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Gender Inequality in Chinese Politics: An Empirical Analysis of Provincial Elites

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Since its foundation, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has promoted gender equality, at least at the level of official rhetoric. Despite some progress in their social and economic lives, women have not been able to make headway in Chinese politics. Many scholars have studied this topic, but due to the CCP's political sensitivity, systematic data are not available. Drawing on a unique data set about provincial-level elites, I quantify gender inequality in Chinese politics and test several commonly held hypotheses. Although most empirical studies of Chinese women in politics focus on the National People's Congress (NPC), this paper focuses on officials in the Party-State, on the grounds that they wield more power than members of the NPC. Female leaders of the Party-State are more likely to be drawn from nonparty members and to occupy less prestigious positions than male leaders. There is no evidence, however, indicating that women and ethnic minority status are associated, or that women face more difficulties entering more powerful branches of the Party-State. Cross-regional analysis finds that political institutions, socioeconomic conditions, and culture have all played some role in promoting or hindering women's political careers.

One major goal of the socialist revolution in China was to liberate women. Social transformation and state socialism under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have raised women's overall status (Croll 1978; Davin 1976). But their advancement in politics is still in question. Have women achieved the goal of holding up half the sky in Chinese

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politics? If not, how much progress have they made and what kind of biases do they face? How serious are those biases? What factors can explain the progress, or lack of thereof? Many feminist scholars have analyzed the role of Chinese women in social, economic, and cultural life (Gilmartin, Hershatter, Rofel, and White 1994; Stacey 1983; Wesoky 2002). Existing research about women's involvement in politics is imprecise. Scholars lament the slow progress (and indeed the retrogression in the post-Mao era) in women's political participation and analyze women's frustration as a result of their rising social and economic status, but empirical evidence in their analyses is usually anecdotal. Statistics, whenever available, are not systematic. There are many interesting and plausible hypotheses that are not subject to rigorous testing. In a way, the relative lack of empirically grounded research is understandable. The Chinese state is well aware of the gap between its promise of gender equality and the reality in Chinese politics. The government has tried to control the amount of information available in this regard and has released more flattering statistics, such as women's representation in the National People's Congress (NPC). Some scholars (Hsiung 2001; Judd 2002) have studied women politicians and provided rich biographical information. Their studies are very informative but limited in geographical coverage. Stanley Rosen (1995) has assembled an array of statistics regarding women's political participation in different institutions and at different levels of the state. While valuable, the statistics are highly aggregate.

In the comparative politics field beyond China, a growing literature has analyzed women's political participation around the world. In particular, scholars have explained women's legislative representation in terms of various factors, such as political institutions (electoral rules, party ideologies), socioeconomic conditions (level of development, education), and culture (religion, attitude). Initially, most studies focused on Western democracies (Rule 1987). Gradually, scholars expanded their analyses to incorporate more countries (Matland 1998; Moser 2001). Of particular interest to this article are Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris (2003) and Andrew Reynolds (1999) because both sources include China. To measure women's representation in national legislatures, they use the percentage of female representatives in the NPC. This sounds reasonable, but the Chinese NPC is hardly an institution comparable to parliaments in Western democracies, for example, the House of Representatives in the United States or the House of Commons in the United Kingdom. The causal mechanisms they identify cannot be readily applied to China,

especially the positive impact of proportional representation (PR) on women's representation.

Recent developments in China, especially the rapid expansion of Internet use, have made new information concerning the demographics of political participation available to researchers. The data analyzed here are a systematic collection of biographical information about all provincial-level leaders in China's 22 provinces, five autonomous regions, and four centrally administered cities (CACs).[1] This individual-level information allows for systematic testing of some conventional beliefs about women's political participation among researchers and policy advocates. The geographic coverage also makes it possible to explore the regional variation and test insights from the comparative literature.

This article contributes several empirical findings to our knowledge about gender equality in Chinese politics. First, it offers accurate descriptive statistics of women's participation at the provincial level. In a field that is hindered by insufficient information and questionable data, this information can add more precision to ongoing discussions. Second, while it confirms some common hypotheses, it rejects others. Female leaders are more likely to be drawn from non-CCP members, and they also occupy less important positions. There is no evidence, however, indicating that women and ethnic minority status are associated or that women face tougher barriers in attaining more powerful positions within branches of the Party-State. Third, political institutions, socioeconomic conditions, and culture all have some impact on gender equality. These findings are generally supported by other comparative gender studies. As the political institution variables cannot be borrowed directly from electoral politics, I have modified the analysis to measure other institutional aspects that are more meaningful in the Chinese context.

