

# A Historical Review of the Development of Women's Higher Education in China (1908-2020): Stages, Explanations, and Trends

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The development of women's higher education in China can be divided into four stages: emergence (1908-1948); foundation (1949-1976); accelerating development (1977-2008); and the qualitative leap (2009-2020). This work considers the principal institutional mechanisms that contributed to this development. First, flexibly planned parenthood gradually promoted gender equality and openness in society facilitated by systematic "awards, grants, and loans" initiatives to support women's higher education economically. Second, compulsory education ensured that left-out and migrant children had access to higher education. Third, effective connectivity across different education types bridged education gaps between those with different levels of education. Fourth, China made great efforts to invite and integrate international experiences that promoted the development of women's higher education. Looking beyond these achievements, we also discuss the future trends of women's higher education in China.

*Keywords:* Chinese higher education, women's higher education, educational equity, development process

## Introduction

Chankseliani (2022) argued that investing in higher education will improve the world and benefit the "public good or common good". In this pursuit, higher education, in particular, has played a leading role in modernizing education in China, and women's higher education has been an essential part of the overall higher education system. Pan Maoyuan, a pioneer in Chinese higher education research, pointed out that women's higher education is a barometer of social and cultural modernization that mirrors the speed of social development and structural changes (Pan, 2001). In 2019, UNESCO released "From Access to Empowerment: UNESCO Strategy for Gender Equality in and through Education 2019-2025", arguing that women's education

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is critical to the future of humanity (UNESCO, 2019). Furthermore, women's higher education has also played a pivotal role in modernizing the landscape of Chinese higher education. Therefore, investigating the characteristics and formation mechanisms of women's higher education in China can help offer guidelines for developing women's higher education worldwide.

### **Literature Review and Problem Statement**

The broader research on the development of women's higher education involves themes such as the value of women's higher education, employment quality, and other contemporary issues, and we now discuss how it relates to the scope of our work, beginning with the value of women's higher education. Scholars have found that women's higher education can effectively improve the socio-economic level of women in China. A study in Bangladesh showed that the country's economic growth rate has declined from 5.5% in 1985 to 2.1% in 2017, and many international researchers believe that the decline is due to the country's family planning program (Bora, Saikia, Endale, Kebede, & Lutz, 2022). However, the study pointed out that increasing female education can effectively prevent economic decline.

Second, women's higher education can optimize the educational environment in general, and four factors may explain this phenomenon. The first is gender role theory, which argues that women who receive higher education are more likely to have a better understanding of gender equality, which helps to develop a sense of gender-equal childcare (Craig & Mullan, 2011). Educated Japanese women tend to fulfill the role of "rational motherhood" (Goodman, 2015). The second perspective is economic rationality. Women who receive higher education tend to reduce their time investment in childcare because of higher financial returns in the labour market. The third perspective relates to resource theory, which suggests that women who receive higher education have relatively more resources and power in family decision-making, reducing their childcare responsibilities. The fourth perspective suggests that women who receive higher education value the quality of childcare more than those who do not, leading to higher levels of investment in childcare (Guryan, Hurst, & Kearney, 2008).

Third is the quality view of women's higher education. The question here is whether quality standards for Chinese women's higher education should be the same as those for men or allow for the differences between men and women. In response to this dilemma, Yan Guangfen advocates for an equal view of men and women based on gender differences that the author believes can promote the modernization of women's higher education in China (Yan, 2002).

Fourth, there are many problems faced by women in receiving higher education. Economic poverty affects women's access to higher education, and research has shown that women are more sensitive to deprivation (Zhang & You, 2018). Next, there are problems in the process of women receiving higher education. Research has found that female doctoral students experience higher stress levels than male doctoral students (Kurtz-Costes, Helmke, & Ulku-Steiner, 2006).

