 1949-79, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981, pp.165-66.

elevated to the more prestigious and higher paying ones.

In other words, male development was at the expense of an expanding cheap female labour force. In the late fifties as the Soviet withdrawal of technical advisers and the GLF experiment, created problems in Chinese industry, there were cutbacks and forced lay offs. Women workers were most affected with the least seniority, least skill training and education, they were the first to lose jobs. Some industries showed a clear reluctance to employ women, because of poor skill levels. A case in particular was the Beijing Bus Company, which refused to take women because of the need to train them.²⁹ Blatant discrimination also, in some cases, prevented women from entering the workforce. The resistance to women workers in the iron and steel and machinery industries was mainly because of traditional attitudes toward the capabilities of women. Many supervisory personnel refused to teach female workers as they did not accept women's participation in industrial labour.³⁰

Though women industrial workers were far from achieving equality with men, there were some positive side effects from the increased participation of women in economic activities

29. Phyllis Andors, The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women, p.84.

30. Phyllis Andors, "Social Revolution and Women's Emancipation: China during the GLF", Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, 7(1), 1975, p.40.

outside the home. Most important of them was a sense of self-confidence, secondly, the feeling of individual contribution to the society independent of any male member of their family. If the Maoist period could not confer the desired position to women workers, the basic reason was the economic reality did not permit the same. The leadership also did not try to create new job opportunities for women. Nevertheless, women did gain a place in theory, but not so much in terms of objective reality. Armed with this reality, Chinese women marched into a new era in 1978.

CHAPTER-III

POST-MAO CHANGES IN EDUCATION

AND SKILL-TRAINING FOR WOMEN WORKERS

It is generally held that education of women is essential for their equality in social and economic fields, and to improve their status. A study by the United Nations on the "Status of Women and Family Planning" views the best measure of status as the extent of control that a person has over his or her life, derived from the access to knowledge, economic resources and political power, and the degree of autonomy enjoyed in the process of decision-making.¹ There is another view which considers that access to education reflects only formal equality. In reality it only extends women's role since there is no modification in men's role.² However, both the groups consider that education is a pre-condition for women to gain equality, as it prepares women to gain access to material and social resources. The objective of this chapter is to examine whether this view is applicable to Chinese women.

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1. "Status of Women and Family Planning", New York, Department of Economics and Social Affairs, United Nations, 1975, as cited in R.B. Bhagat, (June, 1990) "Status of Women and age at marriage in India". Social Change, 20(2) p.20.
 2. M. Indiradevi, Women - Education - Employment: Family Living, (Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1987), p.2.

In the post-Mao period, the new leadership has stressed the upgradation of education and aimed to change the education system to suit the objectives of economic development. Top ranking officials even grant education the status of the "fifth modernization".³ As early as in 1980 at a meeting on educational work, some changes in the education system were initiated and targeted to be completed in three to five years. The main points include, among others,

- (i) compulsory primary education for all;
- (ii) promoting a number of key schools and colleges to serve as models for others;
- (iii) teaching more technical and vocational content in senior middle schools and restoring and developing secondary specialised, technical and agricultural middle schools;
- (iv) improving the level of teaching and research in higher education, and developing the fields of study which were weak or non-existent; and
- (v) promoting scientific and cultural exchanges with foreign countries.

In May 1985, further reform of the education system was initiated to further economic development. The "Decision of the CPC Central Committee on the Reform of Education System"

3. Rosalie L. Tung, Chinese Industrial Society After Mao, (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1982), p.120.

stressed the need to change the management system of excessive government control of institutions of higher education, expand decision-making in the institutions under the guidance of unified education policies and plans of the state, strengthen the connection of the institutions of higher education with production organizations, scientific research organizations and other social establishments, and enable the institutions of higher education to take the initiative and ability to meet the needs of economic and social development.⁴ The stress on setting up a vocational and technical education system right from the primary to college level to train students for different professions is well reflected in the Central Committee decision.

This new campaign has brought some significant changes in China's education structure. In the Chinese education system a student generally completes twelve years of pre-university schooling, five years in primary school, three years in junior middle school, and two to four years in senior middle school, depending on the courses for which he/she opts. Under the new system, there is more flexibility. For example, in the fall of 1980, the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Education extended the primary education programme

4. Ruth E.S. Hayhoe, "China's Higher Curriculum Reform in Historic Perspective", China Quarterly, No.110, 1987, p.221.

to six years.⁵ Until 1986, students had to pass an examination for admission to junior middle school. This has been abolished with the institution of compulsory nine years education.⁶ Schools now provide vocational or technical training to students who do not wish to pursue a normal curriculum. Students have a choice of at least nineteen different technical subjects in these schools which offer training for particular industrial or agricultural needs. Higher education has received special attention in the post-Mao period. Because of the reform policies, the country faces a growing need of a new generation of skilled personnel to cater to the needs of economic development. Keeping in view this situation, the post-Mao leadership has opened various channels of higher education. Chief among them are,

- (i) enrollment of day students; and,
- (ii) introduction of diverse methods of education which include the Tube University, correspondence and night colleges, and self study programmes. China has also reintroduced the system of post-graduate education since 1978. Generally, all admissions in colleges and universities were on the basis of qualifying examinations. But in 1987, a regulation allowed senior middle schools to recommend students for admission without an admission test. Other

5. Rosalie L. Tung, Chinese Industrial Society After Mao (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1982), p.123.

6. Beijing Review 28(18) May 6, 1985, pp.9-10.

institutions also relaxed the conditions for admission. The role of research has been stressed in China. According to Conroy, "the role of Research and Development in the higher education sector has changed from a supplementary activity to one central to and symbolic with the process of training, knowledge generation and dissemination itself."⁷

Parallel to regular educational institutions, China has reintroduced vocational institutions in 1979. Vocational schools are set up in order to better serve the needs of industry. The course of study at these vocational schools include the subjects taught at regular middle schools plus a technical subject. The students also participate in physical labour course in industries or farms. The main purpose of the vocational schools is to equip students with technical skills for their further employment. The vocational and technical education provided by the special secondary schools are divided into :

- (i) Basic vocational and technical (V and T) education;
- (ii) Middle level V and T education, which is of two types:
 - (a) secondary V and T schools and
 - (b) workers' training schools,

7. R.J. Couroy, "The Role of Higher Education Sector in China's Research and Development System." China Quarterly No.17, 1989, p.69.

- (iii) Professional middle schools; and
- (iv) Higher V and T schools, which again are of two types :
 - (a) V and T specialized colleges, and
 - (b) V and T teachers' training colleges.⁸

Basic V and T education offers basic knowledge of a certain vocation. Secondary training schools produce mid and primary level technical management personnel and skill worker, whereas workers' training school produces mid level skilled workers. Professional middle schools produce mid-level technical and management personnel. Higher V and T schools produce high level technicians and technical and management personnel at corresponding levels. V and T teachers' training colleges cultivate instructors for secondary vocational and technical schools.

In pre-1978 period, higher vocational education mainly served publicly owned medium and large enterprises. With the introduction of reform and the open door policy, higher vocational education has become extremely important because now, many other arenas are open where there is an urgent need of highly qualified professionals, who will understand the principles of market mechanism properly. Under such

8. "Vocational and Technical School Education in China", Chinese Education, 24(3), 1991, pp.12-14.

circumstances, the government attaches high importance to management education, especially in the higher level.

These measures have resulted in marked improvement in education standards. Within a few years of its implementation, China's literacy percentage rose to 88 from 66 during 1981-83.⁹ But as far as women's education is concerned, there still remains a persistent male-female difference. According to the results of the One Percent Population Survey in urban China in 1987, 71 per cent males and 43 per cent females aged 45 and above were literate, whereas in the 15-19 year age group, 97.7 per cent male and 94 per cent females were literate.¹⁰ Other data show that in 1990, the literacy rate of men and women in urban China was 94 and 82 per cent respectively and in the rural areas, it was 84 and 63 per cent respectively.¹¹ All these data show that although the general level of education, and women's education level in particular has improved substantially, if we compare the rates of male/female improvement, we find that the male-female gap, though narrower, still persists. The gap is narrowest in the primary and secondary level of education

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9. K. Deb, The Chinese Economy: Changes and Challenges in the Post-Mao Era. (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1993), p.221.
 10. John Bauer et. al., "Gender Inequality in Urban China: Education and Employment", Modern China, 18(3), 1992, p.337.
 11. Beijing Review 38(36) Sept. 4, 1995, p.7.

as a result of compulsory 9 year education for all. 1992 statistics show that a total 712,973 primary schools admitted more than 122.01 million students of whom girls accounted for 46.6 per cent. In 84,021 middle schools, there were nearly 47.71 million students and girls made up 43.1 per cent of it.¹² It is in the institutions of higher education that female representation falls significantly.

