

**CHINA  
COUNTRY GENDER REVIEW  
WORLD BANK**



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## CHINA COUNTRY GENDER REVIEW

### Country Gender Reviews (CGRs)

The Bank seeks to integrate gender analysis into World Bank Economic and Sector Work (ESW), Country Assistance Strategies (CASs) and projects (World Bank 1999a) because evidence has mounted that countries that discriminate on the basis of gender tend to have greater poverty, slower economic growth, weaker governance and a lower quality of life. Conversely, gender equality is conducive to poverty reduction and economic growth (World Bank 2000a). Therefore, the Bank is preparing Country Gender Reviews which identify and analyze priority gender issues constraining development. They will be available for ESW, CAS and project task managers and staff who often lack resources to research gender concerns (Zuckerman 2000).

### Introduction

Since 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has sought to change the unequal relationship between men and women and to provide legal protection for women. In many ways, women's status has improved over the last 50 years. Some of the most pernicious manifestations of gender inequality such as binding women's feet have been eradicated. Women have been provided access to education and the political process, long denied them. But deeply entrenched patriarchal customs, such as the preference for a boy-child and inferior treatment of girls in rural families, persist. Other backward gender practices thought to have been eradicated during the Mao era have been reemerging during the transition from a state to a market economy, including female infanticide, trafficking in young girls and prostitution. At the same time, the transition to a market economy has permitted women to become successful entrepreneurs. There are many complexities to China's gender situation.

China's laws guaranteeing and promoting gender equality are enlightened by any standards and could serve as a benchmark for other countries striving for gender equality. Under Chinese law, equal rights for women and men are guaranteed in access to employment, equal pay, compulsory education, political participation, property, marriage and health. Trafficking and kidnapping women and prostitution are prohibited. Affirmative action programs exist to realize gender equality. But it is easier to enact laws than to implement them. This report addresses the gender implications of these legal issues and of access to the labor market, education and health services, vulnerability to violence and political participation. These were the issues identified by stakeholders as the thorniest gender gaps in China today.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These priorities identified by stakeholders do not constitute a comprehensive list of issues with gender implications in China and they are not in a priority order since they are all important.



## Methodology

This report, a desk study, is based on the following elements:

- ◆ **Stakeholder consultation.** China gender specialists, especially in-country, including leaders of the All China Women's Federation (ACWF), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women's studies centers and others were each asked to identify about a half dozen most critical gender priorities.<sup>2</sup> Then the Bank East Asia and Pacific Region (EAP) gender coordinator, the Beijing country office Gender Specialist, and staff of the Poverty Reduction and Economic Management, Gender and Development Group (PRMGE) and other units were consulted about the stakeholders' priorities. Bank staff endorsed the stakeholders' priorities and requested that the framework for the CGR analysis be the transition from a state to a market economy.
- ◆ **Data collection.** Extensive sex-disaggregated data were collected, reflected to some extent in the CGR graphs and data contained in the report. We also compiled a set of more extensive China Gender Statistics and prepared additional China Gender Graphs available in the Background Documents listed at the end of the CGR. Data were collected from government, civil society, international agency and academic publications and studies. The bulk of the data consist of official statistics, which even government officials claim are often unreliable. There are large gaps in the sex-disaggregated data available. For example, consumption and welfare data have not been collected in terms of intra-household distribution so it is impossible to know if men or women and girls or boys receive more or less education, nutrition and health care. Poverty in China has been measured down to the county level, rarely down to the household level and hardly within the household where the most meaningful sex-disaggregated individual data would exist. At EAP's suggestion, gender information was sought in newspapers to complement official statistics. *It is recommended that future gender data collection attempts to redress the intra-household data gap.*
- ◆ **Literature research.** Library and web publications and documents prepared for the Beijing Plus Five Symposium were reviewed. Detailed analyses of each of the priority gender issues discussed below are available in the Background Documents listed at the CGR end. In addition, stories documenting gender issues from the press were collected provide a qualitative complement to the quantitative data collected. Examples are presented in boxes.
- ◆ **Bank portfolio analysis.** A portfolio analysis assessed the extent of gender integration in the China CAS, ESW and a sample of projects. The CGR contains a summary of this analysis. The detailed portfolio analysis is available in the Background Documents listed at the CGR end.

China is a vast multifaceted country. Given limited resources, this review discussed national trends and provides a few local examples but it could not capture the many different regional and minority nationality nuances coexisting in China. *It is recommended that the next phase of the China CGR work encompass fieldwork to collect and present some local gender variations. Fieldwork is also important to complement this report's quantitative data with qualitative data collected in interviews and focus groups. Fieldwork would broaden the participatory nature of the report by including views of the most important stakeholders, the ultimate beneficiaries of government and Bank interventions. Deeper stakeholder participation which fieldwork permits is recommended for all CGRs*

The EAP region requested that the China CGR be around 15 pages to facilitate its use by country officers, task team leaders and other clients. More detailed information about gender issues in China is available in the Background Documents listed at the end of the report.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A full list of stakeholders consulted is contained in the Background Documents available at <http://worldbank.org/gender/cgr/>.

<sup>3</sup> All background materials are available electronically at <http://worldbank.org/gender/cgr/>.



## Poverty and Gender

In the last twenty years, China has experienced a tremendous decline in **overall** poverty (World Bank 2000c) but little is known about its gender-differentiated effects. Generally, poverty reduction and economic development tend to reduce gender disparities (World Bank 2000a). If this general principle applies to China, then its gender gaps should be narrowing. During the 1980s and 1990s, GDP growth exceeded 10 percent annually. Indeed, spurred by rapid economic growth and market liberalization, millions of Chinese were lifted out of poverty.

How extensive is Chinese poverty, where is it concentrated and are women overrepresented among China's poor? It is easier to answer the first two questions than the third. Although there is no consensus on the extent of poverty, the two main views agree that it has decreased dramatically over the last 20 years. In rural areas, where 70 percent of the population resides and most of the poor are concentrated, government statistics suggest that poverty declined from 30 percent of the population in 1978 to less than 5 percent by the end of 1998, while World Bank measurements indicate that poverty declined to 11.5 percent during this period. All studies concur that poverty is increasingly concentrated in the Western provinces, especially in the remoter mountainous counties, townships and villages (World Bank 2000c; Nyberg & Rozelle 1999).<sup>4</sup> Whereas less than half of China's poor lived in the Western region in the late 1980s, by the mid-1990s, the proportion reached more than two thirds (World Bank 2000c). Ethnic minorities compose a disproportionate number of the poor. Although they represent less than 9 percent of the total population, they account for some 40 percent of the absolute poor who live in the deepest poverty.<sup>5</sup>

With few exceptions, most argue that women are not overrepresented among China's poor (Nyberg & Rozelle 1999; World Bank 2000c). However, sparse or no data substantiate this position. Existing Chinese poverty data at best disaggregate to the household level but more commonly only to the county level. The assumption that households pool income and allocate resources for consumption, production and investment equitably obscures differences in income distribution between males and females within the household (World Bank 2000a). To truly measure the gender dimensions of poverty requires sex-disaggregated welfare measures such as nutrition intake. In China and in most countries, it is difficult to estimate the number of individual men and women living in poverty for lack of these data.