ANALYZING BUREAUCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PARTY-STATE

The comparative study of women legislators has made valuable contributions to our understanding of gender equality. Its importance is premised on two main assumptions. First, national legislatures are a key site for political contestation. This is certainly a reasonable assumption for

1. In the Chinese political context, they are all one level below the central government. To avoid confusion, I use "provincial level" to include all three types of regional administrations.

mature democracies, where legislators hold the ultimate power in passing new laws, changing existing policies, and holding executives responsible. Second, women legislators are different from their male counterparts. An increasing number of studies conclude that female legislators exhibit different behavioral patterns than men in similar positions (Swers 2001; Thomas 1991). In particular, they tend to prioritize bills related to women's issues, such as abortion, family, and reproductive policies. Therefore, the presence of women legislators can indeed make substantive changes in women's lives.

In the Chinese context, the assumption that national legislatures are the appropriate site for political contestation is problematic. Reforms in the past three decades have fundamentally changed the Chinese economy and society. Politically, China is becoming less authoritarian. The National People's Congress has been trying to shed its "rubber stamp" image and become a viable force in Chinese politics. Some people believed that the NPC would become the national legislature in the true sense of the concept. However, these hopes were not realistic; while the NPC has become more active in legislating new laws and monitoring government actions, the party is still in command and the NPC remains no more than a minor player in the Party-State (O'Brien 2001). This subordination becomes apparent when some of its key institutional features are examined. First, there are about three thousand delegates in the NPC, making it too unwieldy to act as a powerful political organization. Second, except for two hundred or so standing committee members, all NPC delegates are part-timers. They usually meet once every year and have other full-time jobs, limiting their ability to accumulate legislative expertise. Third, delegates to the NPC are not directly elected by the public but through party-controlled indirect elections at provincial-level People's Congresses.

The National People's Congress is not yet a powerful legislature and the role of a delegate is essentially ceremonial. The party can easily continue its prereform quotas and maintain a high level of female representation.[2] Commenting on similar arrangements in pretransition Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Marilyn Rueschemeyer (1998) acknowl-

2. After huge leaps during the Cultural Revolution, women's representation in the NPC has remained quite stable; the figure has remained at just above 20% for the past 30 years. Given declines in more powerful institutions, such as the Central Committee of the CCP (from about 12% in the 1980s to 7% in the 1990s), maintaining women's representation in the NPC becomes very important for the state to demonstrate its commitment to gender equality in politics. Unlike democratic nations that have quotas, China does not have well-specified and legally binding quotas. All quotas are deliberately left ambiguous, and leaders have a lot of discretion.

edges that "the high levels of formal representation in the communist period did not translate into real political power for women. Although constituting a respectable proportion of the rank and file in communist parties and communist era legislatures, women typically did not occupy positions of genuine political or economic power" (p. 355). Even Reynolds (1999) admits that "a leftist ideology will be more likely to place women in high office—even if such gestures are essentially tokenistic" (p. 554). This certainly applies to the Chinese case. Focusing on the NPC exaggerates the degree of gender equality in Chinese politics.

Researchers need to look beyond the NPC and locate the source of real political power in Chinese politics. Many China experts agree that despite economic and social changes, Chinese politics are quite resilient. The Party-State remains highly centralized and bureaucratized (see especially Naughton and Yang 2004). Political leaders in the Party-State establishment are the real movers and shakers. Their preferences and interests determine what kind of issues are on the agenda, how policies are designed, and whether or not policies are implemented. There are no systematic studies on the impact of women's leadership on women's issues in the Chinese context. In her field interviews, Ping-Chun Hsiung did report on one local female deputy party secretary who initiated several projects related to women's health in her administration (2001, 228). This question is beyond the scope of the current study, but if there is indeed a connection between women's participation in politics and substantive changes in women's lives, researchers need to have a better understanding of female leaders in the Party-State.

As a first step in this direction, this article focuses on provincial-level elites. Students of China have long acknowledged the role of provincial leaders in Chinese politics. At one level below the central government, these individuals are important power brokers and can exercise great influence in both policymaking and implementation. This choice makes practical sense as well. Because they are all high-ranking officials in the Party-State, more information about them is available through government Websites and news sources. Moreover, many of these regions are like midsize countries and have different social and economic conditions. This variation offers a great opportunity to explore factors (especially those developed in the cross-country context) that can increase or hinder the entry of women into the inner circle of politics in China.