The scope of higher education is limited in China. In 1980, only about 8 per cent of those who took the college entrance examination were admitted. Women made up only slightly more than one fourth of this small number.¹³ Only about 9 per cent of male and 5 per cent of female senior high school graduates continued on to university in the 1980s.¹⁴ A yearwise breakup of university graduates and women students participation shows that over the years women's participation has steadily increased although it remains much lower than that for primary and middle levels.¹⁵

12. Ibid., p.9.

13. E. Honig and G. Hershatter, Personal Voice: Chinese Women in the 1980s, (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1988), p.246.

14. John Bauer et. al., "Gender Inequality in Urban China: Education and Employment", Modern China 18(3), 1992, p.343.

15. Beijing Review 35(10) March 9, 1992, p.20.

| | TOTAL | | | UNIVERSITY GRADUATES | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|----------------------|--------|-------|
| | | WOMEN | (%) | | WOMEN | (%) |
| TOTAL | 991.3 | 337.64 | 34.06 | 435.0 | 125.05 | 28.74 |
| 1980 | 55.7 | 16.65 | 29.89 | 14.7 | 3.52 | 24.00 |
| 1981 | 74.5 | 22.86 | 30.68 | 14.0 | 3.50 | 25.00 |
| 1982 | 90.3 | 25.72 | 29.48 | 45.7 | 11.00 | 24.07 |
| 1983 | 71.0 | 20.79 | 30.90 | 33.5 | 8.04 | 24.00 |
| 1984 | 63.3 | 20.49 | 30.99 | 28.7 | 7.33 | 25.54 |
| 1985 | 74.5 | 23.09 | 33.76 | 31.6 | 8.29 | 26.23 |
| 1986 | 88.9 | 30.02 | 34.88 | 39.3 | 11.08 | 28.19 |
| 1987 | 111.0 | 38.72 | 37.67 | 53.2 | 15.63 | 29.37 |
| 1988 | 114.9 | 43.29 | 38.67 | 55.6 | 17.15 | 31.00 |
| 1989 | 116.7 | 45.37 | 38.87 | 57.6 | 18.74 | 32.53 |
| 1990 | 127.5 | 50.64 | 39.71 | 61.4 | 20.76 | 33.31 |
| Average increase rate(%) | 8.6 | 11.77 | | 15.4 | 19.30 | |

The 1987 One Percent Population survey showed a steady increase of female students at each level.

Education Attainment, by Sex: Urban China, 1987 (in hundreds)

| Age | Male | Female | Ratio(M/F) |
|--------------------|---------|---------|------------|
| University | | | |
| 15-19 | 18 | 83 | 0.21 |
| 20-24 | 5,580 | 3,383 | 1.65 |
| 25-29 | 5,595 | 2,699 | 2.07 |
| 30-34 | 6,777 | 2,966 | 2.28 |
| 35-39 | 5,573 | 2,240 | 2.49 |
| 40-44 | 5,436 | 2,273 | 2.39 |
| 45+ | 18,368 | 6,245 | 2.94 |
| Senior high | | | |
| 15-19 | 41,603 | 38,103 | 1.09 |
| 20-24 | 59,462 | 56,277 | 1.06 |
| 25-29 | 58,550 | 51,572 | 1.14 |
| 30-34 | 39,678 | 28,395 | 1.40 |
| 35-39 | 16,002 | 10,187 | 1.57 |
| 40-44 | 12,979 | 9,690 | 1.34 |
| 45+ | 34,926 | 14,199 | 2.46 |
| Junior high | | | |
| 15-19 | 116,984 | 101,631 | 1.15 |
| 20-24 | 115,387 | 102,866 | 1.12 |
| 25-29 | 65,717 | 51,969 | 1.26 |
| 30-34 | 80,247 | 60,062 | 1.34 |
| 35-39 | 56,605 | 38,954 | 1.45 |
| 40-44 | 35,417 | 22,640 | 1.56 |
| 45+ | 78,981 | 29,359 | 2.69 |
| Primary | | | |
| 15-19 | 55,676 | 63,644 | 0.87 |
| 20-24 | 39,482 | 47,342 | 0.83 |
| 25-29 | 24,543 | 32,058 | 0.77 |
| 30-34 | 50,295 | 53,497 | 0.94 |
| 35-39 | 56,483 | 52,886 | 1.07 |
| 40-44 | 43,296 | 36,793 | 1.18 |
| 45+ | 177,300 | 91,069 | 1.95 |
| Illiterate | | | |
| 15-19 | 5,016 | 12,459 | 0.40 |
| 20-24 | 4,524 | 15,821 | 0.29 |
| 25-29 | 4,766 | 18,569 | 0.26 |
| 30-34 | 9,407 | 35,431 | 0.27 |
| 35-39 | 9,427 | 31,411 | 0.30 |
| 40-44 | 8,937 | 27,159 | 0.33 |
| 45+ | 126,208 | 286,999 | 0.44 |

SOURCE: 1987 One Percent Population Survey.¹⁶

16. John Bauer, et.al., "Gender Inequality in Urban China", Modern China, 18(3), 1992, p.339.

It is clear from these statistics that though the overall intake of new college and university students increased by 28 per cent between 1976 and 1981, and nearly tripled between 1976 and 1991,¹⁷ the expansion has not kept pace with the increase in the number of senior high school students. In 1992, only 2.18 million students were enrolled in 1,053 universities and colleges all over China. Of them, women constituted only 33.7 per cent. In post graduation courses, there were only 91,000 students in 1992, women constituted a mere 24.8 per cent of them.¹⁸

Even in the field of higher education, vocational courses are given importance, as there is a growing need for young managers. To meet with this demand, the government increased the enrollment of business and management students. As a result of this policy, the number of new college and university students enrolled in vocational courses increased by about 23 times between 1976 and 1991. This amounts to an increase of business and management students between 1981 and 1991 by over 440 per cent.¹⁹ In 1988, there were altogether 594,940 students enrolled for technical and vocational higher

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17. M.W. Luke Chan, "Management Education in the PRC" in David H. Brown and Robin Peter (eds.), Management Issues in China Vol.1, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.240-241.
 18. Beijing Review 38(36) September 4, 1995, p.9.
 19. M.W. Luke Chan, "Management Education in the PRC," in David H. Brown and Robin Peter (eds.), Management Issues in China Vol.1, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.240-241.

education. Of them, 192,165 were female students, ccounting for 32.3 per cent only. A major chunk of students , 220,075 were enrolled in engineering programmes, and 46,243 were enrolled in medicine.²⁰ The number of percentage of female students in these branches is not available, but reports indicate that the majors and departments, women apply for are more concentrated in the areas of literature, art, and history, and in these courses they make up more than 60 per cent.²¹

In 1992, there were only three women's vocational colleges and a women's university. The China Women's University is under construction according to a 1995 Beijing Review report.²² In view of the limited opportunity for higher education, students geneally enroll in junior and middle level skill training courses. There were 1,679 women's secondary vocational schools in 1992.²³ In these schools women are trained in nursing, sewing and embroidery,

20. Vilma Seeberg, "Access to Higher Education: Targeted Recruitment from under Economic Development Plans in the People's Republic of China:", Higher Education 25(2), 1993, p.174.

21. Ju Ning, "My Perception on the Discrepancy", Chinese Education and Society 26(2), 1993, p.54.

22. Beijing Review 38(36), Sept. 4,1995, p.9.

23. Ibid.

For example, in 1984, a Vocational School for Girls was established in Dalian which trained skills within "their (students') field."²⁴ Besides, women are also enrolling in special secondary schools in increasing numbers. Between 1980 to 1990, the percentage of women graduates from special secondary schools rose from 32 to 45.20. The table below shows the year-wise increase:²⁵

| UNIT : TEN THOUSAND SPECIAL SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATES | | | |
|---|-------|--------|----------|
| | | WOMEN | PER CENT |
| TOTAL | 556.3 | 212.59 | 38.21 |
| 1980 | 41.0 | 13.12 | 32.00 |
| 1981 | 60.5 | 19.36 | 32.00 |
| 1982 | 44.6 | 14.72 | 33.00 |
| 1983 | 37.5 | 12.75 | 34.00 |
| 1984 | 37.6 | 13.16 | 35.00 |
| 1985 | 42.9 | 14.80 | 34.49 |
| 1986 | 49.6 | 18.94 | 38.18 |
| 1987 | 57.8 | 23.09 | 39.94 |
| 1988 | 59.6 | 26.14 | 43.85 |
| 1989 | 59.0 | 26.63 | 45.05 |
| 1990 | 66.1 | 29.88 | 45.20 |
| Average increase rate (%) | 1.9 | 8.58 | |

24. E. Honig and G. Hershatter, Personal Voices, (Standford: Standford Univ. Press, 1988), pp.247-248.

25. Beijing Review 35(10), March 9, 1992, p.20.

Special secondary schools or secondary vocational schools are one of the three branches of vocational education, the other two being polytechnic schools and skilled workers schools.²⁶ Junior and middle level skill training centres produce skilled workers.