Although sex-disaggregated consumption and welfare data are lacking, there is evidence that illiteracy and lack of education are concentrated among Chinese women and girls in poor counties (World Bank 1999b). In many of the poorest villages, nearly all girls and about half of the boys do not attend school and remain illiterate (World Bank 2000c). There is also evidence that girls in poor areas obtain less health care and less nutritious foods than boys (Zia 2000). Moreover, China's female suicide rate, the highest in the world -- five times the world average -- mainly reflects the deep misery poor rural women suffer.

Since poverty is multifaceted, based on elements including poor health, illiteracy, low education levels, low income and social and psychological insecurity, it appears that Chinese women might be overrepresented among the poor. To verify or negate this hypothesis, *it is recommended that future household surveys, to the extent feasible, collect sex disaggregated data.*

<sup>4</sup> Townships have populations over 3,000 with more than 70 percent of them non-agricultural or populations over 2,500 with more than 85 percent of them non-agricultural. China has some 2,275 counties covering rural populations living outside of cities and towns (Division of Administrative Areas in China).

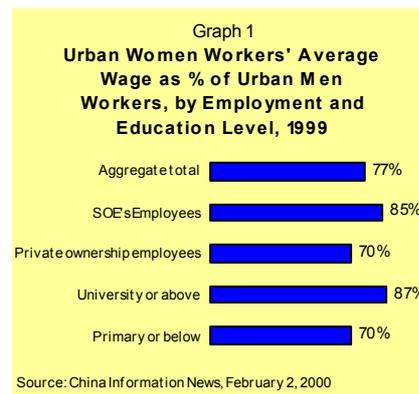
<sup>5</sup> Minority autonomous counties accounted for three quarters of all nationally designated poor counties with annual per capita incomes below 400 yuan (US\$48.32) and more than four fifths of nationally designated poor counties with annual per capita income under 300 yuan (US\$36.24).



Even if Chinese women or men are not disproportionately represented among the poor, since poverty is experienced differently by men and women, effective poverty reduction strategies must be based on the different constraints and needs of men and women. The remainder of this paper examines the priority gender gaps identified for this review by stakeholders. *China's poverty reduction strategies and Bank-supported operations should address these poverty-related gender priority issues.*

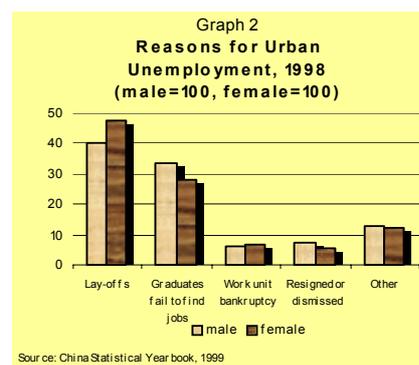
## Labor Markets

China has achieved greater female participation and gender equality in the workplace than have many other countries. Women currently comprise 46 percent of the workforce, up from 44 percent in 1982 (China Daily, May 13, 2000; United Nations 1997). Women received 80 percent of the pay men received in the rural industrial sector in 1985 and 88 percent of men's pay in the state sector in 1987 (World Bank 2000b). However, the income gap has been increasing since then with deepening labor market liberalization. By 1990, women earned 83 percent of men's pay and by 1999 only 77 percent (Graph 1). Men have consistently occupied most managerial and higher skilled positions. The share of female administrators and managers was under 12 percent in 1997 (UNDP 1997).



As labor markets have liberalized during the last 20 years of transition from a state to a market economy, there have been deeply felt gender-differentiated effects including:

- ◆ A competitive labor market has replaced the Mao era “iron rice bowl” that provided lifetime employment with guaranteed welfare benefits including housing, health care, education, generous, early pensions and amenities.<sup>6</sup> Conforming to global trends, the transition has spurred contractual, temporary and informal sector jobs lacking social protection.
- ◆ State affirmative action policies have receded while traditional gender stereotypes and values have reemerged including increasing gender discrimination in the labor market. During the transition, women have had a harder time than men obtaining and keeping jobs. Job ads often specify men or young, attractive women although such job discrimination flaunts the 1992 Women's Law (see Legal Protection below). Official statistics indicate that in 1998, some 48 females were laid off for every 40 males laid off (Graph 2).
- ◆ Migration in search for better paying jobs, virtually prohibited during the Mao era,<sup>7</sup> took off during the 1980s market opening. By the 1990s, close to 70 million rural people had migrated to the cities for jobs, about two thirds of them men and one third women (Graph 3). Today, the estimated migrant population exceeds 100 million (Washington Times, July 14, 2000). Recently the rate of female out-

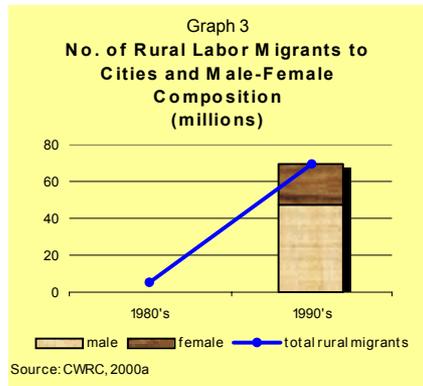


<sup>6</sup> Chinese workers in State-owned-enterprises received amenities such as soap, toilet paper and even theater tickets, which work units distributed to employees on a rotation basis.

<sup>7</sup> Migration controls were enforced through the Residence Permit system. Food, housing and other basic needs could only be obtained in the locality stamped in one's Residence Permit.



migration surpassed that of males although the absolute number of male migrants exceeds that of females (Nyberg & Rozelle 1999). Male migrants tend to work in construction and heavy industry while female migrants predominate in services and light manufacturing including domestic work,



- ◆ textiles, food-processing, electronics and other labor-intensive industries (Huang 1999). The female jobs are usually filled by rural women who work in township and village enterprises (TVEs) or rural unmarried girls who work in coastal, export-oriented industries for a couple of years and then return home (UNDP 1999b).
- ◆ Agriculture is becoming feminized because heavy rural male migration to cities leaves women in charge of the family farm (Judd 1990; Kerr 1996; UNDP 1999b). Male migrants earn significantly more than do women farmers, widening the earnings gap between the two genders (Kerr 1996). However, women left on the farm are not necessarily poorer than migrant men since

husbands send substantial remittances back home. But women's heavier agricultural workload has exacerbated the tensions between women's productive and reproductive roles and is considered one of the causes of Chinese women's extraordinarily high suicide rate (See Violence below; China Daily, May 4, 2000).