Four groups of leaders are included in the study. The first consists of secretaries and deputy secretaries of the provincial-level party committees. The second group includes all leaders in the provincial-level gov-

ernments, that is, governors and vice governors (for provinces), chairpersons and vice chairpersons (for autonomous regions), and mayors and deputy mayors (for CACs). Chairpersons and vice chairpersons of the People's Congresses (PCs) and People's Political Consultative Conferences (PPCCs) are the last two groups.[3] These branches are the four major pillars of the Party-State at the provincial level, commonly known as the "four leadership groups." Of course, these four branches are not equal in terms of their impact on local politics. The party and the government command most human and financial resources. PCs and PPCCs are essentially advisory bodies. Some experts on provincial leaders have excluded PC and PPCC leaders from their analyses but I have included them. PCs and PPCCs often serve as "retirement homes" for former provincial party and government leaders; including them can thus expand the data range to cover older generations of provincial elites. Many of these leaders are still quite active in local politics and can exert influence through their clients in the party and government. Where appropriate, I analyze these four branches separately to capture their differences.

The final database contains 1,098 cases.[4] As of July 2004, the last time all of the information was updated, women occupied approximately 10% of all provincial-level leadership positions.[5] This is significantly lower than 20.2% of female representation in the tenth NPC. Based on some other estimates (Bo 2002; Rosen 1995), 10% is probably an upper boundary for women leadership throughout the Party-State. It is interesting to note that this number is close to the world averages (12.5% in the lower houses and 8.7% in cabinets) calculated by Reynolds (1999). Compared with 37.8% in the labor force and 47.1% in schools (*China Statistical Yearbook 2002*, Table 13 (ch. 5), Table 20 (ch. 20)), women have not made much progress moving into the upper echelons of political power.

3. These leaders are different from delegates to the NPC. They are permanent bureaucrats and have the same bureaucratic ranking as other leaders in the party and government branches.

4. There are 1,034 individuals. Some of them hold concurrent positions in these four branches. For example, many governors are also deputy party secretaries, and party secretaries are usually chairpersons of the PCs. I treat these people as two separate observations and thus analyze 1,089 provincial-level positions.

5. I have collected information from several sources. To improve transparency, the Chinese government requires that all government ministries and local governments publish relevant information on the Internet. Under this "government online" project, provincial-level administrations have listed biographies of all their leaders in about 40% of the cases. For the rest, I relied on the two largest official news sources on the Internet, People's Daily (www.people.com.cn) and Xinhua News (www.xinhua.org.cn). In many cases, I relied on the Google.com search engine for information about gender, ethnicity, or party affiliation of leaders; when I used Google.com, I relied only on information from official sources (e.g., local party newspapers). In the end, information was still missing for about 70 cases, and I called various local government offices to fill in the gaps.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER INEQUALITY

Women's low participation rate is apparent. Feminist scholars believe that in politics, Chinese women suffer from two more forms of gender inequalities: selection of female leaders mainly from discriminated categories and appointment of these leaders into less powerful positions. Neither is apparent, but each is crucial for understanding gender equality in China. This empirical section first tests these hypotheses. Next, I explore causes of gender inequality through cross-regional comparisons.

Gender Bias I: Combination of Discriminated Categories?

It has long been recognized that in Chinese politics, certain social categories of people are subject to systematic discrimination, especially women, ethnic minorities, members of noncommunist parties, and the intelligentsia. For the sake of political correctness and legitimacy, however, CCP leaders have officially pledged to promote the political participation of members of these groups. In the Chinese nomenclature system, the party committee at each level has its Department of Organization, and its responsibility includes nominating, investigating, and appointing all major leaders of the Party-State below that level. It is generally believed that the department acts strategically and gives preference to individuals who represent several discriminated categories at the same time. This allows the CCP to improve its statistics for multiple discriminated categories while leaving more positions for their preferred candidates.

Suspicion concerning such departmental action is particularly common among scholars who study women's issues in China. One scholar commented that "when people choose a woman to be a leader at the upper levels of leadership, they often demand, or at least expect, that the candidate may combine in herself all the following qualifications: that she is not a member of the Chinese Communist Party, that she is an intellectual, that she is a member of a minority nationality or of some democratic party" (Dai 1992, 324). These leaders are labeled "ignorant young girls" (or *wu zhi shao nu*). These four Chinese characters refer to each of the four discriminated categories: non-CCP, intellectual, minority, woman. The phrase vividly highlights the powerlessness of these quadruple minorities in Chinese politics. A great deal of anecdotal evidence supports this claim. For example, among the six female leaders in Shanghai, five are noncommunist party members and only one is a CCP

Table 1. Loglinear analyses of gender, ethnicity, and party

	Pooled	*CACs*	*Provinces*	*Autonomous Regions*
Gender * Party	0.89***	1.62***	0.91***	0.12
	(0.21)	(0.57)	(0.26)	(0.59)
Constant	6.5***	4.56***	6.21***	4.22***
	(0.04)	(0.1)	(0.04)	(0.11)
Likelihood ratio	1.76	3.02	0.92	0.76
Chi-square				
DF	3	3	3	3
P	0.62	0.39	0.82	0.86

Note: Main effects are included in all models and estimates are not reported. Two interaction terms (Gender * Ethnicity and Ethnicity * Party) are not entered in the models. Neither is significant when included. Variables are coded as follows: Gender: one if man and zero otherwise; Party: one if CCP membership and zero otherwise; Ethnicity: one if Han and zero otherwise. Standard errors are in parentheses. *** significant beyond 0.01 level.

member. In Guangdong province, two of the four women leaders are noncommunist party members and one of those two is also an ethnic minority.