Armed with this kind of education and skill-training, women enter the workforce. It is needless to say that a persons's education and skill training is the major criteria for employment. From the employment point of view, there is no doubt that those who acquire higher education have more opportunities . Highly qualified professionals are preferred by work units for highly desired and attractive posts. The above discussion shows that women form a minority in this special group. The large number of women, therefore, are employed in work units as junior or middle level technicians and workers and opt for other jobs according to their standard of training and skill.

In China, nine of the twelve sectors of the national economy hire over one million women each. They include industry, agriculture, building, transport and communication,

26. Liu Junfang, "Progress in Vocational Education", Beijing Review, 35(12), March 23, 1992, p.31.

commerce, public health, education, party and government organizations and social organizations.²⁷ There is close relationship among skill training, job mobility and wage structure in all these employment avenues. College and university graduates who have obtained high level skill training, are channelled into jobs with high remuneration. Students having high professional skills become managers, engineers, and high level technicians in private, collective, state-owned as well as Chinese foreign joint enterprises, where they get higher pay, perks and have high status. Female students being few in this category, there are a very small number of women, who have high social and economic status.

Middle and high school graduates with basic and medium level skill training generally become factory workers, where their wage is less than that of highly skilled professionals. Women constitute almost half of the work-force having basic and medium level skill-training. Since a considerable number of women with basic and medium level skill-training are trained in traditional female work, they are channelled into those kinds of jobs, where benefits are very less. Women are employed in large numbers in the majority of childcare centres, nurseries, kindergartens. Under the policy of private and collective enterprises, women trained in women's

27. Beijing Review 38(10), March 6, 1995, p.8.

junior and middle level skill-training centres open their own shops where they generally set up tailoring units or open food stalls. In fact, in view of the growing unemployment and male-bias in the workplace, the government encourages women to take advantage of their "special strength".²⁸ This refers to women's invisible training in household chores as girls generally help their mothers in household activities and learn cooking, laundry work and sewing from childhood. It also refers to the supposedly nurturing nature of women placing them squarely in service sector such as nursery and child-care.

Women trained in vocational skills, other than female oriented jobs, work as factory workers. A major chunk in this category are employed as temporary, part-time or contract labourers. They lose out in benefit and services and also earn relatively low wage. Besides, work units discourage women workers from increasing their skills by attending various courses offered for the working population. The work units are of the opinion that since most of the workers are not permanent, there is no point providing unnecessary concessions and leave to attend skill enhancement courses, as the unmarried workers would get married and leave their work.

28. E. Honig and G. Hershatter, Personal Voices:, (Standford: Standford Univ. Press, 1988), pp.246-247.

Male permanent workers and a handful of women workers who are permanent are however allowed to pursue vocational skill-training in evening colleges, spare-time colleges and tube universities to further their skill. Acquiring extra skill training is important for a worker's career because it helps in getting promotion. A survey of 1,047 women workers in Henan province in 1989 showed that only 8 per cent of them availed the opportunity of spare time studying to increase their level of skill.²⁹ In 1992, an estimated 60 per cent of women workers nationwide had attended and was attending various cultural and technical training programmes and 400,000 adult women nationwide educated themselves through television universities.³⁰ But there is no break ups available for how many of them attended cultural programmes and how many of them attended vocational training programmes. The low percentage of women workers in spare time colleges, and night colleges is however not solely because of their employers' reluctance, and also not because of their ignorance. As the survey of 1,047 Henan women workers in 1989 indicates, 47 per cent of them realized the need for improving skill-training and were troubled by lack of

29. "Women, Education and Employment", Chinese Education, 22(2), 1989, p.44.

30. Beijing Review 38(10), March 6, 1995, pp.9-10.

learning aid incompetence.³¹ Many married workers feel so tired after the day's work, housework and childcare that they cannot gather the energy for extra study. The result is that, women remain either with traditional female work oriented skills or with low professional training and are employed into jobs where wages are less and chances of promotion are less, because promotion is linked with standard of skill training and seniority. A 1992 data shows the average educational term for women workers is 11.31 years and 45 per cent of them have reached middle school or secondary vocational school level. Only 15.4 per cent of women have received higher education.³²

Education and skill training is also reflected in bonus and pension of a worker. Bonus is calculated on a worker's monthly wage in majority of work units in China. Since women workers' basic pay is less, though they work the same amount as their male colleagues, they earn less from overtime work. The cause of low pension after retirement is also the same, it is calculated according to a worker's salary. Moreover, women's retirement age is 54, compared to men's 59. Salary increases with seniority and since women work 5 years less than men, it affects their seniority. There are many cases

31. "Women, Education and Employment", Chinese Education 22(2), 1989, p.44.

32. Beijing Review 38(10) March 6, 1995, p.10.

reported where women workers were denied pension without proper reasons.³³ However, these are the cases of discrimination against women and has nothing to do with their skill-training and education. In many cases women are employed into jobs where they benefit less from seniority. All these factors result into low pension for women workers.

Another development resulted from women's education and skill training level is that, many work-units prefer women worker. Though there are plenty of statistics which show that work units prefer male workers and explicitly instruct college and technical institutes not to assign them female graduates, low skilled female labourers are preferred by some enterprises like textiles, tobacco, etc. According to 1987 One Percent Population Survey, in textiles, leather and apparel factories women employees accounted for 78.9 per cent. In printing industry women constitute 63.7 per cent, in rubber and plastics industry they are 67.7 per cent of total work force, whereas in printing industry 63.7 per cent workers are women. These industries are essentially labour intensive and do not need much on-the-work skill. Unskilled and semi-skilled women are supposed to be patient in nature and docile, and also less likely to revolt against the

33. E. Croll, Chinese Women Since Mao, (Bath: Pitman Press, 1983), p.56.

leadership, and they are also less likely to complain about monotonous and repetitive nature of work, where there is no chance to show one's creativity. Another reason is that the society to a large extent, and many women perceive their employment as a help to their household income, relatively low wage is acceptable to them.

Thus, women acquire low level of education and skill training, and as a result, are channelled into low paying and low status employment. Women workers are frequently laid off by work units on the ground of incompetence and disability to fulfil production norms because of their poor skill.

CHAPTER-IV

EMPLOYMENT AVENUES; DOWNGRADING POSTS AND WAGES

Article 48 of the 1978 Chinese Constitution guarantees all citizens the right to work. Article 10 further stipulates:

Work is an honorable duty for every citizen able to work. The state promotes socialist labor emulation, and putting proletarian politics in command, it applies the policy of combining moral encouragement with material reward, with the stress on the former, in order to heighten the citizen's socialist enthusiasm and creativeness in work.¹

This chapter seeks to examine, first, whether women enjoy fully their right to work, particularly in the urban industrial sector in post-Mao China; and second, when employed, whether they enjoy equality with men in terms of posts and wages.

A short discussion on post-Mao changes in the urban industrial set up and its subsequent effect on the changing nature of jobs in China will provide a background for assessing women's position in the urban job market.

1. Constitution of the PRC, Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1978.

Under the Chinese economic system prior to 1978 state investment was concentrated in the heavy industrial sector. Under the first Five Year Plan (1953-1957), for instance, 46.5 per cent of state investment went to heavy industry and capital construction, whereas light industry received only 5.9 per cent. Between 1966 and 1978, the Government invested over 55 per cent in heavy industry and capital construction, and light industry received not more than 5 per cent.² The ratio between investment in light and heavy industries was 1:8 during the first Five Year Plan and reached 1:14 during the third Five Year Plan.³ This imbalance in industrial structure directly affected the level of employment. Statistics reveal that a state owned heavy industrial enterprise could absorb only 94 workers per 1,000 yuan investment, whereas the same amount in a light industrial enterprise could generate as many as 257 jobs.⁴ Under such circumstances rising urban unemployment was inevitable. The leadership tried to solve the problem through various policies like limiting migration to the cities sending urban youth to the countryside. These policies yielded high growths over the years but the unemployment problem continued throughout the Maoist period.