- ◆ In the Mao era, all jobs were assigned by the government. In contrast, today women and men compete for the same jobs in the public and private sectors and both can become entrepreneurs. In the competitive labor market, women are disadvantaged by less education, fewer skills and lower social status than men (Croll 1995). Still, women constituted 39 percent of the self-employed and 35 percent of owners of private and individual businesses by 1996 (UNDP 1999b).
- ◆ Although women compose almost 40 percent of the self employed and half of farmers, they have much less access to credit than men (Rahman 1995; Cabral 1998; Du 2000). Men borrow most formal sector credit and until recently borrowed the majority of informal sector loans. Today, in contrast, two thirds of informal credit borrowers are women (Tsai 2000). Microcredit programs targeted to women so far consist of scattered small-scale pilots (Jiang 1997a; Du 2000).<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ Women bear the brunt of layoffs in downsized and shuttered state-owned-enterprises (SOEs). It is estimated that women constitute between 60-70 percent of those laid off (Human Rights in China 1999a; Kerr 1996). For example, in heavily industrialized Liaoning Province, 62 percent of the nearly one million 1998 layoffs were women (China Women's News, April 18, 2000). Some 30 million SOE workers were laid off in 1998-99 and another 10 million are expected to lose their jobs in 2000 (Washington Post, March 30, 2000).

## Education

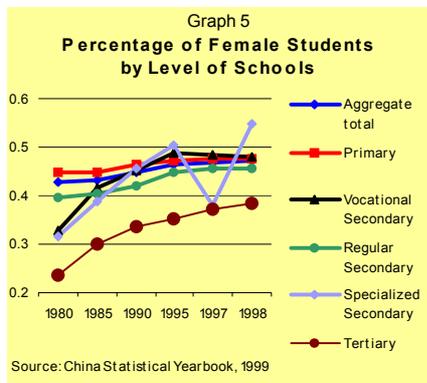
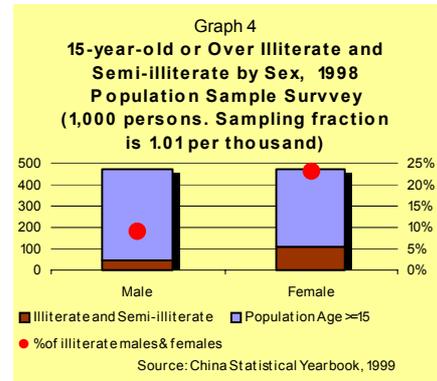
Employment and income tend to be commensurate with education, "abilities" and skills. The traditional Chinese view that women do not belong in the workplace is captured in the old Chinese saying, "For a woman to be without ability is a virtue" (Croll 1995). To overturn such thinking, in the last half century the Chinese government has promoted education for all to develop everyone's abilities. It has financed continuous anti-illiteracy campaigns and required parents to enroll all sons and daughters in school. The 1988 Regulation for Eliminating Illiteracy, the 1986 Law of Compulsory Education, and the 1995 Education Law, all emphasize gender equality. There has been marked progress in reducing illiteracy and raising school enrolment and completion levels.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Michael Goldberg of CGAP, May 30, 2000.



Illiteracy has not yet been eliminated. It is mostly a rural problem and it affects women more than men. Some 70 percent of China's 240 million illiterates or semi-illiterates are women (China Women's News, April 11, 2000). But illiteracy is being reduced among younger cohorts. Whereas 42 percent of Chinese women over 25 were illiterate in 1990, under 26 percent of women over 15 were illiterate in 1998. This compared to 9 percent illiterate men over 15 years in 1998 (WISTAT 1994 and Graph 4).

School enrolment rates have climbed steadily and gender imbalances in education are declining. By 1998, 99 percent of all children were enrolled in primary school of which 48 percent were girls (Graph 5). In secondary school, 46 percent of pupils were girls and in tertiary school 39 percent



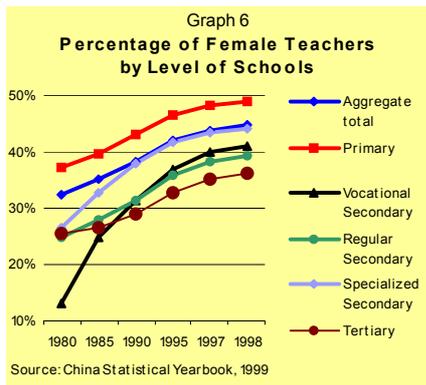
of students were girls. While girl's enrolment still lags, the gender gaps are declining. Almost no gap remains in vocational schools where girls constitute 48 percent or almost half of all students. However, vocational training curricula still reflect gender stereotypes. Girls typically learn service sector skills including languages, secretarial tasks, hotel administration, catering, waitressing and housekeeping while boys tend to study industrial trades.

High enrolment data mask high dropout rates, particularly of girls (Jacka 1997; Meng 1996). There are several reasons behind girls' higher dropout rates. Since the government imposed tuition fees on all parents beginning in the mid-1990s, poorer rural parents

have spent fewer of their meager resources on daughters, whom they consider to be a bad investment or "goods on which one loses," than on sons (Pearson 1995; Human Rights In China 1999c). Rural girls move to their husband's family sometimes in far-away villages, yielding no private returns to their own parents. Another reason for female dropouts is the increasing employment available for teenage girls to work as domestics in better-off households, in rural townships and village enterprises (TVEs) and in urban enterprises (Meng 1996; Zhang 1999). Female dropouts are such a great problem that non-government charitable programs, like the Spring Bud Project of the All China Women's Federation (ACWF), provide financing for keeping girls from poor families in school.<sup>9</sup> Spring Bud, however, only reaches a minority of dropouts. Project Hope, initiated by the quasi-governmental China Youth Development Foundation, has raised funds from diverse sources including multinational companies like Coca-Cola and Unilever, to bring dropouts back to school and improve learning conditions in poor areas (New York Times, November 1, 1999).

In urban areas, where gender biases have diminished, parents send all their children to school, regardless of sex. An exception might be some daughters among the estimated 100 million poor rural-to-urban migrants (Washington Times, July 14, 2000). Because of lack of parental resources and schools for migrants, compounded by traditional biases, poor migrant parents might be likelier to keep sons than daughters in school.

<sup>9</sup> The All China Women's Federation (ACWF) is described in the last paragraph of Political Participation below.