Fifth are the employment opportunities for women after receiving higher education. Women's education can empower them and impose certain limitations (Anderson-Faithful, 2012). The childbearing age of women mostly coincides with their most productive labour supply period. Their reproduction decisions can affect their availability for employment (Cai & Wang, 2001), and some researchers have even claimed that "being a good wife and mother is the core value of women's higher education" (Cai & Wang, 2001). Additionally, a survey

on job satisfaction of full-time female teachers in research universities shows that female teachers are more satisfied than male teachers in aspects such as academic environment, internationalization, and interpersonal relationships on campus. However, they are far less satisfied than male teachers regarding research resources such as project funding approval and access to cutting-edge research (Zhao, 2011).

Based on the above analysis, we offer the following summary of the current literature related to women's higher education. Research on women's higher education covers a wide range of topics. Second, the gender perspective that puts men and women in opposition to each other has been replaced by a perspective of common development between the sexes. The shortcomings of the existing research are twofold. The literature as a whole has not established a connection between women's higher education and the modernization of education in China, and the institutional motives behind the development of women's higher education in China have not been systematically examined.

With all of this in mind, this study focuses on four questions: What achievements have been made in developing women's higher education in China? How have these achievements been made? What are the characteristics of women's higher education in China, and what are the future trends? By exploring and answering these basic questions, an overall picture of the development of women's higher education in China is presented, and constructive suggestions are provided for further promoting the modernization of women's higher education in China.

### **The Hundred-Year Development of Women's Higher Education in China**

The development of women's higher education in China can be divided into four different stages: emergence, foundation, accelerating development, and qualitative leap. An overview of the history of women's higher education in China is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*An Overview of the History of Women's Higher Education in China from 1919 to 2023*

<b>Stage of women's higher education</b>	<b>Social background of the times</b>	<b>Changes in school education</b>	<b>Changes in women's higher education</b>
Emergence (1900-1948)	The establishment of the Chinese Communist Party	The emergence of formal education in China	Educational opportunities for women's higher education
Foundation (1949-1976)	The establishment of New China; the Cultural Revolution	The exploration of education in China; the suspension of education during the Cultural Revolution	Civilianization of the concept of women's higher education
Acceleration (1977-2008)	The reform and opening up	The reinstatement of the Gaokao in 1977	Focus on process and equity in women's higher education
Qualitative leap (2009-2020)	Financial crisis	Mass higher education	Quality and transformation of women's higher education

#### **The Emergence Stage: The First Educational Opportunities for Women's Higher Education in China (1908-1948)**

In 1908, Hwa Nan College was established in Fuzhou, China, and Ginling College was established in Nanjing, China, in 1915. Later, in 1919, Wu Yifang and others received their bachelor's degrees and became the first female university graduates (Wu, 1983). In the same year, Beijing Female Higher Normal College was founded, becoming the first women's higher education institution organized by the Government of the Republic of China. During this period, many ideas to promote women's higher education were put forth. For example,

Ms. Huang Bihun pointed out that “there is no other way for women and men to have the same knowledge and skills and to be able to work in the same occupations, except for absolute coeducation of men and women” (M. H. Jing & Y. H. Jing, 2001). In the fall of 1920, Peking University officially admitted 28 female students (Wei, 2015).

In October 1921, Li Da, the propaganda director of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), suggested to Chen Duxiu to find a civilian girls' school to effect the transfer of educational rights to women. In 1922, The CCP Second National Congress proposed that “women enjoy equal rights politically, economically, socially and educationally” (Wei, 1995). During this period, the CCP also trained many cadres of women. Many progressives also made positive explorations into promoting women's higher education development. For example, in July of 1922, Tao Xingzhi, a famous Chinese educationist, wrote in the *Republic Daily* that “women should have the knowledge and skills to live independently” (Tao, 1984). In 1929, Cai Yuanpei emphasized that equal rights for men and women were in a period of preparation rather than in a period of completion (Cai, 1988). Since its founding, the CCP has attached great importance to women's and children's education, laying the groundwork for the gradual opening of higher education to all women in China.