Systematic information about these provincial leaders' educational background is not available; however, information about their gender, ethnicity, and party membership is available, and so it is possible to test the relationship among these three discriminated categories. There are many different ethnicities in China, but the politically relevant distinction is between the Han ethnicity (the majority of the country) and the non-Han ethnicities. The party membership category is also treated as a dummy variable. A leader can be either a Chinese Communist Party member or not a CCP member. In the latter case, the leader may be a member of one of the "democratic parties" or not affiliated with any political party. I hypothesize the relationship of these variables to leadership positions as follows:

Hypothesis 1: *The gender, ethnicity, and party membership of provincial leaders are associated. Women leaders are more likely to be non-Han Chinese or non-CCP members, while male leaders tend to be Han Chinese or CCP members.*

Because I am interested only in associational patterns, not causal relations, and as all these variables are categorical, loglinear models are used in the analyses. Table 1 summarizes the results. The first interest-

ing finding is that statistically speaking, only gender and party membership are associated. The other two hypothesized associations (gender and ethnicity, ethnicity and party) do not exist. Therefore, only part of Hypothesis 1 is confirmed. For provincial leaders as a whole (the first column), the estimate is positive, meaning that the woman and non-CCP membership (or the man and CCP membership) combination is quite common. To interpret these estimates meaningfully, I calculate their corresponding odds ratios. For all provincial-level leaders, the odds for female leaders to be a non-CCP member instead of a CCP member is 2.44 times greater than that for male leaders. Therefore, a substantial gender difference exists.[6]

The second finding of the analysis concerns variations within provincial level administrations. Although provinces, CACs, and autonomous regions are considered formally equal in the Chinese administrative system, there are some subtle differences. The central government and the CCP keep a closer watch over CACs, and their leaders enjoy more prestige in the Party-State (e.g., higher chances of being promoted to national leadership, more representation in the party's powerful Political Bureau). Autonomous regions, however, are supposed to enjoy more freedom from the center. Non-Han ethnicities are usually the majority and are entitled to more leadership positions. As in the pooled data, gender and ethnicity, ethnicity and party are not associated with each other—but the relationship between gender and party membership varies. In both CACs and provinces, women tend to be non-CCP members. The odds ratio for provinces does not change very much (2.48), but jumps to 5.05 for CACs; this signifies that the combination of discriminated categories is much stronger in CACs than in provinces. If this combination is interpreted as a subtle form of gender bias, the result is somewhat counterintuitive. After all, the CACs are more developed economically and socially, and should therefore lead the way for gender equality in Chinese politics. This puzzle can be partially resolved later by a more careful analysis of regional patterns. For autonomous regions, the association between gender and party membership disappears. The odds ratio is close to 1, and not statistically significant. In other words, women leaders in these areas are not subject to this subtle form of discrimination. It does not, however, mean that there is no gender bias in autonomous regions.

6. Among 66.3 million CCP members in China, only 16.6% (10.3 million) are women. This is one possible reason for a higher women's and non-CCP membership combination among provincial leaders. I thank one reviewer for raising this point. Hypothesis 1, however, concerns only this association and does not try to explain the causes.

Gender Bias II: Glass Ceilings for Female Leaders?

Feminists and other scholars frequently criticize the CCP for failing to place female leaders in positions with more power, prestige, and resources. This form of gender bias is not subtle. For example, the Political Bureau is the most powerful and prestigious institution in Chinese politics. Among its 24 members, only one, Wu Yi, is female. None of its nine standing committee members is female. In our data set, the most prestigious leadership position that goes to a woman at the provincial level is a chairperson of the PPCC.[7] In order to detect and to measure this kind of gender bias, I explore two sources. The first is the distribution of women leaders across the four branches of the Party-State. In provincial level politics, the party and the government branches have more power and control more resources. PCs and PPCCs control few resources; therefore, their impact on local politics is relatively weak. Another more straightforward way is to examine how chief leadership positions (party secretary, governor, mayor, and chairperson) and deputy positions are allocated. If gender discrimination exists, we have the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: *Women leaders are more likely to be found in the PCs and PPCCs than in the party and government branches.*

Hypothesis 3: *Women leaders are more likely to be assigned to deputy positions than their male counterparts.*

There is in fact a third way to track this gender bias. Studying cabinet members throughout the world, Reynolds (1999) discovered that women tend to hold "softer" sociocultural ministerial positions, whereas men are in more prestigious positions of economics, national security, and foreign affairs. In China, scholars also find that typical portfolios of women leaders include women's affairs, family and child affairs, health, education, and culture (Hsiung 2001; Rosen 1995; Zhang 1993). Very few female leaders are in charge of economics, finance, and personnel. Unfortunately, information regarding their responsibilities is missing for most provincial leaders.