A positive indicator for future education trends is that the gender gap among school teachers has been decreasing. In 1998, female teachers comprised 47 percent of primary and 36 percent of secondary schools teachers compared to 37 percent and 25 percent respectively in 1980 (World Bank 2000b). Women continue to constitute almost all (94 percent) of pre-school teachers (China Women's News, April 11, 2000). Major progress has been made in the female share of tertiary level teachers which has increased from 24 percent in 1980 to 37 percent in 1998 (Graph 6). The continuing increases in female education provide optimism for reducing gender gaps in China.

### Legal Protection

Post-1949 China has legislated near gender equality, but millennia of social norms cannot be erased by legislation alone. In China, where a legal system itself is a new phenomenon, the rule of law is slowly taking root but lags behind the creation of a body of law. New gender laws are thinly rooted while traditional gender stratification is deeply entrenched. Women defer to men in a myriad of ways. For example, the tradition of rural brides moving to husbands often distant villages upon marriage still persists, separating women from their natal kin. Across countries, this practice tends to be associated with less freedom for women, higher female mortality and less investment in girls' schooling (World Bank 2000a).

Despite these traditions, China's body of laws promoting gender equality is impressive. One of the first laws legislated after the founding of the People's Republic of China was the 1950 Marriage Law. It banned backward customs including arranged marriages, bigamy, concubinage, child betrothal and exaction of money or gifts in connection with marriage, and guaranteed equal status for husbands and wives, the right of both to inherit each other's property, and the right of divorce when both husband and wife desire it. In 1980, China signed and ratified the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In 1992, the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women (Women's Law) was promulgated. It codified women's rights including freedom of speech, the right to vote and seek public office, compulsory education through grade nine (the same as for boys) and equal rights for women and men to contract farmland and housing and to obtain employment.<sup>10</sup> The laws guaranteeing gender equality include:

#### Gender Related Laws and Conventions in Post-1949 China

Marriage Law	1950	Women and men are guaranteed virtually the same legal rights with respect to marriage
Law of Succession	1985	Men and women are equal in their right to inheritance
Compulsory Education Law	1986	All children aged six years and over must attend school to receive compulsory education through grade nine regardless of their sex, nationality, and race
General Rules on Civil Law	1986	Women enjoy the same civil rights as men
Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women	1992	Women's rights are equal to men's in political, economic, cultural, and social life, and with regards to property, marriage, divorce and the family

<sup>10</sup> Regarding employment, however, the Women's Law states that some work is unsuitable for women. There is controversy over whether this is a step backward from the Maoist tenet that women could do everything men could, which was propagated by ubiquitous media images of women airplane pilots and welders.

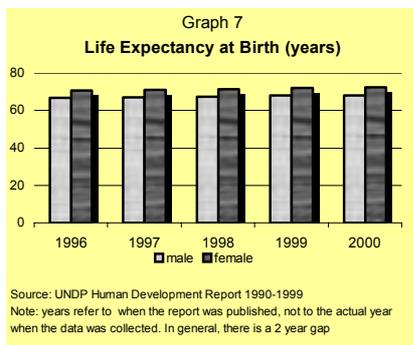


Although these laws have been disseminated widely, for example through ACWF social marketing campaigns, many are unaware of their rights, especially poor, rural, uneducated, illiterate women. Often the laws are not enforced. Egregious crimes include female infanticide and trafficking in women, both outlawed by the Women's Law. In the workplace, women are frequently subject to discrimination and abuse, are the hardest hit by retrenchment and are selected for jobs based on their marital and maternal status. Almost all private housing is owned by men who are the traditional signatories of housing registration. Women often lose their home in the event of divorce, an increasing phenomenon in China. In rural areas where women traditionally move into their husband's family home, often away from their native villages, women are even more vulnerable in the event of divorce.

Despite insufficient implementation of laws, there are some encouraging examples of legal rights protection. A few local governments are taking measures to implement gender laws. For example, in 1996, Hunan Province became the first government to arrest perpetrators of family violence and spouse abuse (Xinhua News Agency, July 24, 2000). Qingdao municipality adopted the first regulation in 1995 ensuring women access to housing in the event of divorce (Legal Daily, May 18, 2000). Several local governments, including those of Shanghai and Wuhan, have established shelters for battered wives and abused women (Hubei Daily, March 31, 2000). The citizen's sector is playing an increasing role in promoting legal protection. Proliferating non-profit institutions are establishing legal aid centers for women and shelters and hotlines to assist women in distress. While significant, these efforts are insufficient to cover the vast unmet need for legal aid.

## Health

Following the 1949 revolution, China lost its distinction as the "Sick Giant of Asia." Although this name referred to China's general socioeconomic condition, it also aptly described the population's health status. Only a tiny minority of rich Chinese had access to health care before 1949. The new government made public health a major priority. Through a massive preventive health program which dispatched physicians and "barefoot doctors"<sup>11</sup> to remote rural areas and provided national health insurance to all Chinese, health indicators improved markedly. Between 1950 and 1990, life expectancy at birth doubled from 35 to 70 years (Yu 1997). However, it has stagnated since the early 1990s. Today, female and male life expectancy are 71 and 68 years respectively (Graph 7). These are remarkably good indicators for a low-income developing country.<sup>12</sup> Men's poor health behavior contributes to their shorter life expectancy. Some 63 percent of men but only 4 percent of women smoked in 1996 compared to 61 percent of men and 7 percent of women who smoked in 1984 (WHO 1997).



Today's stagnant life expectancy rate reflects health system reversals during the transition to a market economy. Free health insurance is becoming rare. With the dismantling of agricultural communes during the 1980s, rural residents, 70 percent of the total population, lost commune-provided health services. With the closure and downsizing of state-owned-enterprises (SOEs), increasing numbers of public employees are losing health insurance along with their jobs.

The majority of laid-off SOE workers have been women (see Labor Market above). Women today have less health insurance,

<sup>11</sup> Barefoot doctors were paramedics, often of local origin, trained in basic preventive health care. Barefoot signified their grassroots nature since like the peasantry whom they served and came from, they might not have afforded shoes.

<sup>12</sup> China had a per capita GNP of US\$750 in 1998, ranking it in 149<sup>th</sup> place among 206 countries (World Bank 1999c).



are admitted less frequently to hospitals, and have shorter hospital stays when admitted than do men (Pearson 1996; Human Rights in China 1999b). Basic reproductive health services, affecting mostly women, have become unaffordable for the poor as curative, costly, urban services replace the former preventive, inexpensive and rurally-focused health care system (Human Rights in China 1999b). Whereas from 1950-85 health care expenditures in China were overwhelmingly public, today 75 percent of health spending consists of private out of pocket fees (WHO 2000).<sup>13</sup> Rural families tend to spend scarce resources on men's and boys' health care rather than on women's and girls' (Zia 2000; Pearson 1995). Elderly women, who constitute the majority of China's aging population, with 110 women for every 100 men above 60 years of age, are especially vulnerable to health problems (United Nations 2000). They lack access to medical services particularly due to public health expenditure cutbacks.