2. Beijing Review 22(51), Dec. 21, 1979, p.11.

3. Feng Lanrui and Zhao Lukuan, "Urban Unemployment in China", Social Science in China 3(1), 1982, p.129.

4. Beijing Review 23(43), Oct. 27, 1980, p.20.

Post-Mao reform is aimed at changing the three elements of the Chinese economy of the Maoist period — the Soviet model, the Stalinist push, and Maoist radicalism, the central focus is on the socialist enterprise, the basic production unit in industry.

The overriding concern of the present leadership is to increase productivity and improve organizational efficiency. The new programme of adjustment and reform adopted in 1978, focused mainly on adjustment in five areas : (i) reversing the traditional order of priority given to heavy industry, light industry and agriculture, (ii) increasing the share of consumption in national income, (iii) reducing consumption of energy, (iv) increasing exports, especially of manufactured goods, and (v) emphasizing plant modernization, and improving efficiency of existing enterprises. Reform focussed on three areas: (i) reform of incentives, i.e., linking rewards to performance to raise efficiency, (ii) decentralizing decision-making, and (iii) placing more reliance on market mechanism rather than administrative controls.⁵

As a result of these policy shifts, for the first time in the history of the PRC, the rate of growth of light industry(9 per cent) exceeded that of heavyindustry(7.4 per

5. G. Tidrick and Chen Jiyuan (eds.), China's Industrial Reform, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987) , p.1.

cent). Gradually investment in light industry has increased by over fifty per cent.⁶

The growth of light industry has generated a large number of jobs. Moreover, the Party's Central Committee called a nationwide conference in 1980, on labour and employment, and adopted a new employment policy. This aimed at doing away with the former policy of rigid control over jobs and the unified distribution of work-force. The new employment policy encourages a combination of employment by way of job placement by labour departments, voluntary organizations of the jobless, and self-employment all under the overall plan of the state. The distribution pattern of the work-force hence changed on the basis of various reforms in the structure of industry and ownership. Accordingly, priorities were given

(i) to light industry, textiles and handicrafts in industrial sector,

(ii) to the service trade over industry and agriculture,

(iii) to collectively owned enterprises over state enterprises, and

(iv) to labour intensive industries over capital intensive industries.⁷

6. Beijing Review 24(11), March 16, 1981, p.14.

7. Feng Lanrui and Zhao Lukuan, "Urban Employment in China", Social Science in China 3(1), 1982, p.137.

As a result of these policies a wide range of job opportunities were created for urban residents. The growth of light industry and the service trade, in particular, have opened a new vista for female employment because it is these sectors where women have traditionally been predominantly employed. Reports say almost 13 million new jobs were created nationally during 1977-80. Among the three types of enterprise ownership, collective enterprise provided 12 million or 92 per cent of all jobs.⁸ Available data show that unemployment dropped from 5-6 million during 1978-80 to 2-3 million in the late 1980s.⁹ According to Minister of Labor, Li Boyong, 75 million people have been employed in the 1980s, as a result the urban unemployment rate has remained below 3 per cent. At the sametime, real annual wages have increased by 4.3 per cent.¹⁰ This data, however, does not include those who became unemployed for various reasons like forced lay offs, end of contract etc. Thus, when the official record showed the number of unemployed youth as 2-3 million, in

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8. G.H. Jefferson and T.G. Rawski, "Unemployment, Under-employment and Employment Policy in Chinese Cities", Modern China 18(1), 1992, p.45.
9. J.P. Emerson, "Urban School-Leavers and Unemployment in China", The China Quarterly No.93, 1983, p.12.
10. Beijing Review 38(44), Oct. 30, 1995, pp.8-9.

reality, their number remains much more , as employees who became unemployed, numbered 665,700 in 1988.¹¹

Since women constitute a large portion of the urban labour force, women's participation in economic activities also went up with the present employment policy. The number of working women increased from 600,000 in 1949 to 56 million in 1992 or 38 per cent of the total employment population and further to 44 per cent in 1995 compared to 7.5 per cent in 1949.¹² Another report reveals that in 1990 the employment rate of urban women was 97 per cent, equal to that of men, and the employment rate of rural women was 76 per cent compared to 87 per cent for men.¹³

But the condition of working women is not as good as it seems from these statistics. Women face discrimination at every step throughout their career, from getting a job, keeping the job, getting promotions, in working condition, and untill their retirement and even in getting pensions after retirement. Sexual division of labour is still based on the traditional perception that women are not fit for certain

11. G.H. Jefferson and T.G. Rawski, "Enemployment Policy in Chinese Cities", Modern China, 18(1), 1992, p.46.

12. Beijing Review 38(10), March 6, 1995, p.8 and Beijing Review 37(23), June 6, 1994, p.13.

13. Beijing Review 38(36), Sept. 4, 1995, p.7.

occupations, like jobs in heavy industry and jobs which require tours, and are better suited to some professions like the light industrial sector because of their physiological characteristics. Another deep-rooted notion about women in China is that women cannot be sincere and reliable workers because they will not put their energy entirely in their work as they have the responsibility of housework and childcare. Now that the new economic policy has granted autonomy to the enterprises, enterprise authorities are no more compelled to stick to socialist ideology, and take this new found right as a pretext to deny women employment and exploit women workers by denying them their rightful treatment.¹⁴ In early 80s, those who were unemployed were mainly secondary school graduates and young people who had come back from the countryside after the Cultural Revolution. The Workers' Daily reported that women were 70 per cent of young people waiting for jobs in 1981.¹⁵ This imbalance reflects preferential hiring of men. This has been a problem till date. An extreme case was reported at Teanjin in 1984, where employers recruiting new workers decided to give 97 per cent of jobs to male workers and only 3 per cent to female labour. Even after strong protests from the Women's Federation, Women

14. E. Honig and G.Hershatter, Personal Voices, (Standford: Standford Univ. Press, 1988), pp.253-54.

15. "Zhao Gong zhong bu Ying Zhong Nan Qing Nü (In Recruiting Men Should not be Favoured and Women Slighted)", Workers' Daily, March 7, 1982, p.1.

recruitment percentages did not rise beyond 20 per cent.¹⁶ Women middle school graduates report that they are not outrightly denied jobs but are required to score higher than men for the same post in the same institution.¹⁷ The result is that less women are finally hired. Many work units even request institutes of higher studies not to recommend women students to them. The government remains helpless as there is no particular law which declares this a social offence. On the one hand the government requests work units to recruit women workers and on the other, encourages women to take advantage of their "special strength" i.e., traditional skills like cooking, sewing, laundry work, etc. to start their own business. This is a sympathetic attitude on the government's part, but by encouraging women to concentrate on traditional jobs, it is pushing women backward indirectly. The government is stuck by its own contradictory laws: on the one hand the Constitution guarantees all citizens the right to work, and on the other, the leadership will not take any action against enterprises which deny women employment under the cover of the new economic policy fearing that this will jeopardize the reforms.