7. After the data for this study were collected, one woman (Song Xiuyan) was appointed to a prestigious position and became the governor of Qinghai province.

Table 2. Loglinear analyses of branch, gender, ethnicity, and party

	Pooled	*CACs*	*Provinces*	*Autonomous Regions*
Gender * Party	0.89***	1.62***	0.91***	0.12
	(0.21)	(0.57)	(0.26)	(0.59)
Branch * Party				
P = 0, B = 1	−19.9	−19.9	−19.9	−19.8
	(987.6)	(2507.7)	(1133.9)	(2563.7)
P = 0, B = 2	−1.91***	−1.99***	−1.91***	−1.86***
	(0.22)	(0.61)	(0.27)	(0.58)
P = 0, B = 3	−1.79***	−1.07**	−1.98***	−1.84***
	(0.20)	(0.47)	(0.26)	(0.54)
Constant	5.00***	3.05***	4.69***	2.8***
	(0.07)	(0.21)	(0.09)	(0.18)
Likelihood ratio	19.2	5.65	14.8	14.7
Chi-square				
DF	21	21	21	21
P	0.57	1.00	0.84	0.84

Note: Main effects are included in all models and estimates are not reported. Other interaction terms (Branch * Gender, Gender * Ethnicity, Branch * Ethnicity, Ethnicity * Party) are not statistically significant and are dropped from the final models. No non-CCP members can enter the party branch, and so these are structural zeros in P = 0 and B = 1. Branch is coded as follows: one if the individual is in the party, two in the government, three in the PC, and four in the PPCC. All others are coded the same as Table 1. Standard errors are in parentheses. ** significant beyond 0.05 level; *** significant beyond 0.01 level.

Table 2 summarizes the relationship between branch and gender. Ethnicity and party are included to control for their effects. For both pooled and separate data, the association between gender and branch is not present and the interaction term is dropped from the final models. There is no evidence indicating that women are mainly being assigned to less powerful branches, even though their participation in *each* branch is very low. A simple cross-tabulation of gender and branch does suggest that slightly more men than women (40.7% vs. 33.9%) are in the party and government branches.[8] This is largely a party effect. Non-CCP members are strongly discriminated against when it comes to getting into the

8. The distributions of women leaders in four branches are 12.5% (party), 21.4% (government), 30.4% (PC), and 35.7% (PPCC). The numbers for males are 17.7%, 23%, 26.5%, and 32.8%, respectively. Statistically, there is no relationship between gender and branch (Pearson chi-square = 2.55, df = 3, p = 0.47).

Table 3. Conditional odds ratios for party and branch

	Pooled	*CACs*	*Provinces*	*Autonomous Regions*
Government vs. PC	0.89	0.4	1.1	0.98
Government vs. PPCC	0.15	0.14	0.15	0.16
PC vs. PPCC	0.17	0.34	0.14	0.16

Note: Party and Branch are coded as in earlier tables. Non-CCP members cannot enter the first Branch (the party), and so this category is not included.

government branch, and they are certainly not allowed into the party branch. Table 3 calculates these conditional odds ratios. For all provincial elites, a non-CCP member is six times more likely to be in the PPCC branch than in the government branch. This is not surprising since the PPCCs are supposed to represent democratic parties and social forces. There is some bias against non-CCP members in the government branch as opposed to the PC branch, but the odds ratio is close to 1. Since gender and party are closely associated, this party effect reduces women's appointments in these more prestigious branches. This pattern remains largely unchanged for provinces and autonomous regions. CACs exhibit different dynamics: Non-CCP members face higher entrance obstacles to the government branch as opposed to the PC branch, and the PC and PPCC divide for non-CCP members is less steep. These deviations may reflect different power alignments in CAC politics, and they are beyond the scope of our investigation of gender equality.

Another interesting and important finding in Table 2 is that the relationship between gender and party remains unchanged from Table 1; in addition, branch variable has been added to this analysis. For each branch, only gender and party are combined, and they are both statistically independent from ethnicity. This provides more justification for analyzing these four branches together instead of separately.