#### **The Foundation Stage: Civilianization of the Concept of Women's Higher Education (1949-1976)**

The People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. In the same year, the First National Education Conference put forward the general policy of China's education construction, transforming the situation of the old society where the working people had no opportunity to receive education and making it necessary for schools to open their doors to the workers and peasants (News site cnr.cn, 2021). In 1949, the “New China Women's Vocational School” was established and was later transformed into undergraduate colleges and universities in 2002 and enrolled graduate students for the first time in 2013.

In 1952, all colleges and universities in China unified their enrollment, legitimizing and broadening the scope of women's access to higher education. In the same year, Shandong Women's University, which was converted to a full-time general undergraduate college in 2010, was also established. In 1956, China issued a Decision to eliminate illiteracy, stating that it “must be closely integrated with the country's socialist industrialization and the development of agricultural cooperatives; literacy education must be vigorously carried out among the masses of workers and peasants”. The People's Republic of China has conducted three literacy campaigns that have helped many women become literate, and the census illiteracy rate dropped from 33.58% in 1964 to 2.67% in 2020 (Office of the Leading Group for the Seventh National Population Census of the State Council, 2021).

#### **The Accelerating Development Stage: Focus on Process and Equity in Women's Higher Education (1977-2008)**

In 1977, China resumed the unified college entrance examination system, an examination and selection system to provide male and female students with an equal opportunity to receive higher education. Opinions on the Enrollment Work of Higher Education Institutions in 1977 abolished the recommendation system and resumed cultural examination, instead selecting students based on merit (China Archives News, 2014). The Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China in 1986 stipulated that women enjoy equal rights and obligations to receive compulsory education in accordance with the law (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2017).

In 1992, the promulgation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Guarantee of the Rights and Interests of Women marked the government's guarantee that women enjoy equal cultural and educational rights with men in terms of school enrollment, advancement to higher education, graduation and assignment, award of degrees, and study abroad rights (National Working Committee on Children and Women under State Council, 2017a). In 1995, the Education Law of the People's Republic of China stipulated that citizens of the People's Republic of China are guaranteed equal access to education in accordance with the law (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 1995), and in the same year, the implementation of the Program of China's Women Development (1995-2000) stipulated that China must "vigorously develop women's education, raise women's scientific and cultural level, and gradually increase the proportion of women receiving education at all levels and in all categories" (National Working Committee on Children and Women under State Council, 1995). The implementation of the Program of China's Women Development (2001-2010) also stated that "women are guaranteed equal opportunities to receive education, and the level of women's education and lifelong education has been generally raised" (National Working Committee on Children and Women under State Council, 2001). The implementation of the Program of China's Women Development (2011-2020) further pointed out that "women have equal access to higher education, and the ratio of men to women in higher education is balanced" (National Working Committee on Children and Women under State Council, 2011).

In 1998, the Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China began the expansion of higher education, the introduction of a student loan system, and the establishment of student scholarships, which provided financial security for women's access to higher education (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 1998). In 1999, the Central Committee of the People's Republic of China and the State Council of the People's Republic of China issued the order for Deepening Educational Reform and Promoting Quality Education. It commanded that the basic rights of school-age children and adolescents to learn are guaranteed per the law (The Central Committee of the People's Republic of China & the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 1999). Additionally, the 2003-2007 Year Education Promotion Motion Plan, issued in 2004, provided for the development of rural vocational and adult education and the implementation of a "county-based" system for the management of compulsory education in rural areas, which indirectly laid the foundation for guaranteeing girls' access to higher education (www.gov.cn, 2004).

### **The Qualitative Leap: Quality and Transformation of Women's Higher Education (2009-2020)**

Women's access to and participation in higher education in China has grown rapidly at all levels of education, with the total number of female students now exceeding that of male students in general colleges and universities. Drawing on the concept of "feminization of higher education" (Morley, 2010), Ma Yuhang argues that this phenomenon occurred in China in 2009, when the total number of female students in general colleges and universities first exceeded that of male students. She describes the development of women's higher education in different provinces of China and the social challenges it poses, such as the imbalance of "an excellent woman who has received higher education encountering but an ordinary man who has not" in the marriage market. She then analyzes paths taken to avoid the feminization of higher education in Germany (Ma, 2018).