16. E. Honig and G. Hershatter, Personal Voices, 1988, pp.244-245.

17. Ibid., p.245.

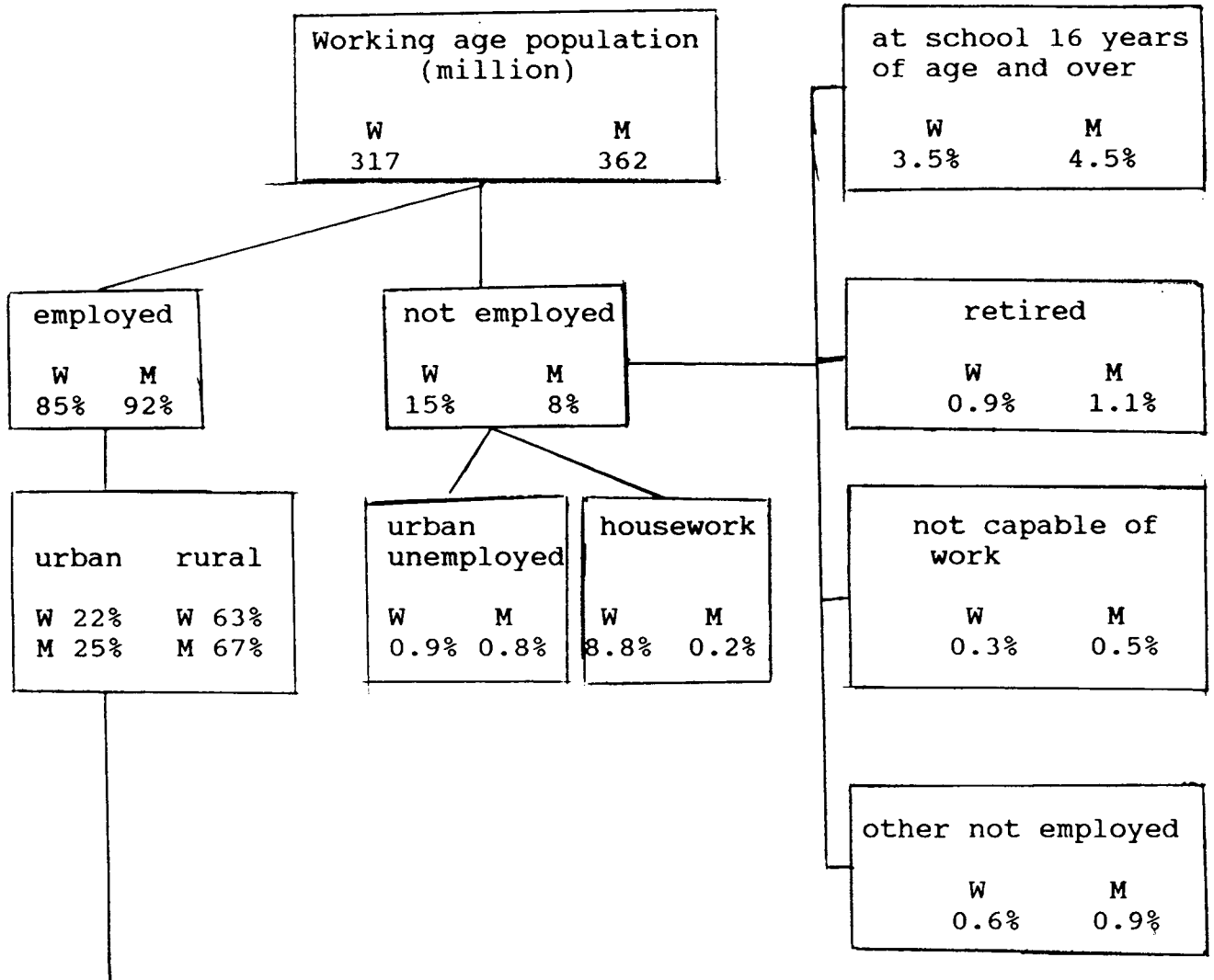
However, there is no doubt that women's employment has increased drastically after the reform and opening up. A breakdown of numbers and the percentage of total employment figures shows that women's employment has increased gradually over the years.¹⁸

| Year | Employment | | % | Administrative personnel | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|-------|------|--------------------------|-------|------|
| | Total | Women | | Total | Women | % |
| 1980 | 104440 | 36980 | 35.4 | 4900 | 790 | 16.1 |
| 1981 | 109400 | 39350 | 36.0 | 5200 | 900 | 17.3 |
| 1982 | 112810 | 40930 | 36.3 | 5770 | 1010 | 17.5 |
| 1983 | 115150 | 41990 | 36.5 | 5910 | 1060 | 17.9 |
| 1984 | 118900 | 43250 | 36.4 | 6690 | 1240 | 18.5 |
| 1985 | 123580 | 45000 | 36.4 | 7180 | 1360 | 18.9 |
| 1986 | 128090 | 46880 | 36.6 | 7700 | 1490 | 19.4 |
| 1987 | 132140 | 48690 | 36.9 | 8050 | 1580 | 19.6 |
| 1988 | 136080 | 50360 | 37.0 | 8420 | 1660 | 19.7 |
| 1989 | 137420 | 51370 | 37.4 | 8850 | 1790 | 20.2 |
| 1990 | 140594 | 52941 | 37.6 | 9287 | 1906 | 20.5 |
| average increa- se rate | 3.02% | 3.65% | | 6.6% | 9.2% | |

Unit : Thousand

18. Pei Qing, "Women: A force in public life", Beijing Review 35(10), March 9, 1992, p.19.

Another break down of population of working age by activity status in the year 1990 shows the male-female ratio for all women aged 16-54 year and men aged 16-59 year.¹⁹



| 16-24 yrs. | | 25-34 yrs. | | 35-44 yrs. | | 45-54 yrs. | | 55-59 yrs. | |
|------------|-----|------------|-----|------------|-----|------------|-----|------------|----|
| W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M | W | M |
| 26.9% | 26% | 26% | 26% | 20% | 21% | 10% | 13% | - | 5% |

19. Beijing Review 38(36), Sept. 4, 1995, p.8.

These statistics show clearly that in terms of male-female ratio of working population, in spite of the initial problem of getting jobs, women's participation is spectacular. This data also reveals that young women prefer to join the workforce rather than pursuing higher education as 29.6 per cent women compared to 26 per cent men of 16-24 age group join workforce. Yet although a majority of women are employed after graduating from middle and senior high schools, with low level skill training and low educational level, whereas more men carry on their higher education, and when they seek jobs, they get preference because of high levels of education and skill training. This affects not only the kind of jobs to which they are assigned but also their status in society and their wages.

It is natural that with low skill, women are assigned jobs in light industry, the service sector and the textile and handicraft industry. Recent statistics published by the government in 1995 show that women employees in the primary industry make up 38.4 per cent of the total number of employees, 42.5 per cent in secondary industry and 49.2 per cent in the tertiary trade. Women workers in the field of commerce, service trade, education, culture and finance constitute more than 45 per cent. In the public health

sector, female workers account for more than 50 per cent of the total employment.²⁰

If we look at the history of female workforce participation in China, we can see that women have always been a minority in heavy industrial sector. In 1978, women formed only 15 per cent of workforce in heavy industries, whereas textile and other light industries absorbed an average of about 69 per cent more than the heavy industrial sector.²¹ The May 1982 issue of Women in China reported that women workers consist of 60 per cent of workforce in the cotton textile, finance and trade sectors they constitute 50 per cent in the light industry sector like instruments and meters, and constitute 30 per cent in sections which include machinery, national defence, posts and telecommunication services, whereas they constitute 21 per cent, 18 per cent and 14 per cent in railway communication, geology and civil construction respectively; coal mining and metallurgy respectively. The one per cent population survey of 1987 further confirmed this trend. The findings showed that women are concentrated in the light industry, commerce and service sector jobs.

20. Beijing Review 38(10), March 6, 1995, p.9.

21. E. Croll, Chinese Women Since Mao, (London: Zed Books, 1983), p.43.

Occupational Composition of Nonagricultural Employment:
Urban China, 1987

| Occupation | Male Distribution (Column %) | Female Distribution (Column %) | Female Share (%) of Total Employment |
|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Professional and Technical (totals) | 13.0 | 19.0 | 50.2 |
| Scientific and technical staff | 3.3 | 1.4 | 22.4 |
| Health and medical staff | 1.4 | 3.4 | 62.8 |
| Accountants, clerks, secretaries, and other white-collar workers | 4.2 | 8.2 | 57.2 |
| Law | 0.2 | 0.1 | 21.2 |
| Teaching | 3.2 | 5.0 | 51.9 |
| Arts, culture, religion | 0.6 | 0.9 | 48.7 |
| Heads of government/Party organizations, and enter- prises (totals) | 10.0 | 2.4 | 14.2 |
| Government | 1.3 | 0.3 | 13.0 |
| Party | 1.8 | 0.6 | 19.3 |
| Enterprises | 6.9 | 1.5 | 13.0 |
| Administrative and poli- tical/security staff (totals) | 7.0 | 4.8 | 32.0 |
| Administrative staff | 4.1 | 2.9 | 32.8 |
| Staff for political and security affairs | 2.3 | 0.8 | 19.4 |
| Postal and other | 0.6 | 1.1 | 57.2 |

Continued on next page...