While Hypothesis 2 is rejected, Hypothesis 3 receives strong confirmation. Table 4 reveals this gender difference. After controlling for position, the relationship between gender and party remains robust, even though the odds ratios have changed slightly due to the effect of position. For all provincial-level elites, the odds for non-CCP members to be in a deputy position are 36.6 times greater than for CCP members. Given the close association between woman and non-CCP membership, women are disproportionately impacted by this party effect. After controlling for

Table 4. Loglinear analyses of position, gender, ethnicity, and party

	Pooled	*CACs*	*Provinces*	*Autonomous Regions*
Gender ∗ Party	0.77***	1.64***	0.79***	0.01
	(0.21)	(0.60)	(0.26)	(0.59)
Gender ∗ Position	1.4**	–0.1	1.43**	16.4
	(0.6)	(1.13)	(0.73)	(1337.7)
Party ∗ Position	3.6***	17.6	17.2	1.48
	(1.01)	(1525.4)	(640.5)	(1.05)
Constant	4.61***	2.68***	4.36***	2.2***
	(0.09)	(0.25)	(0.11)	(0.24)
Likelihood ratio	8.63	4.38	2.2	1.94
Chi-square				
DF	8	8	8	8
P	0.38	0.82	0.97	0.98

Note: Main effects are included in all models and estimates are not reported. Other interaction terms (Gender ∗ Ethnicity, Ethnicity ∗ Party, Ethnicity ∗ Position) are not statistically significant and are dropped from the final models. Position is coded as follows: one if an individual is in chief leadership position and zero otherwise. All others are coded as in earlier tables. Standard errors are in parentheses. ** significant beyond 0.05 level; *** significant beyond 0.01 level.

the party effect, however, the odds for women to be in a deputy position is still four times greater than for their male counterparts. This effect is related entirely to issues of gender. These patterns hold largely across different types of regions, even though some variations do exist. The bias against non-CCP members is present in all three areas. The estimates for CACs and provinces are unusual because *no* non-CCP members are in a chief position, making it impossible to calculate odds ratios and thus providing strong evidence of party bias. In autonomous regions, party bias is also strong but the confidence level is low. The regional dynamics of the gender effect is different. Although the hidden bias against women (combining woman with non-CCP membership) is strong in CACs, female leaders do not face extra hurdles in obtaining chief positions. Out of 15 women leaders in these regions, one is the chairwoman of a PPCC. In provinces, the effects of gender are more powerful, and the odds of women leaders reaching chief positions are still four times smaller than the odds for their male counterparts. The gender effect is strongest in autonomous regions. The odds ratio cannot be calculated because no woman is appointed to chief positions in these areas, again the strongest evidence for gender bias.

Explaining Gender Inequality: Regional Variation

Thus far, my analysis has verified some forms of gender bias in Chinese politics. The empirical findings also point out some interesting variations across different types of regional administrations, a reminder of China's enormous regional diversity. The regional dimension opens an opportunity for exploring some causes of gender inequality in Chinese politics, that is, why some regions are doing better in terms of incorporating women into important official positions. The key is to operationalize this concept. One can calculate the percentage of women leaders in each provincial-level administration. This is a straightforward method, and it indicates the overall level of gender equality. But it fails to capture more subtle differences in Chinese politics. Unlike one-person-one-vote systems in Western legislatures, being a member of the ruling elite does not guarantee the same amount of power and resources.[9] The four branches of the Party-State are not equal. Party secretaries and governors wield more authority than chairpersons of PCs and PPCCs. Being appointed in a chief position also matters. To capture these differences, I have constructed a gender equality index (GEI). All provincial-level elites are weighted differently according to their branches and positions.[10] The final index measures women's share of total weight in the region and can be interpreted as an indicator of women's real clout in provincial-level politics.[11] As shown in Table 5, GEI scores exhibit a significant amount of variation.

On the side of independent variables, I follow the lead of other comparative gender scholars and test three groups of variables. Most political institutional variables in comparative studies are particular to legislative politics, such as electoral rule, district size, and party ideology. They are not relevant in Chinese provincial-level politics. However, preceding analyses do indicate that CACs, provinces, and autonomous regions have somewhat different political dynamics. This may be one way to capture the effect of political institutions on gender equality in a centralized and authoritarian state. Even though these 31 provincial-level regions are equal in terms of bureaucratic ranking, their relationship with the cen-

9. Some scholars of American legislatures are moving beyond simple numbers and exploring institutional differences within these bodies.

10. I weighted various positions as follows: two points for people in the party and government branches; one point for being in the PC and PPCC; and one point for being in a chief leadership position.

11. For example, the total score for region A is 70 and women leaders' total score is 7. The GEI for this region is $(7/70) \times 100 = 10$.