In 2014, the net elementary school enrollment rate for both boys and girls in China was 99.8%, achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goal ahead of schedule. Gender Equality and Women's

Development in China provides for implementing a special support policy for girls, guaranteeing that girls of the appropriate age group have equal access to compulsory education (National Working Committee on Children and Women under State Council, 2015). The Constitution of the People's Republic of China indicates that China shall develop socialist education and raise the scientific and cultural level of the Chinese people as well (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2018). Driven by China's national policy, women's higher education in China has taken on the following characteristics.

First, the number of female students in general undergraduate programs is the largest, followed by female students in adult undergraduate programs, and the number of female postgraduate students is the smallest. Second, dynamic changes can be found in the number of female students in general undergraduate programs, female students in adult undergraduate programs, and female postgraduate students, as they are all increasing year by year. The proportion of female students in higher education is as follows. For ordinary female graduate students in ordinary colleges and universities, from 2004 to 2020, female graduate students increased year by year from 41.57% to 50.64% in 2016 and from 48.42% in 2017 to 50.94% in 2020. Female master's degree students increased from 44.15% to 53.14% in 2016 and then from 49.88% in 2017 to 52.53% in 2022. Moreover, female doctoral students gradually increased from 31.37% in 2004 to 41.87% in 2020, and the percentage of female master's students is typically higher than that of female doctoral students, as illustrated (see Figure 1).

The proportion of general specialized and undergraduate female students shows mixed year by year, from 45.65% in 2004 to 52.54% in 2017, with a slight decrease in 2019, declining to 50.96% in 2020. Additionally, the proportion of specialized female students increased from 47.82% in 2004 to 52.41% in 2010 and began to decline slightly in 2011, from 52.17% to 47.53% in 2020. General undergraduate female students gradually increased from 43.89% in 2004 to 53.70% in 2020 (see Figure 2).

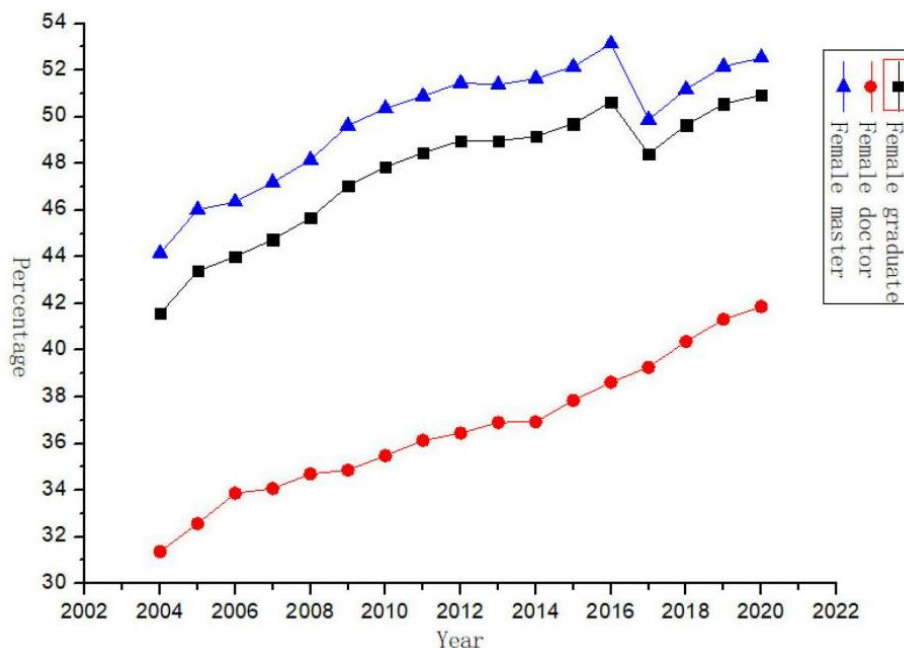


Figure 1. The proportion of ordinary female graduate students in China (2004-2020).