Despite the existence of more elderly women than men, a serious health problem with gender implications is China's sex imbalance among the younger population. In order to brake China's exploding population, the government created the one-child policy for urban couples in 1979. This policy is widely practiced in cities where parents usually treasure girl babies as well as boys. Most urban parents cite the advantages of one child -- it permits parents to invest more in the single child, it permits the mother greater freedom to pursue a career, and it permits better access to maternal health care.<sup>14</sup> Rural families still overwhelmingly prefer sons. Their "Confucian" son preference, common in many Asian countries, values male children more highly as future labor on the farm and as social security to care for parents in old age. Rural parents who do not have a son during the first birth are entitled to have a second child after four years. Many rural families actually have more than two children in order to have at least one son (Washington Post, May 3, 2000).

#### **Box 1: Rural Families Ignore One-child Policy**

More than five million Chinese children have not been registered with the government, creating what demographers call a "black population." Rural families are ignoring the country's one-child family planning policy by having two or more children.

Huo Suifa, a 47-year-old farmer in Miaoxia, Henan Province, finally got a son in 1989 after having seven daughters. Huo's family is not that unusual in China even though the one-child policy was implemented almost 20 years ago. "It wasn't easy to have all those children, but it wasn't hard either," said Huo. "If things became tough in our village, my wife went to another township to have the child." The underreporting of births could mean that China's population is already as high as 1.4 billion or even 1.5 billion, some experts say.

According to Chen Shengli, a senior official at the State Family Planning Commission, only 60 million of the 300 million children under 14 today are from single-child families. That means 80 percent of China's children have brothers or sisters, and may have both.

(Washington Post, May 3, 2000)

Enforcement of the rural two children policy is inconsistent across localities (Box 1). In areas where it is stricter, parents sometimes take drastic measures to have sons. No or less health care for girls than for boys is believed by some to be the main cause of China's imbalanced 1999 child mortality rate, 40 for

<sup>13</sup> Until the health care system reversal during the 1980s, visiting a doctor and obtaining pharmaceuticals cost only a token few «*fen*» or cents. Hospital stays were virtually free. Constant national health campaigns almost eradicated developing country diseases like schistosomiasis. These notes are based on the author's personal experiences using and studying the Chinese health care system in rural and urban areas during the 1970s.

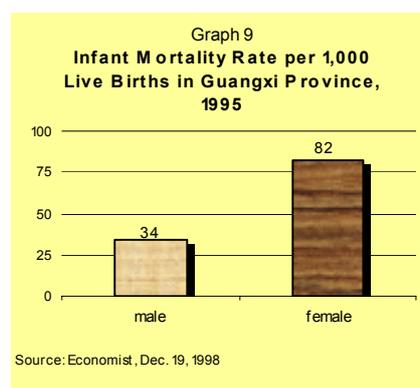
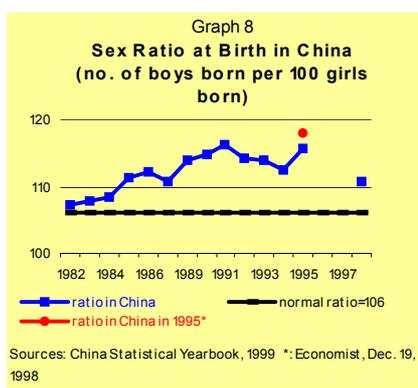
<sup>14</sup> Interview with Song Li, June 29, 2000, World Bank, Washington DC.



1,000 females and 35 for 1,000 males under five years (Zia 2000). Others attribute this imbalance to excessive deaths of young girls from parents committing female infanticides and feticides. These practices have resulted in the dramatic sex imbalance of 118 boys born for every 100 girls in 1995 compared to the normal standard of 106 boys per 100 girls (Graph 8). These numbers suggest that 8.7 million female babies were missing nationwide between 1979 and 1985 (Economist, December 19, 1998). Guangxi is an example of a poor province with marked sexual imbalances (Graph 9).

There are growing social problems resulting from China's sex imbalance. Increasing numbers of rural bachelors cannot find wives to have a family and perpetuate their lineage. Increasing numbers of Chinese women commit suicide at a rate five times higher than the world average, further depleting the stock of females (see Violence below). Unwanted girls are also given for adoption abroad.

Another health problem with gender implications is the rising incidence of HIV/AIDS. China reported 500,000 cases this year compared to 400,000 in 1999 (UNAIDS 2000b; Dallas Morning News, October 7, 1999). So far the predominant group affected is male drug users, but female incidence is rising, especially among prostitutes. Over 1977-88, the male to female ratio of reported HIV/AIDS cases was 2.04:1 but by 1999 this ratio was 1.39:1 (CWRC 2000).



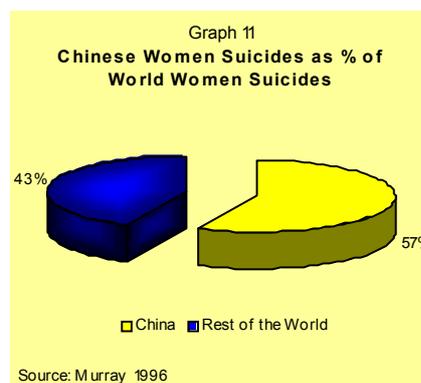
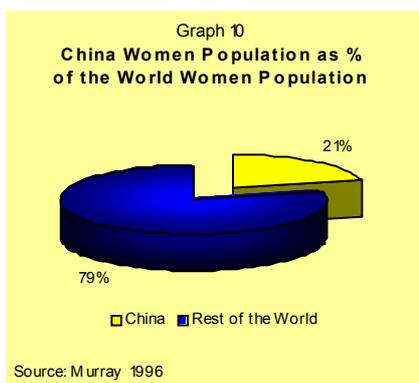
## Violence/Domestic Issues

Both men and women are involved in the most pernicious manifestations of gender violence in China: female suicide, female infanticide and feticide, trafficking in women and domestic violence.

One of the most dramatic manifestations of China's customary denigration of women is its soaring female suicide rate, five times the world average. With 21 percent of the world's female population, China accounts for 57 percent of female suicides worldwide (Graphs 10 and 11; Murray 1996). Suicide accounts for 4.5 percent of all female deaths in China, whereas worldwide it accounts for 1.6 percent of all female deaths (Murray 1996). China is the only country where more women than men commit suicide. The female suicide rate is 40 percent above the male rate (Cabral 1999). In 1990, 56 percent of female suicides occurred among women aged between 15 and 29 years of age (Murray 1996). The rural female suicide rate is three times the urban rate (MacLeod 1998). Reasons for China's high female suicide rate, especially in rural areas, include the unbearable stress women feel for belonging to the "wrong" gender, their increased farming and domestic workloads as husbands migrate to urban areas, domestic violence, unhappy, forced marriages, and treatment like servants in their husbands' family households.