Table 5. Gender equality index (GEI)

Region	*GEI*
Jiangxi	1.96
Shaanxi	5.45
Yunnan	5.66
Guizhou	5.77
Hainan	6.38
Beijing	7.14
Gansu	7.41
Inner Mongolia	7.41
Qinghai	7.41
Congqing	7.69
Henan	7.69
Jilin	8.00
Sichuan	8.20
Xinjiang	8.62
Tibet	8.97
Anhui	9.62
Hunan	9.80
Fujian	10.00
Hebei	10.00
Hubei	10.00
Tianjin	10.00
Shandong	10.53
Shanxi	10.53
Guangdong	11.11
Heilongjiang	11.54
Ningxia	11.54
Guangxi	12.00
Jiangsu	12.50
Zhejiang	12.50
Shanghai	14.04
Liaoning	16.33

Note: The numbers are percentages. Coding methods are reported in notes 10 and 11.

tral government differs. The designation of CACs, provinces, and autonomous regions reveals some real differences that impact women's political participation. In terms of power and prestige, official positions in CACs, provinces, and autonomous regions are ranked in the preceding order. Since more power usually leads to intensified competitions, bias against women is more obvious in CACs.

Hypothesis 4: *Other things being equal, CAC status reduces women's participation in politics most strongly, followed by province status.*

For socioeconomic variables, I include GDP per capita, female labor participation rate, and level of female college education.[12] According to the modernization thesis, economic development expands educational opportunities for women, enabling them to compete for jobs in the modern economy. Through higher education and professional experience, women gain more confidence and expertise for participation in politics. These arguments are regime neutral and should apply to the Chinese case. Gender ratio is also included in the analysis.[13] It is possible that higher female political participation is merely a reflection of demographics; that is, there are more women available. Religion is not a salient factor, nor is there any information available. Opinion surveys typically do not cover all regions in the country. Like most comparative studies, I rely on a proxy measure. The education bias variable measures men's college education against that of women's: the larger the number, the greater the bias.[14] This is different from the level of female college education. While the latter measures absolute achievement, education bias gauges the relative success of women. These hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 5: *Higher levels of economic development, labor participation, and college education increase women's presence in provincial politics.*

Hypothesis 6: *Higher gender ratio reduces women's political participation.*

Hypothesis 7: *Education bias is negatively associated with women in politics.*

Table 6 summarizes the regression results. Because GDP per capita and female college education are moderately correlated ($r = 0.73$), I have

12. GDP per capita is calculated by dividing regional GDP by its population (in 1,000 yuan). Both are year 2000 data and available in *China Statistical Yearbook 2001*. Female labor participation rate measures the percentage of female employees in urban units, including state-owned, collectively owned enterprises and government agencies. This does not include female employees in the rural area. Presumably, urban employment opportunities should give women more experience, confidence, and connections for reaching political leadership positions at the provincial level. Employment opportunities in the rural areas are largely agricultural. The information is for year 2000 and also available in *China Labor Statistical Yearbook 2001*. Level of female college education measures the percentage of women six years and older who have received two-year college or more (including university and graduate) education. Data are from the 2000 population census in *China Statistical Yearbook 2002*.

13. Gender ratio is calculated by dividing male population by female population. Data are available from the 2000 population census in *China Statistical Yearbook 2002*.

14. Level of men's college education (percentage of men six and older who have received two-year college or more education) is divided by women's college level education. Both are from the 2000 population census and are available in *China Statistical Yearbook 2002*.

Table 6. Regression analysis of gender inequality in provincial-level administrations

	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*
Political					
CACs				−4.57*	−4.63*
				(2.42)	(2.46)
Provinces				−1.43	−1.25
				(1.18)	(1.24)
Socioeconomic					
Gender ratio	−0.43**	−0.35*	−0.34*	−0.27	−0.25
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
GDP per capita	0.02*	0.02*	0.04**	0.04**	
(× 1,000 yuan)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	
Female labor participation	36.3*	21.4	23.5	−2.28	−1.20
	(21.3)	(21.8)	(22.5)	(25.3)	(25.7)
Female college	0.11				
	(0.15)				
Cultural					
Education bias			−0.88		−0.99
			(1.72)		(1.77)
Constant	41.2*	37.5*	36.8*	37.6*	36.5*
	(22.0)	(21.0)	(21.3)	(20.4)	(20.8)
Number of cases	31	31	31	31	31
Adj. R square	0.22	0.29	0.27	0.33	0.31

Note: OLS estimates. * significant beyond 0.1 level; ** significant beyond 0.05 level.