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---|-----|------|------|------|
| Commerce (totals) | | 8.1 | 12.0 | 50.6 |
| Sales | | 4.5 | 10.9 | 62.5 |
| Purchasing, procurement | | 3.6 | 1.1 | 17.0 |
| Service workers (totals) | | 6.8 | 12.5 | 55.9 |
| Workers in industry, transport, and related activities (totals) | | 52.2 | 44.4 | 37.0 |
| Setion chiefs | | 0.6 | 0.1 | 8.9 |
| Manufacturing and opera- tion of machine tools | | 5.4 | 3.8 | 32.8 |
| Plumbers, welders | | 2.7 | 1.4 | 26.3 |
| Operators of power, load- ing, and transport of equipment | | 11.3 | 2.7 | 14.1 |
| Inspection, testing, measuring | | 1.2 | 4.0 | 68.7 |
| Mining | | 3.0 | 0.7 | 14.4 |
| Metals | | 2.3 | 1.4 | 30.5 |
| Chemicals | | 0.8 | 1.2 | 51.7 |
| Rubber and plastics | | 0.5 | 1.5 | 67.7 |
| Textiles, leather, apparel | | 2.4 | 12.7 | 78.9 |
| Food and tobacco | | 1.6 | 2.2 | 49.1 |
| Wood and paper | | 4.1 | 2.0 | 24.5 |
| Printing | | 0.5 | 1.2 | 63.7 |
| Machine assembly | | 3.6 | 1.2 | 18.9 |
| Electronics | | 3.6 | 2.6 | 33.1 |
| Construction | | 5.2 | 1.5 | 16.7 |
| Workers not classified (totals) | | 2.9 | 5.0 | 54.2 |

SOURCE: 1987 One Percent Population in John Bauer et. al.,
"Gender Inequality in Urban China", 18(3), 1992, p.358.

In 1991, women made up 47 per cent of the total payroll of light industry and service trades, in joint ventures and foreign financial enterprises and institutions, they accounted for more than 50 per cent of the workers and staff. Among the scientists and technicians, women are one third of the total number, but women professors and senior engineers accounted for slightly more than 10 per cent of the total number. In 1989, surprisingly, there were no women in high level political or decision making bodies in either the Party or the government.²²

The tradition of employing women in light industry and the service trade has become very popular at present because of two reasons, namely growth of light industry and the export trade. As a result, women are overrepresented in low wage industries and underrepresented in high paid jobs, as these tables show:²³

| Women economically active (000) | | Estimated economic activity rate | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------|----|------|----|
| 1970 | 1990 | 1970 | | 1990 | |
| | | F | M | F | M |
| 162390 | 283433 | 67 | 90 | 70 | 87 |

22. Beijing Review 34(10), March 11, 1991, p.38.

23. "The World's Women, 1970-90. Trends and Statistics", New York, UN, 1991, p.106; and "The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics", New York, UN, 1995, p.144.

| Adult (15+) economic activity rate(%) | | | | Women as % of adult (15+) labour force | |
|---------------------------------------|----|-----------|----|--|-----------|
| 1980 est. | | 1994 proj | | 1980 est. | 1994 proj |
| F | M | F | M | | |
| 70 | 88 | 70 | 87 | 43 | 43 |

Women per 100 men in occupational groups;

| | adminis- trative and mana- gerial | profes- sional techni- cal and related | cleri- cal & related workers | sales workers | service workers | produc- tion & trans- port workers and la- bourers |
|-------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|--|
| 1970-90 | 12 | - | | 71 | | 55 |
| 1990 census round | 13 | 82 | 35 | 88 | 107 | 56 |

The high percentage of female employment in the professional and technical jobs is however very unusual, as it seems to go against the general trend. Actually, this category covers a lot of professions like scientists, secretarial work, other white collar work, and teaching. Teachers occupy a large position in this category. Female teachers are a majority in primary and pre-school teaching, while only around 10 per cent of all university professors are female. The number of women in the category of

scientists, engineers, managers, heads of organizations and enterprises, heads of party and government organs, etc. are even fewer.²⁴ However womens representation in the medical profession is high compared to their representation in other professional jobs.²⁵

The increase of women employees in state sector industries can be mistaken as an improvement of women's status. There are different sections and different types of jobs in state sector. State owned industries do not imply that they are all heavy industries. China has 11,000 large and medium sized state enterprises.²⁶ Quite a few of them are light industries, where women workers generally are concentrated. Even within the state owned heavy industry all work is not concerned with technical or mechanical skill. There are state primary school teachers and shop clerks who are regarded as underpaid, and are more often women.

24. John Bauer, et.al., "Gender Inequality in Urban China", Modern China, 18(3), 1992, p.357.

25. Ibid.

26. Beijing Review 35(47), Nov.23, 1992, p.6.

Thus, be it state sector, collective sector or private sector, women are employed in jobs which have lower monetary returns.

In 1980, the average wage of workers in state-owned industries was 803 yuan, nearly 30 per cent higher than the collectively owned enterprises' average wage of 624 yuan. Moreover the real value of state sector permanent employee's wage is more than that of a collective sector employee. For example, in 1978 permanent employees in the state-owned enterprises were given subsidized benefits on an average of 526 yuan per worker, which was 82 per cent of the average wage of 644 yuan paid to them in that year.²⁷ Collectively owned enterprises hardly offer such benefits and subsidies. Since women are generally employed in collectively-owned establishments, they naturally tend to lose out in terms of extra benefits like this. Women are heavily underemployed in sectors which offer relatively high wages as shown in the table below:

27. J.P. Emerson, "Urban School Leavers and Unemployment in China", The China Quarterly, No.93, 1983, p.14.

Sectoral Composition of Employment for Staff and Workers, 1987²⁸

| Sector | Male Composition(%) | Female Composition(%) | Sex Ratio (M/F) | Relative Wage |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Agriculture | 6.5 | 6.3 | 1.8 | 0.80 |
| Industry | 42.3 | 50.2 | 1.4 | 1.01 |
| Construction | 9.3 | 4.2 | 3.8 | 1.16 |
| Transportation communication | 7.2 | 3.8 | 3.3 | 1.14 |
| Commerce | 11.2 | 14.8 | 1.3 | 0.88 |
| Public Health | 2.1 | 3.9 | 0.9 | 0.99 |
| Education | 8.2 | 7.8 | 1.8 | 0.97 |
| Government/party organizations | 7.8 | 3.3 | 4.0 | 1.01 |
| Other | 5.4 | 5.7 | 1.7 | - |
| | 100 | 100 | | |

SOURCE: Guojia tongji ju (1988).

According to a survey conducted in 1990, the average monthly income for male and female workers in the urban sector was 193.1 yuan and 149.60 yuan respectively. Thus women earned 77.4 per cent of what men earned.²⁹

28. Bauer, et.al., "Gender Inequality", Modern China, 18(3), 1992, p.357.

29. Beijing Review, 37(23), June 6, 1994, p.14.

In China, there are two categories of wages, one set for government organizations, where there are 30 grades of wages ranging from 30 to 300 yuan, and the other for industrial enterprises. In this later category there are 20 grades, ranging from 34 to 220 yuan.³⁰ This is the reformed wage system. China first adopted its new wage system in 1956 under Soviet guidance. Administrative personnel were graded into 30 salary grades, technicians into 18 grades, industrial workers into 8 grades and so forth. In the post-Mao period, these grades were reclassified into 20, 17 and 8 grades respectively.³¹ Since women are more often employed as industrial workers, they fall into the lowest wage grade. Even in this eight grade scale, women cluster in lower wage grades. For the wage scale of workers, each job title is assigned a grade, and these are based on various factors like education, skill-training, experience etc. First grade workers are generally new comers, most of them are middle-school graduates and are called 'helpers' or 'apprentices'. After a year's probation, they are promoted to second grade. Promotions to higher grades depend on workers' skill, training, education and experience. It is here that women workers tend to lose out. Since women join the

30. Rosalie L. Tung, Chinese Industrial Society After Mao, (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1982), p.184.

31. M.K. Whyte and W.L. Parish, Urban Life in Contemporary China, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), p.43.

workforce right after graduating from middle school, their education and skill training is low. Though workers can improve their skill through various part time courses at colleges, night colleges, and tube universities, women workers in general become less interested in developing their skill and they become satisfied with their job. This is generally the case with married women. The general attitude of these women workers towards success is finding the job itself, they are less interested in taking examinations for promotion. Looking after their family takes preference over competition to move up in their career.³²

Women also do not want to go to work at the grassroots level, whereas men are more mobile. Some educated women are quoted as saying that even though we are fully aware that some work-units are inaccessible to us, we still have no desire to work at the grass root level.³³ They fear that if they work at the grassroots level, they have almost no chance to be promoted to higher levels in organizations when they return. However, it is not that women workers prefer to work at higher levels in government organizations. The reluctance to join government office is mainly due to the stress on

32. M.R. Weeks, "Virtuous Wives and Kind Mothers: Concept of Women in Urban China", Women's Studies International Forum 12(5), 1989, pp.510-511.

