The jobs Chinese girls just can't do

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In China - as in many countries - more women than men are entering university. But are there jobs for the girls out in the real world?

Manicurist or courtroom judge? Cake decorator or radio host? For the cost of a ticket, children in Beijing can test out dozens of possible careers at the I Have a Dream theme park. But even in this imaginary world, these children - and their parents - stick to rigid gender stereotypes. The most popular attraction for girls is the chance to dress up as flight attendants. After dragging tiny suitcases onto a fake plane cabin, they learn to serve meals from a miniature trolley. "Straighten your uniforms!", the girls are told, as they stand in neat rows, nervously tugging at their sleeves. Many boys choose to work as customs agents or security guards - in costumes complete with fake rifles and mini bullet-proof vests. In China, the idea that girls can't or shouldn't do the same jobs as boys is passed on early. It's a lesson that extends into university and beyond.

Six hundred kilometres south of Beijing, at the China Mining and Technology University in China's eastern Jiangsu province, a group of mining engineering students listen intently to their professor. They're the envy of others at this school, since they belong to one of China's so-called "green card majors", courses that all but guarantee employment after graduation. But this program has one clear entrance requirement: men only. "China's labour law suggests mining work is unsuitable for women, so we ask women to refrain from applying to our major," explains one of the department's senior professors, Shu Jisen.

This university is not alone. Out of respect for women's safety, it says, China's education ministry bans girls from studying a variety of subjects across China, from tunnel engineering to navigation. At one university in Dalian, northern China, females are barred from studying naval engineering - because months on board a ship would be tough for women to endure, one admissions officer explained to the BBC. Slightly different reasons are given for severely restricting the number of women who can study at Beijing's People's Police University, which has a strict quota, limiting girls to comprise 10-15% of the student body. An admissions officer refused to be interviewed in person. But over the phone, he told the BBC that women were not allowed into the university in large numbers because there were not many jobs open to them after graduation, since most people in China expected police officers to be male. Jiangsu's mining engineering department cites similar practical considerations. Women would not be able to carry heavy mining equipment, they explain, and they would not be able to escape the mine as quickly in an emergency. "Some jobs are really inappropriate for women," Prof Shu argues. "If they force their way into these jobs, they will waste energy that can be better used elsewhere."

Top of Form

Some refuse to accept those reasons. A small but feisty of students and lawyers is fighting the . Using electric razors, they shaved their heads in a of well-publicised protests across China last year. "It was blatant ," argues one of the student activists, Xiao Meili. "No-one had stood up to these universities before, and told them these were wrong. Why didn't anyone want to change anything? It really made me very angry."

But more are starting to question the ban. In the university lunch canteen in Jiangsu, girls, here to study everything from management to mathematics, can't stomach the . "If someone can endure tough working conditions, that person should be allowed to do it," explains one student. "Universities should lift the limitations and allow people to make their own choices, instead of just barring them." The activists' is also battling quotas at many Chinese universities that favour boys.

The following words will fill the gaps:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| discrimination | gender | gender | network | network | policies | restrictions | restrictions |
| series |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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In recent years, females across the country scored top marks in China's all-important college entrance exam. But schools want their courses to a balance between , so they regularly lower the admissions standards for boys, leaving girls with higher marks out of luck. China's of education insists that it does not allow fixed when admitting students, "except for , national defence and public colleges", according to China's state news agency, Xinhua. But unofficially, the quotas are still in place at many schools, according to the activists. They hope to eradicate all written banning girls from applying to any majors, a activist Xiao Meili feels they can reach within a year.

And hidden prejudice against women in education? That presents a bigger . " is in every corner of life in China, and people get so used to it that it's easy to it," she says. "People got used to the idea that men did things better than women. But when women started to excel, people got scared and thought of that as a problem." The following words will fill the gaps:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| academies | achieve | challenge | gender | genders | goal | ignore | military |
| ministry | policies | ratios | security | sexism |  |  |  |