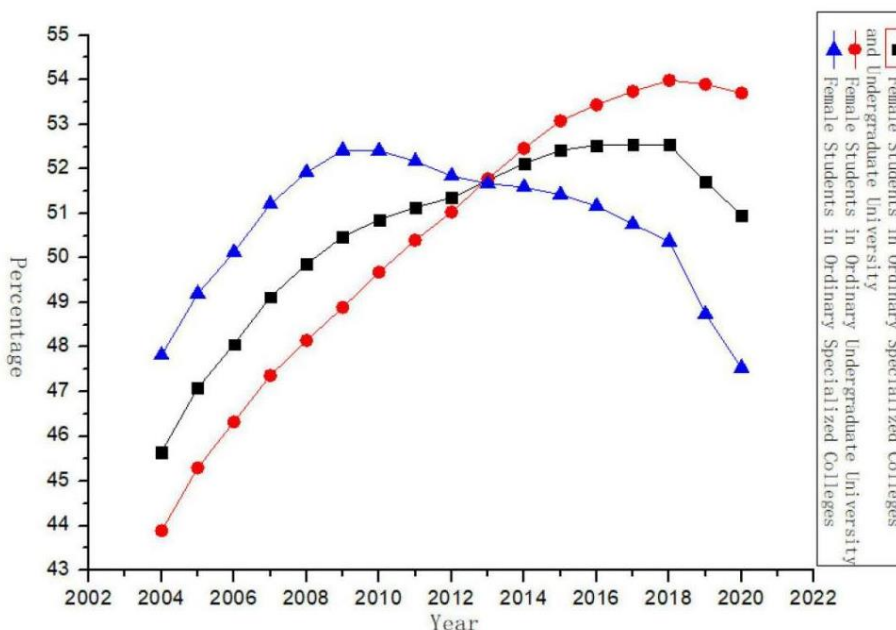


Figure 2. The proportion of female students in general undergraduate and vocational colleges in China (2004-2020).

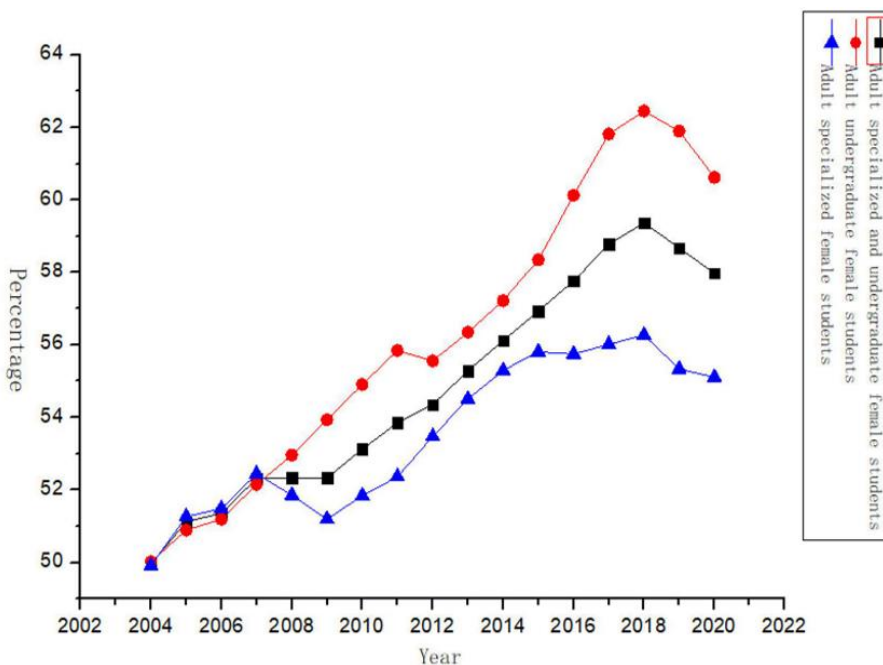


Figure 3. The proportion of adult female college students in China (2004-2020).