33. "Women, Education and Employment", Chinese Education 22(2), Summer 1989, pp.18-19.

effectiveness.³⁴ However, women think it is still a better option than to go and work at the grassroots level.

These reasons motivate women not to join higher posts in government offices. Non government enterprises have all along shown a preference for male workers, especially in high posts. In a majority of enterprises, even if women work as high ranking officials, they look after women's work, or hold a position which has less career opportunity.³⁵

All these factors taken together - low level of skill-training, lack of ambition, reluctance to move from their home town, and gender bias against women workers result in the fact that women in post-Mao China are clustered in low wage and low status jobs.

BENEFITS:

In January 1980, All China Federation of Trade Unions held a special meeting in Beijing on work among women. It called on the trade union organisations at various levels to pay attention to the difficulties of women workers, speak for them and help them solve their particular problems. These

34. Ibid.

35. M. Dalsimer and L. Nisonoff, "The New Economic Readjustment Policies: Implications for Urban Working Women", Review of Radical Political Economics, 16(1), 1984, p.31.

include health and labour protection of women workers, help run the kindergartens, nurseries and canteens and socializing household chores step by step so as to lighten the women workers' burden, help them in regard to love, marriage and family planning and oppose any instance of discrimination against women or harming their interests. After one decade a coordinating committee on women and children in the state council was set up in 1990. With 20 state agencies on the committee, it has more power and authority than the All China Women's Federation. The coordination committee became the working committee of the state council on women and children in 1994. Its work is to coordinate the implementation of the law protecting women's rights and interests. The AWCF and the Women's Committee of the Workers' Trade Union also worked to set up "Special reproductive funds" in 38 cities and Counties by 1991 to help solve problems women face in employment due to maternity-related issues. Recently, a new law on the protection of the rights and interests of women took effect on October 1, 1993.³⁶

The focus of all these laws, and meetings speak volumes about the situation of working women after the launching of reform and opening up policies.

36. Nai Huazhuang and Wu Xu, "The Women's Movement in a Changing China" in A. Basu (ed.) The Challenge of Local Feminism, (Westview: Boulder, 1995), p.34.

With economic development as the top priority and ideology occupying a back seat, the community feeling of the past is gone and an environment of tough competition for profit earning has emerged. As a result, factory workers, specially women workers tend to lose out on the protection they used to enjoy earlier. Though the Chinese government stresses the importance of ideology, it seems difficult to balance the current economic policies and gender equality. With enterprise authorities chasing profits, women at the lowest rung of job and wage scales increasingly fall prey to discrimination in the workplace.

Besides low waged employment, Chinese women in post-Mao China face another challenge - lack of proper benefits at work. The evidence presented so far reveals that women workers in post-Mao China are channelled into traditional, low-skilled and low waged jobs. What is of additional interest is whether the process of structural adjustment created factors which determine and influence the levels of benefits and second, whether urban working women are availing the benefits they are entitled to receive.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the government has taken many measures to ensure good working conditions for women workers in Chinese factories. In post-Mao China, however, benefits at work

depends on various factors, such as size and ownership of an enterprise, emphasis on profitability, efficiency and competitiveness in the newly emergent market place.

Urban employment sector in China is of three kinds: state, collective and individual. State sector industries are primarily administered by the central bureaus during the Five Year Plans, they are generally big in size and more capital intensive. They enjoy financial subsidies from the government and also have easy access to credit and raw materials. As a result, these enterprises provide good wage scales compared to other sectors, and also provide subsidized services to their workers like transportation, schools, health care, housing, childcare, sick leave, vacations, non staple food subsidies and other facilities. The huge state investment allows the state sector to offer a satisfactory wage, promotion and pension scales. The most important aspect in state sector jobs is that they are more or less secured for a lifetime. The collective sector cannot provide comparative services to their employees primarily because of less capital. The collective sector is usually a smaller enterprise, enjoys lower but usually a unified wage, and fewer services in the welfare system. Since collective sector has less capital, services in this sector are subsidized to a lesser extent. The individual sector comprises of small firms. Most of them operate with small loans from the state and municipalities and are far less advantageous in terms of

wages and benefits. Thus the sector in which a worker is employed determines the amount of wages and facilities received. Comparatively big collective enterprises also provide better services but the number of big collective enterprises are few. As a majority of urban women are employed in collective sector, some in state owned light industries and far less in the state owned heavy industrial sector, women workers naturally do not get the best service facilities available in China.³⁷

Another factor which further influences the nature of benefit for women workers is the freedom of enterprise authorities to hire and fire their employees and the freedom to utilise the surplus profit as they wish. These policies contain major loopholes which allow them to be used against women by denying them full employment and proper benefits. The bias against the employment of women, based on notions of their biological constraints, the social pressures of home-making and child rearing that makes them "unreliable" as long-term labour in whom skill enhancement investments can be made, allow enterprises to make arguments for not hiring women in the name of the new found shibboleths of efficiency and profitability. Married women workers in particular, are

37. John Bauer et. al. "Gender Inequality", Modern China, 18(3), 1992, p.358; E. Croll, Chinese Women Since Mao, (London: Zed Books, 1983), p.43.

seen as an unnecessary financial burden on the enterprises. Employing a married woman means spending enterprise's money to establish a nursery or kindergarten and providing other facilities like maternity leave, breaks for feeding babies etc. which means a loss of working hours. Since under the new economic policy, enterprises are free to utilise their profits, enterprises in general wish to diversify rather than provide better facilities to women workers. This trend is common to the collective sector, but state owned industries provide better working conditions with the support of government fund.

The argument against benefits is one reason why work units constantly request labour bureaus not to recommend women workers to them. Under the insistence of labour bureaus, enterprises so far have not been able to stop women from entering work units. They, however, use various means to limit women's employment. First, they tend to employ women as temporary workers and lay them off frequently. Sometimes factory managers or directors just dismiss women from work if they feel they need to reduce staff. In many cases, if the enterprise feels it does not have much fund, older women are told to take premature retirement, sometimes even at a lower percentage of their wages instead of the 70 per cent they

would receive at the age of 50, the normal retirement age for women.³⁸

The contract labour system initiated in the late 1980s has given work units the right to enter into contracts with workers for a certain period or for a certain production quota. Enterprises employ women as contract workers. Contracts are not renewed in many cases. Work units then argue that it is not possible to provide extensive benefits to temporary workers. The problem is particularly acute in sectors where women are employed in large number of collectives, specially cotton, textile mills. 1995 statistics show that Shanghai city alone has more than 300,000 unemployed women.³⁹ According to an investigation by the department of women workers of the All China Federation of Trade Union, in 52 enterprises in Jiangxi Province, 1,217 women workers had lost their jobs because of motherhood. This amounted to 53.7 per cent of laid off young women workers.⁴⁰ Frequent dismissal of women workers prevents women workers from attaining full employment.

38. John Woodruff, China in Search of Its Future, (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1989), p.120.

39. Beijing Review 38(44), Oct. 30, 1995, pp.8-10.

40. Beijing Review 38(10), March 6, 1995, p.10.

As a remedy, the government has implemented a re-employment project, to find appropriate positions for redundant workers. An unemployment insurance system has been introduced to guarantee basic necessities for the unemployed and promote re-employment in 1992. The new scheme increased the annual unemployment insurance fund from 480 million yuan to 1 billion yuan in 1992. The new scheme expanded the number of beneficiaries from the previous four types of state enterprises stipulated in 1986 under the measure of providing unemployment, security to four kinds of jobless people affected by bankruptcy, business cutbacks by the government, the expiry of labour contracts, and other business closures to all workers who lose jobs for whatever reason.