Another dramatic example of gender discrimination in China is the “missing girls” problem reflected in an excessively high female mortality rate (Graphs 8 and 9; Croll 1995 ; Kerr 1996; Human Rights In China 1999e; Pearson 1995; Economist, December 19, 1998). The strong boy preference is the main reason for missing girls (See Health above). Some believe China’s one-child policy is also responsible for fewer female babies.<sup>15</sup> These values drive parents to commit female infanticide and sex-selective feticide, the latter facilitated by the pervasive use of ultrasound, even in Chinese villages, to identify the



sex of fetuses.<sup>16</sup> The missing girls problem is exacerbated by Chinese girls, but not boys, being offered for adoption abroad. Some argue that girls die more often as a result of inadequate health care than of infanticide (Zia 2000).

Trafficking in women and children – the criminal act of selling women and children as commodities under compulsion -- is another type of gender violence. The 1992 Women’s Law and other legislation explicitly prohibit trafficking; yet, it has proliferated with the market liberalization since the 1980s (Zhuang 1993). Trafficking in women is exacerbated by the serious sex ratio imbalance. Virtually all traffickers are male and usually they are poorly educated. Poor young women are especially vulnerable to the promises of traffickers for greater wealth and affluence (Human Rights in

#### Box 2: A Tale of a 14-year-old Mother and Wife

A 14-year-old girl, Kang Minge, was kidnapped in Yi county, Hebei Province, and forced to marry a farmer when she was 12. Members of the Beijing Public Security Bureau’s Women and Children Anti-Smuggling Team freed her in April 2000 along with her 1-year-old son. She was among thousands of victims of a pernicious trade in young women and girls across rural China.

Kang’s parents died when she was eight years old. She and her brother begged for food all the way from their hometown in Shanxi to the neighboring province Hebei. She was sold for 2,000 yuan (US\$ 227) to Liu Fende, who became her “husband”.

Kang neither reads nor writes and has never gone to school. “I will take Liu family to court sooner or later,” she said. She does not want to give up her baby boy. “I cannot look after this child, but I don’t want to give him to Liu’s family, because I don’t want them to have a descendant”, she said.

A national campaign was launched April 1, 2000 to combat the trade in women and children. More than 10,000 suspects had been arrested nationwide during the campaign’s first five weeks.

(China Times April 4, 2000  
<http://www.chinatimes.com.tw/english/esociety/89041105.htm>)

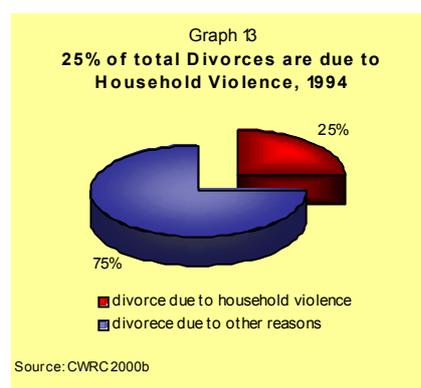
<sup>15</sup> Some analysts believe Confucian values underlie the missing girls problem and cite the comparable situation in Confucian-valued South Korea where there is no one-child policy (Croll 1995; Das Gupta 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Several provinces and localities recently passed legislation banning the use of ultrasound for sex selective abortion, including Hainan, Henan and Jiangsu (China Women’s News, April 20, 2000; Hainan Daily, May 27, 2000; Jingpingouwuzhinan, China, April 14, 2000).

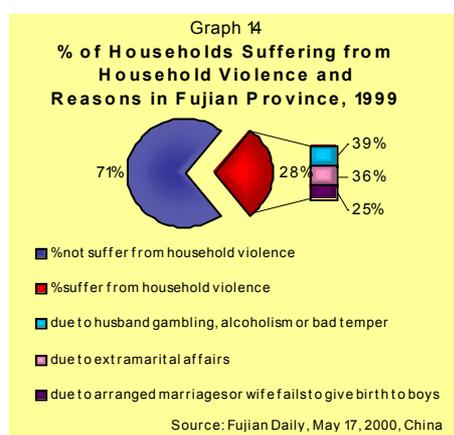


China 1999d). Women are kidnapped and sold sometimes as prostitutes, sometimes as forced brides to men wishing to purchase wives, or sometimes as mistresses for men who maintain more than one household (Box 2).

With the shortage of women, this is an expanding market. There is a flow pattern from the poor southeastern provinces (Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Guangxi, and Hunan) to the northeastern and coastal provinces (Shandong, the southern part of Hebei, the northern part of Jiangsu, Fujian and Henan). There is also a flow from mountainous and border regions to the inland regions (Zhuang 1993). Increased demand has raised bride prices which were virtually prohibited during the Mao era (Jacka 1997). Although data on trafficked women are not available, there are some reports on the number



of women rescued from kidnapping. During five weeks this year, over 10,000 females were rescued from kidnapping (Graph 12; Washington Post, May 10, 2000). Despite some rescues, many officials collude in kidnapping, including party secretaries who participate in the name of “leading villagers to prosperity”.



Domestic violence is also common. Some 25 percent of divorces in 1994 were attributable to domestic violence (Graph 13). National data on domestic violence are scarce but provincial data indicate that domestic violence was reported in close to 30 percent of Fujian households in 1999 (Graph 14) and 20 percent of women in Hong Kong reported being beaten. Among the latter, 68 percent of battered women believe it is acceptable for their husbands to use violence at home and 78 percent of their children fear their father will hurt or kill their mother (South China Morning Post, March 8, 2000). Many cases of domestic violence go unreported.