Finally, the percentage of adult female undergraduate students has been higher than that of adult specialized female students. Adult female specialized and undergraduate students increased from 49.95% in 2004 to 57.98% in 2020; the highest percentage was 59.37% in 2018. The rate of adult female specialized students increased from 49.92% in 2004 to 55.10% in 2020, and the percentage of adult female undergraduate students increased from 50.02% to 60.62% in 2020, as illustrated in Figure 3.

### Explanations for the Development of Women's Higher Education in China

Women's higher education development in China has benefited from a favourable institutional environment. At different stages in the process of modernizing Chinese-style education, women's higher education has never been developed solely for its own personal benefit but has instead been connected to broader social development.

#### China's National System Focuses on Promoting Gender Equality in Higher Education

The planned parenthood for adjusting the birth rate has gradually led to the formation of the conceptual factor of equality between men and women in Chinese society. In 2002, the Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China stipulated that China should carry out population and family planning work (National Working Committee on Children and Women under State Council, 2002). The impact of the implementation of such policies on women's higher education has been diverse. First, the family planning system about preference for the gender of baby with the traditional concept of gender inequality and gender preference gradually forms a relatively balanced sex ratio. Research shows that in 2020, China had a population of 1.4 billion, with a male population of 723.34 million (51.23%). The male population gradually increased from 301.9 million in 1953, when it accounted for 51.82%, a decrease of 0.59% (see Table 2). Second, girl-only-child families "do not consider gender factors in learning and eating" (Jin, 2007), which contributes to the sharing of the right to education for females. With the adjustment of China's family planning policies, the concept of gender equality has shifted from individual families to the entire Chinese society and, in doing so, is driving the gradual formation of an atmosphere of gender equality.

Table 2

*The Growth Rate of China's Population from 1953 to 2020*

Survey year	Total number of people	Growth rate	Population by gender				Gender ratio of the total population (Female = 100)
			Male	Proportion (%)	Female	Proportion (%)	
1953	582,600,000	/	301,900,000	51.82	280,700,000	48.18	107.56
1964	694,580,000	1.61	356,520,000	51.33	338,060,000	48.67	105.46
1982	1,008,180,000	2.09	519,440,000	51.52	488,740,000	48.48	106.30
1990	1,133,680,000	1.48	584,950,000	51.60	548,730,000	48.40	106.60
2000	1,265,830,000	1.07	653,550,000	51.63	612,280,000	48.37	106.74
2010	1,339,720,000	0.57	686,850,000	51.27	652,870,000	48.73	105.20
2020	1,411,780,000	0.53	723,340,000	51.23	688,440,000	48.76	105.07

In addition, the funding system addresses the issue of funding for women's access to higher education. The characteristics of scholarships at the higher educational stage are based on providing equal funding for both sexes to award outstanding students. The specific characteristics are as follows. First, "award-assisted loans" cover different levels and types of higher education institutions. Opinions on Establishing a National Subsidy System for Students from Economically Difficult Families in Ordinary High Schools stipulate that financial assistance is provided to high school students whose families are experiencing financial difficulties (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2010). Interim Measures for the Administration of National Grants for Graduate Students propose to ensure that all full-time graduate students (excluding those with fixed-salary income) receive funding for basic living expenses (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2013).



Second, there is significant support for “award-assisted loans”. The policy Interim Measures for the Administration of National Scholarships in Ordinary Undergraduate Colleges and Higher Vocational Schools issued in 2007 proposed that six directly affiliated normal universities under the Ministry of Education of China pilot free normal student education (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2007).