The government has also established nationwide unemployment protection net for all urban job seekers in the 1990s, which include those laid off from collectives, and foreign invested and privately run business. According to official data, in 1994, 1.87 million people received unemployment benefits, a number equal to the total in the seven years since the programme was launched. But the number of laid off workers is much more than those of reemployed and those availing unemployment security (3 million in 1994). The government is finding it difficult to re-employ unemployed

workers because many of them possess inadequate skills for the modern workplace.⁴¹

As far as material incentives in the industrial workplace is concerned, women workers are again at the losing end. At present there are three types of material incentives in the industrial workplace. In all these three systems, a reasonable quota for productivity is set. If the worker exceeds the quota, he or she receives extra wages. The bonus system is based on an annual quota, if the quota is surpassed, a worker can receive two months' wages as reward. In the floating wage system, a worker's wages can be raised if he or she surpasses the quota. The piece-rate incentive operates in the same way, but the quota however is set not on an annual basis, but for each piece of product. Since the bonus and floating wage systems are relative to fixed wage workers, women workers, who already earn a low wage earn small amounts of money by their extra work, whereas men, whose wage is higher, earn more for the same amount of work. This undermines the government's/enterprise's claim to equality in the disbursement of bonus and incentives. However, these incentives have still to gain wider currency as they are still in the primary stage.

41. Beijing Review 33(48), Oct. 30, 1995, pp.8-10.

The government is trying hard to minimise discrimination and lack of benefit in the workplace for women workers. Maternity leave in China before 1988 was granted for 56 days at full wages.⁴² The Act to Protect Female Staff and Workers' passed by the State Council, effective September 1, 1988, stipulates that female workers in state-owned enterprises and agencies receive 90 days maternity leave and receive two thirty-minute breaks during working hours each day for breast feeding during the child's first year. All work units with large numbers of female employees are required to provide child care facilities.

In practice, urban women can receive leave up to one-half year if they accept the one-child certificate.⁴³ According to a survey 85.3% of the child-bearing female workers and staff members in urban areas are given three months of paid maternity leave, while some units have extended the leave to six months. The women workers also have their workload and working hours reduced. Most state owned enterprises where women predominate have established

42. "The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics", New York, UN, 1995, p.139.

43. John Bauer et. al., "Gender Inequality in Urban China", Modern China 18(3), 1992, p.367.

gynaecological clinics, rest rooms for pregnant women, a breast feeding room, nurseries and kindergartens.⁴⁴

Here again, the facilities are restricted to state owned industries. In fact, the government has right to implement these measures only in state owned industries, and it cannot force other collective and private enterprises because they enjoy autonomy. The government can only request the work units to implement the Act. Many work units which have provided benefits find other ways to exploit women. In many factories during pregnancy women are given lighter jobs which fetch low wages and even for long periods after childbirth women are not returned to their original positions. Thus, if women workers avail the pregnant time facility, they end up in even lower paying jobs, so that child bearing finally has punitive effects.

The inferiority complex and the lack of competitiveness of women workers becomes another factor for enterprise discrimination. The urban workplace, specially the collective and private sectors, expects a tough competitive attitude and hard work for upward mobility. But women workers prefer less competitive and stressful employment and are less concerned with success in their careers. An investigation into female

44. Beijing Review 37(23), June 6, 1994, p.14 and Beijing Review 38(10), March 6, 1995, p.8.

employees conducted by the Federation of Trade Unions of Hubei Province in 1993 showed that 90 per cent of women workers preferred to work in state owned industries which offer better job guarantees opting for security over upward mobility. The low educational level also contributes to employment difficulties and hence they land up in an unfavourable position in a competitive job market.

Finally, the laws passed by the government contain, in their provisions and wordings, undertones of paternalism. In the seeming interest of women, they restrict women's right to work after a certain age. The law for retirement, for instance, require that women retire earlier than men.⁴⁵ It is significant for the way in which women perceive themselves in Chinese society and for their perception of the relation between the state and themselves that no women's organization has sought to unveil the paternalism that restricts their right to articulate their interests.

45. Working age for male is 15-59 years, and for female 15-54 years. Beijing Review 27(20), May 14, 1984, p.24.

CONCLUSION

This study is an attempt to understand the situation of Chinese women within the present context of economic transformation from planned to a market oriented economy.

Beginning in 1978, China slowly adopted the structural adjustment policies launched and supervised by the WB and the IMF to overcome the economic crisis of the developing countries. While the supporting and contesting groups of the structural adjustment policies debate the implications of these policies for the country's economic development, both groups acknowledge its negative implications for women. It is held that the structural adjustment policies create discrimination in education, training, hiring and remuneration, promotion, and horizontal mobility practices. They also create inflexible working conditions, lack of access to productive resources and inadequate sharing of family responsibilities, combined with a lack of or insufficient services such as childcare. They also restrict employment, economic, professional and other opportunities and mobility for women and make their involvement in economic activities stressful.¹

1. "The World's Women 1995: Trend and Statistics", New York, UN., 1995.

This is a general phenomenon in almost all the developing countries. This study attempts to examine this hypothesis in the field of education and employment of urban Chinese women.

The examination of gender inequality in China is particularly interesting because of the effect of economic policies on it. The Chinese Marxists believed that the origin of women's oppression lay in capitalist and patriarchal exploitation. As a remedy, they subscribed to socialisation of housework and women's active participation in economic production. However, throughout the Maoist period, China found it difficult to stick to its own ideology and constantly compromised with reality. Whenever Chinese women were brought into the labourforce, it was on an unequal basis. Women were viewed as the helping hand of male workers. They were not given their due identity. An important reason was women's low level of education and skill, and traditional attitude of 'nan zhong nü qing' (girls are inferior to boys). Special attention was given to women's education but the political and ideological struggles within China restricted the extent to which gender inequalities could be tackled. Yet women's interests were largely taken care of by work units.

When we compare the situation of women in Maoist and post-Mao period, we come to the conclusion that the present

modernization process has had more of negative impact on women than a positive one. Employment for women has increased under the current policy of reform. But employment cannot be assessed only in terms of the number of jobs. The same goes for education. The review of data indicates that the quality of the employment available and the fields of study for women are far from satisfactory.

Education is considered a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Statistics reveal that when the number of illiterate women is decreasing day by day, specially in urban China, women's presence in higher education is still very low. A majority of women join vocational schools to acquire low and mid-level skills. This education brings them jobs but provides them neither with high wages nor prestige. Moreover, it creates excuses for employers to dismiss them on the grounds of low skills and resulting lower efficiency. In higher education, women are either forced to opt for non-professional courses because of the notion that women are not well suited to scientific and technical fields, or they are outrightly denied the opportunity to study by fixing high requirements for admission compared to male students.²

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2. M.R. Weeks, "Virtuous Wives and Kind Mothers", Women's Studies International Forum, 12(5), 1989, p.514; Ju Nin, "My Perception on the Discrepancy", Chinese Education and Society, 26(2), 1993, p.52.

Sometimes women themselves choose to study "soft" subjects. This attitude has been criticized by scholars as a 'bias in terms of the cultural qualities on the part of the women candidates themselves, or a trend toward a weaker mental quality.³ It may be unrealistic to think all women, who get a chance to pursue higher study should opt for technical education to elevate their status in society. Yet those who wish to pursue technical courses should not be barred from studying technical subjects on the basis of social bias. Chinese society today does not have high expectations from women seeking higher education. The traditional social notions of women's place and work are still present in society.

The reform policies, to a great extent are responsible for the continuation of this attitude. With the sole motive of profit earning, the concern with gender equality in the work place has taken a backseat. Women pay the biggest price in this situation. Employing women means providing various facilities to facilitate their work. As a way out of providing these facilities, enterprises avoid employing women workers. But women workers are necessary as docile and cheap labour. So work units employ women as temporary, part-time or contract labour. In this way, they get the services of women

3. Ju Ning, "My Perception on the Discrepancy", p.54.

workers and at the same time avoid providing facilities on the ground that benefits and services are for permanent workers. In the Maoist period, women joined the workforce with the assurance that their interests would be protected. Even smaller work units provided basic facilities and job security. However, in Dengist China, women cluster in traditional female oriented enterprises, where the wages are low. Everywhere women and men start with fairly similarly wage levels, but at later stages men progress into higher brackets of wages due to higher skills, whereas women do not.

Since the PRC government is actively promoting market oriented economic policies, this situation is likely to continue and as a result, women will continue to be discriminated against in the workplace and in educational institutions like their counterparts the world over.

Significantly, the rate of women's employment in China is higher than in other developing and even some developed countries.⁴ The leadership projects this fact as a sign of development and the high status of women in China. But the fact remains that China's working women, under the discriminatory employment system, will continue to be oppressed in future.

4. Xue Wensheng et.al., "Dual Burden: East and West (Women's Working Lives in China, Japan and Great Britain)", International Sociology, 8(2), 1992, pp.222-224; Beijing Review, 38(10), March 6, 1995, pp.8-16.

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