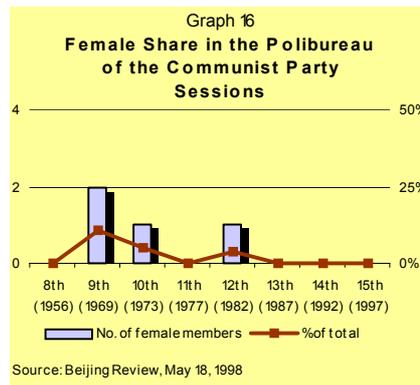
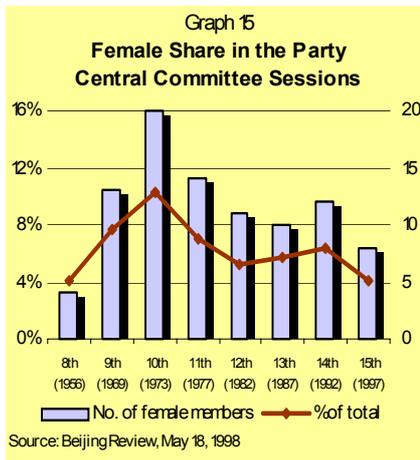
### Political Participation

Before 1949, men held all political power, with few exceptions. The post-1949 regime made serious efforts to involve women in political decision-making, marking a radical break from the past. As in most



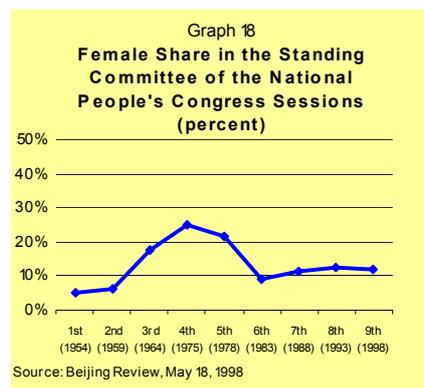
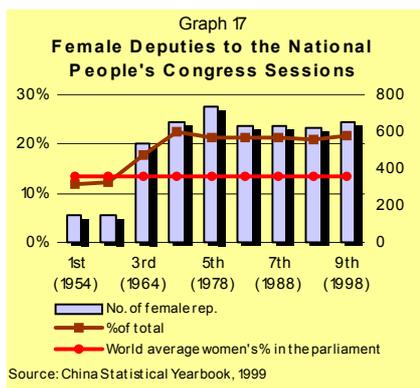
countries today, men still retain the bulk of political and economic power in China, especially in rural areas, but there have been some gains, and some backsliding, for women.

In China's most important political organization since 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), women's share of seats in the Central Committee rose and peaked at 10 percent in 1973 but fell back to



about 5 percent by 1997 (Graph 15). Women have held no seats in recent years on the most important CCP decision making body, the Politbureau (Graph 16). Despite rhetoric of gender equality, the CCP has remained heavily male-dominated (Gilmartin 1993).

Women tend to have higher representation in the People's Congresses which are subordinate to the CCP, typically just surpassing 20 percent, both in the central National People's Congress (NPC) and at lower levels (Graph 17).



An informal central quota and formal quotas in about two thirds of the provinces make this possible (Jiang 1997b). However, women's participation in the higher level NPC Standing Committee has declined to about 10 percent of representatives after peaking at 25 percent in 1975 (Graph 18). Perhaps the most significant political reform initiated by the Chinese government since 1989 has been the introduction of competitive elections in which both women and men participate freely in China's 1,000,000 rural villages (Thurston 1998). Elected Village Committees typically comprise a Chair, a Vice-



Chair, and two to four members. Some Village Committees, but not all, have women members who tend to be the village women's federation representatives.<sup>17</sup>

Chinese women politicians are often most concerned with social issues, such as education and public health, the environment, protection of rights of women/children/the disabled, and social security (Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung 1994). Men dominate in sectors like national security, finance, and foreign relations. These divisions perpetuate female stereotypes and exclude women from most decision-making in the critical issues of economic reform, especially in poorer rural areas.

The main advocacy and implementation lobby for women's political participation has been the All China Women's Federation (ACWF), established in 1949 as a Party-led mass organization operating at all levels. ACWF has lobbied for affirmative action programs including quotas for women in political bodies. It also promotes protecting women in the workplace and expanding their access to education, health, cultural and legal services. In recent years, ACWF work has been complemented by proliferating civil society groups that lobby for women's rights and provide services for women such as independent hotlines, shelters and legal aid centers.<sup>18</sup> In 1998, ACWF established the China Women's Development Foundation, its own quasi-NGO, to finance rural microcredit, legal aid, and literacy and training programs for poor rural women. ACWF played a key role in organizing the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing.

### **World Bank Gender Portfolio Review**

Having analyzed gender priority issues above, it is timely to ask to what extent does the Bank portfolio address these concerns? Is there scope for Bank interventions to address these concerns more deeply? EAP requested that the China CGR analyze a sample of current ESW and projects to answer these questions.<sup>19</sup> The portfolio review analyzed all 11 pieces of ESW produced during 1997-2000 and a sample of 23 of the 97 projects under implementation across sectors (Sløk 2000). Tables presenting the numbers of Reports Available and Reviewed and the detailed Gender Portfolio Analysis (World Bank 2000d) are among the available Background Documents listed at the end of this report.

Overall, the Bank portfolio of ESW and projects in China only considers gender to a limited extent. The CAS integrates gender issues into the social sectors but not into other areas such as agriculture. Most of the other Bank analyses and projects reviewed miss opportunities to consider the gender implications of important issues like poverty reduction, resettlement and labor market shifts such as migration and state-owned-enterprise (SOE) restructuring. Addressing the gender-differentiated effects of these Bank-supported interventions would contribute to reducing poverty. The chart below summarizes sector-specific findings. These sector findings are not presented in a priority order.

<sup>17</sup> Each village has a women's federation member responsible for village family planning and other women's issues. Interview with Ann Thurston, April 24, 2000, Washington, DC.

<sup>18</sup> Many of these organizations receive support from international organizations like the Asia and Ford Foundations.

<sup>19</sup> A Bank gender portfolio review is typically included in comprehensive Bank CGRs, like Ecuador's (Zuckerman 2000).