Third, the systematization of “reward-assisted loans” is reflected in both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The horizontal dimension refers to forming a relatively complete graduate student funding system consisting of national scholarships, academic scholarships, national student loans, and “three assistance” (research, teaching, and management assistance) subsidies. The vertical dimension refers to the entire process of funding covering college students from enrollment to graduation. According to the Interim Measures for the Compensation of Tuition Fees and National Student Loans for Graduates of Higher Education Institutions, college students who voluntarily work in units in the central and western regions and remote areas and have served for more than three years (including three years), are not required to repay their loans (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2009). These scholarship and scholarship systems have played a role in ensuring the long-term planned development of women’s higher education in China.

### **China’s National System Pays Attention to Vulnerable Female Groups**

The term “vulnerable female group” refers to women who have special needs for literacy and education in key rural areas. In 1998, Interim Measures for the Education of Floating Children and Adolescents proposed that parents or other guardians of young migrant children should send their children or other wards to school in accordance with the regulations of the local people’s government and let them receive and complete compulsory education for the prescribed period (National Working Committee on Children and Women under State Council, 2017b).

Various provinces in China have formulated specific strategies tailored to local conditions. For example, the policy issued by Guangdong Province in China, Opinions on Doing a Good Job in Compulsory Education for the Children of Migrant Workers in Cities, proposed to attach great importance to ensuring equal access to compulsory education for migrant children and further improving the quality and level of mandatory education services for migrant children (Government of Guangdong Province, 2011). In 2017, Opinions on Further Improving the Compulsory Education Work for the Children of Migrant Workers and Employed Farmers in Cities stipulated that local governments at all levels, especially education administrative departments and full-time public primary and secondary schools, should establish and improve the working system and mechanism for ensuring that children of migrant workers and employed farmers in cities receive compulsory education (National Working Committee on Children and Women under State Council, 2017c). On this basis, China has promoted women’s vocational education and training.

Gender Equality and Women’s Development in China stipulates that the proportion of women who receive vocational education and skills training should continue to increase (National Working Committee on Children and Women under State Council, 2015). According to statistics, the number of women in China receiving secondary vocational education reached 8.05 million in 2014, and the number of female students in ordinary technical secondary schools reached 3.97 million, accounting for 44.7% and 53.0% of their respective totals, and the number of women in China receiving various types of non-academic higher education and secondary education has reached 3.46 million and 20 million, respectively. Diversified training programs such as the “New Farmers’ Science and Technology Training Project”, the “National High Skilled Talent Revitalization

Plan”, and the “Spring Tide Action” (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People’s Republic of China, 2014) have been carried out to protect minority women in remote and impoverished areas and to ensure that disabled girls and women have equal access to educational opportunities and resources.

### **China’s Promotion of Linkages Between Different Segments of Women’s Higher Education**

The “connection” between different types of education serves as its foundation. The development of women’s higher education in China is not based on anything but a solid foundation of compulsory education. China has a strict enrollment system as a guarantee for the connection between different levels of education. The Notice on Implementing the Sunshine Project in the Enrollment Work of Higher Education Institutions was put in place to implement the Sunshine Project in the enrollment work of higher education institutions, standardize enrollment management, increase transparency in enrollment work, and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of candidates (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2005).

In 2014, China issued the Implementation Opinions of the State Council on Deepening the Reform of the Examination and Enrollment System, which proposed to establish a modern education examination and enrollment system with “Chinese characteristics” by 2020, introduced a classified admission examination and enrollment model, and built a connection and communication between all levels and types of education (www.gov.cn, 2014).

### **China Emphasizes the Integration of Local Experience and International Action**

China actively draws on the experience of gender equality education from various countries around the world, which is reflected in China’s active signing and ratification of United Nations international instruments in the field of gender equality. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women proposed to fulfill the obligations of the Convention conscientiously, submit timely performance reports, accept reviews, and implement the concluding observations of the Committee (UN, 1979). In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women formulated the Beijing Declaration to increase the importance of gender equality in society, ensuring equal opportunities and treatment for men and women in both education and health (World Women Conference, 1995a). The World Women Conference Platform for Action policies also pointed out that poverty is not the only obstacle; so too were unemployment, an increasingly fragile environment, violence against women, and exclusion of women from power and management structures (World Women Conference, 1995b).