tried different specifications in Models 1 and 2. The estimate for female college education, as expected, is positive but not statistically significant. GDP per capita, on the other hand, is statistically significant. Female college education is dropped.[15] Model 3 adds the cultural variable, and Models 4 and 5 further add political variables. There are some consistent findings in the table. The signs for the cultural factor (education bias) are negative, as predicted in Hypothesis 7, but the estimates are not statistically significant. Gender ratio is shown to have a negative impact on women's political participation. Its impact is weakened after GDP per capita and political dummy variables are introduced. In Models 4 and 5, the level of statistical significance is slightly above the conventional figure of 10%. This largely confirms Hypothesis 6: Regions with more men open fewer doors to ambitious women. This result, however,

15. In fact, it never shows a statistically significant effect in any specification.

can be interpreted in cultural terms. Gender ratio may in fact measure overall cultural bias. People in some regions may have deep-rooted cultural preferences for male offspring. By means of ultrasound and infanticide, many girls have been eliminated, leading to higher gender imbalance in those places. The environment is clearly hostile to women in general, let alone women leaders. This reinterpretation argues against a hasty rejection of cultural factors in the Chinese context. In the GEI table, the worst performers in terms of promoting gender equality are Jiangxi and Shaanxi provinces; in fact, they have the worst gender imbalance problem in the country. Top performers (Liaoning, Shanghai, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu), on the other hand, all have a more balanced gender mix. On average, the gender ratio for the top five performers is 106.4, while it is 110 for the bottom five regions. Guangxi is able to place among the top five best performers mainly because of its status as an autonomous region. Excluding Guangxi, the gender ratio for top performers is only 104.7.

Economic development seems to increase women's political participation as predicted. Wealthier areas tend to incorporate more women into provincial leadership. In fact, the top four regions (Liaoning, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu) in the GEI table are all in the wealthy coastal area, and the bottom four (Jiangxi, Shaanxi, Yunnan, Guizhou) are poor inland provinces. This may offer some hope for feminists. As wealth trickles down from coastal to inland regions, more women leaders will rise. This optimism, however, must be checked with some caution. While statistically significant, the substantive effect of wealth is small. Every 1,000 yuan increase in GDP per capita can increase women's political weight by 0.02 or 0.04 percentage points. This is not a very encouraging finding. Female labor participation rate can have a major impact, but that impact is very sensitive to model specifications. Its power quickly gives way to two political variables once they are introduced. As predicted in Hypothesis 4, both CAC and province statuses have a negative impact on women's participation, but only the estimates for CACs are statistically significant. Being a CAC lowers women's political weight by almost 5 percentage points, a sizable drop, especially considering the impact of GDP per capita. Being close to the central Party-State is not helpful for female political leaders. The highest-ranking CAC in the GEI table is Shanghai (2d). Other CACs, Tianjin, Congqing, and Beijing, are 11th, 22d, and 26th, respectively. Considering their advanced economic and social development, this achievement in political gender equality is negligible.

In a nutshell, political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors have all played some role in promoting or hindering women's quest for equality in Chinese politics. Even though political institutional variables are redefined to be relevant in the Chinese regime, the message is surprisingly similar to that of other comparative gender studies. Socioeconomic and cultural developments can promote gender equality in politics. But politics and political institutions have the largest impact. In this sense, gender equality is really a political problem.

CONCLUSION

The Chinese Communist Party has promised to give women half the sky in the country. Although their economic and social status has improved, women are still frustrated by the lack of progress in political participation. The CCP is fond of pointing to women's representation in the NPC to demonstrate its success in promoting gender equality. That 20% of all delegates are female is indeed impressive, especially when compared to other countries at the same level of economic development. But in the Chinese political context, this comparison can be misleading. Researchers need to gauge gender equality in the real center of political power, that is, leadership positions in the Party-State. As such, I have focused my examination on key decision makers at the provincial level. In contrast to the relatively high presence of women in the NPC, only about 10% of the provincial-level elites are female. Moreover, female leaders are disproportionately selected from non-CCP members, and their chances of reaching a chief leadership position are extremely low. This reveals a less sanguine picture of gender equality in Chinese politics. Cross-regional analysis suggests that while economic development tends to promote gender equality in politics, political institutions and cultural bias in China have presented high barriers.

This study provides empirical foundations for scholarly as well as popular discussions about gender equality in China. While I focus exclusively on provincial-level elites, further research, including an exhaustive collection of data about lower-level ruling elites (city, county, and township), would prove worthwhile. More careful examinations will enrich our knowledge of women's political participation in China and empower feminist scholars and activists. One consistent finding in empirical analyses is the difference among three types of provincial-level administrations. Although this institutional effect is strong, this paper ex-

plores only one dimension: the power and prestige in the official ranking system. There are other institutional aspects that may be relevant and therefore require further study. Another logical question to ask is whether women's participation in the Party-State really leads to substantive changes in the society. Do women leaders prioritize issues related to women? If so, how do scholars trace these differences? If not, what is the meaning and significance of women's political participation in China?

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