### World Bank Gender Portfolio Review for China - Summary of Findings by Sector

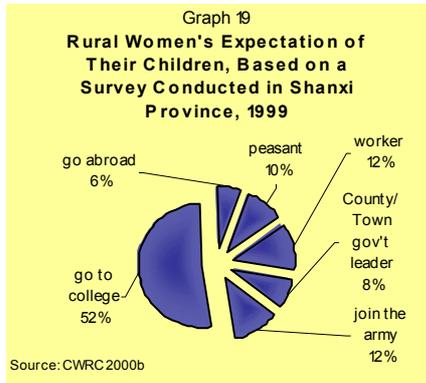
<b>Labor, Technical Assistance, Industry</b>		
<i>Projects Reviewed</i>	<i>ESW Products Reviewed</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Labor Market Development (1996)</li> <li>Pension Reform (1999)</li> <li>Enterprise Reform (1999)</li> <li>Shenyang Industry Reform (1995)</li> <li>Technology Development (1995)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>China's Management of Enterprise Assets: The State as Shareholder (Economic, 1997)</li> <li>Enterprise Reform in China. Ownership, Transition, and Performance (Economic, 1999).</li> </ul>	Gender is not mainstreamed or mentioned in any of these projects or reports except for the Labor Market Development Project which makes brief policy suggestions on unemployment insurance for pregnant workers. Missed opportunities to address gender concerns include the sex-disaggregated effects of (un)employment, distribution of managers and workers, wages, benefits, job descriptions, pensions, and proliferating informal sector workers. Moreover, most of the projects and reports address SOE restructuring but fail to discuss women's disproportionate burden of the layoffs.
<b>Education</b>		
<i>Projects Reviewed</i>	<i>ESW Products Reviewed</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic Education in Poor/Minority Areas (1995)</li> <li>Vocational Education Reform (1997)</li> <li>Fourth Basic Education (1997)</li> <li>Higher Education Reform (1999)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Goals for Chinese education in the 21st Century (Sector, 1999)</li> <li>China Higher Education Reform (Sector, 1997).</li> </ul>	Gender is integrated well or mainstreamed into one (China Higher Education Reform) of two ESW reports and two (Basic Education in Poor/Minority Areas Project and the Fourth Basic Education Project) of four projects reviewed. Contrary to evidence cited in this CGR about discrimination against females in the labor force, the Vocational Education Reform project states that this is not a serious issue and that female graduates do not encounter job discrimination. It would be valuable to provide sex-disaggregated data on male and female enrolment by subject and follow up employment opportunities and wages. Country follow-up work would benefit from analyzing sex-disaggregated enrollment and dropout rates, especially at the secondary level, and curriculum content, including that used in vocational training. Follow-up higher education reform should enhance opportunities for females in scientific streams.
<b>Health</b>		
<i>Projects Reviewed</i>	<i>ESW Products Reviewed</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehensive Maternal &amp; Child Health (1995)</li> <li>Health Nine (1999)</li> </ul>		The Comprehensive Maternal & Child Health Project focuses on mothers and children but excludes men's role in reproductive health. It also fails to address China's significantly higher female than male infant mortality rates. The Health Nine Project mainstreams gender well and includes both women's and men's reproductive health concerns.
<b>Transport</b>		
<i>Projects Reviewed</i>	<i>ESW Products Reviewed</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Henan Highway (1993)</li> <li>National Highways III (1998)</li> <li>Guangzhou City Center Transport (1998)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>China: Forward with One Spirit: A Strategy for</li> </ul>	Gender issues are not mentioned in any of the four projects although the resettlement component of all the projects could have included sex disaggregated data on issues discussed including who is being resettled, land ownership, name on the housing contracts and employment opportunities. The Guangzhou project could have examined safety issues for women using public transport. In the ESW report, Forward with One Spirit, gender is not mentioned. It could have examined how men and women use roads differently, eg how

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fujian Highway II (1999)</li> </ul>	<p>the Transport Sector (1998)</p>	<p>improved access to transport could impact women's and men's access to jobs, health care and education, and analyzed how increased transport sector competition affects men and women differently.</p>
<b>Poverty, Rural and Agricultural Development</b>		
<i>Projects Reviewed</i>	<i>ESW Products Reviewed</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qinba Mountains Poverty Reduction (1997)</li> <li>Anning Valley Agricultural Development (1999)</li> <li>State Farms Commercialization (1998)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overcoming Rural Poverty (2000)</li> <li>Accelerating China's Rural Transformation (1999)</li> <li>Rural China: Transition and Development (1999)</li> </ul>	<p>All three substantial pieces of ESW analyze rural poverty and related issues such as water collection, land tenure, extension services, and labor allocations, without analyzing differential effects on men and women. To some extent, the reports discuss services for the poor like microcredit without considering gender impacts. These analyses assert that poverty is not being feminized without providing substantiating data. Future rural analyses should address these gender concerns. Gender considerations are included in many of the Qinba and Anning Valley project components but they could be enhanced by examining sex disaggregated data for the labor, resettlement and migration issues. Gender is not considered in the State Farms Commercialization Project despite differential impacts of agricultural and rural reforms on the welfare of individual men and women.</p>
<b>Power</b>		
<i>Projects Reviewed</i>	<i>ESW Products Reviewed</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>East China (Jiangsu) Transmission (1998)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Power Trade Strategy for the Greater Mekong Sub-region (1999)</li> </ul>	<p>Gender is not mentioned in either of the power reports reviewed, but it is not relevant to the ESW which addresses aggregate, not household, power needs and uses. The Jiangsu resettlement component could have included sex disaggregated data on who is being resettled, land ownership, name on the housing contract, and employment possibilities in the resettlement area.</p>
<b>Environment and Water</b>		
<i>Projects Reviewed</i>	<i>ESW Products Reviewed</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shanghai Environment (1994)</li> <li>Liaoning Environment (1995)</li> <li>4<sup>th</sup> Rural Water Supply &amp; Sanitation (1997)</li> </ul>		<p>Gender issues are considered in the water and sanitation project but are not mentioned in either of the environment projects. Missed opportunities to include gender issues are in the social development evaluation of the Shanghai project and in the resettlement component and provision on infrastructure and services of the Liaoning project.</p>
<b>Other Sectors</b>		
<i>Projects Reviewed</i>	<i>ESW Products Reviewed</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>China 2020: Development Challenges in the New Century (Sector, 1997)</li> <li>China. Weathering the Storm and Learning the Lessons (Economic, 1999)</li> <li>Country Assistance Strategy (1997).</li> </ul>	<p>China 2020 and Weathering the Storm hardly take gender into account. They lack sex-disaggregated data and there are missed opportunities to address gender issues, especially in the labor market analysis. Gender is very well integrated into the CAS discussions of human development but the CAS does not address gender issues in the analysis of rural development/agriculture, rural poverty, the environment and infrastructure. The CAS data appendix does not disaggregate infant mortality, under five mortality, nutrition, labor force participation, wage gap and other statistics by sex although there are important sex differences and sex-disaggregated data are available.</p>



## Conclusion

China has made enormous gains over the last half century in achieving gender equality. The Mao era made it legitimate for women to undertake careers in virtually all walks of life. The transition to a market economy is adding new complexities to the process of emancipating women. On the one hand, women comprise about 40 percent of the newly self-employed and more than a third of private business owners. On the other hand, trafficking in women, prostitution, female infanticide and feticide have increased with market liberalization. China's female suicide rate is the world's highest. One or two generations are insufficient to transform deeply ingrained traditional patriarchal attitudes. The Bank can play a significant partnership role with its largest client, China, in contributing to continuing economic growth and poverty reduction by addressing the gender gaps and issues analyzed in this report.



Results of a 1999 survey in poor Shanxi Province of rural women's expectations for their children, indicating that 52 percent of poor rural mothers expect their children will go to college (Graph 19), reflect Chinese women's hope for the future.



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The following Background Documents prepared for this summary are available on the World Bank Gender website, at [www.worldbank.org/gender/cgr/](http://www.worldbank.org/gender/cgr/).

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