China has continually promulgated and implemented the Women’s Development Program, actively implemented the strategic objectives in the areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and regularly submitted national reports on implementation. In 2015, Millennium Development Goals were promulgated, which stipulated that the United Nations eliminate gender discrimination and promote women’s development (UN, 2015). In 2016, *On the Frontline: Catalysing Women’s Leadership in Humanitarian Action* pointed out that the contribution of women continued to be underestimated, gender-based violence was widespread, and women’s leadership in humanitarian action needed to be enhanced (Barclay, Higelin, & Bungcaras, 2016).

In 2016, compared to the international plan, China’s Position Paper on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2016) stipulated that China should prioritize the empowerment of women and girls and enhance the empowerment of

all women and children. In 2019, UNESCO's Strategy for Gender Equality in and through Education also stipulated that the education system should achieve gender equality and empower women for a better life and future. Non-gender-biased learning content, non-discriminatory policies, and educational management information systems can all help assess gender inequality (UNESCO, 2019). In 2021, the Outline for Women's Development in China (2021-2030) further stated, "the proportion of male and female students in universities should be balanced, and the gender structure of higher education disciplines and majors should keep balanced as well" (www.gov.cn, 2021a). Also in 2021, the China National Program for Child Development (2021-2030) sought to increase the gender ratio of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and other disciplines, increase the construction of women's colleges and universities, encourage qualified colleges and universities to offer courses related to women's studies and gender equality, and increase theoretical research and trans-disciplinarity on women.

### **Conclusions: The Future Direction of the Development of Women's Higher Education in China**

The modernization of Chinese women's higher education may provide a "Chinese perspective" and "Chinese experience" related to solving the problems of world education modernization.

First, the development of women's higher education in China will likely continue to rely on national policy design. In the process of Chinese-style modernization, Chinese women's higher education has undergone different development stages, including educational policies, educational issues, the convergence of learning stages, and reference to international experience.

Second, the update of gender equality concepts has brought unimaginable changes to women's higher education development. In many countries, gender inequality still affects women's access to higher education. One group of international researchers investigated 26 Indian Muslim women and found that economic restrictions, lack of security in public places, gender bias, family public opinion, and social control all affect women's access to education. The disadvantages faced by women without access to education can also accumulate when they have low social status (Sahu, Jeffery, & Nakkeeran, 2017). The feminization of higher education is not the ultimate goal but rather society-wide improvements in standards of living. The development of women's higher education in China requires a top-level design at the policy level that can transform women from being individual targets of assistance into a significant force for higher education development.

Third, the development of women's higher education in China depends on a comprehensive system where the advantage gained by women in the field of education can spread to other fields. Focusing on the comprehensive development of women is not only about educational achievements but also about learning to live. Fourth, women's access to higher education improves their lives and provides better employment opportunities. However, the female population that receives higher education still faces profound problems. Universities still have "gendered spaces" (American Council on Education, 2021). These places are not isolated from society but essentially have been assigned a gender, mimicking the traditional roles of men and women.

In summary, the development of Chinese women's higher education plays a supporting role in the modernization of Chinese-style education, and the consolidation of the achievements of women after obtaining higher education requires a culture of gender equality in all of Chinese society. Women's access to higher

education is not only about an individual effort of women but also one of reform and fairness, especially in examination and related supporting systems. Indeed, women's problems cannot be solved merely by receiving higher education. Some of the problems women face are not directly caused by gender, and some may even be caused by receiving higher education.

In addition, in the modernization of Chinese education, both men and women must face social interactive factors such as irrationality, arbitrariness, and rigid social norms together.

Finally, although we have endeavoured to be as comprehensive as possible in this paper, one of its main shortcomings is a lack of understanding of the development of women's higher education worldwide. There are currently few perspectives on women's higher education worldwide, and implicit gender biases still exist in many places. We have also not made an effort to reflect the internationalization of women's higher education in China. We intend to address both of these defects in future work.

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