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# Women's Development in Guangdong; Unequal Opportunities and Limited Development in a Market Economy

Ying Hua Yue  
*CUNY City College*

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**Women's Development in Guangdong: Unequal Opportunities and Limited  
Development in a Market Economy**

**Yinghua Yue**

**The City College of New York**

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**ABSTRACT**

In the context of China's three-decade market-oriented economic reform, in which economic development has long been prioritized, women's development, as one of the social undertakings peripheral to economic development, has relatively lagged behind. This research is an attempt to unfold the current situation of women's development within such context by studying the case of Guangdong -- the province as forerunner of China's economic reform and opening-up -- drawing on current primary resources. First, this study reveals mixed results for women's development in Guangdong: achievements have been made in education, employment and political participation in terms of "rates" and "numbers," and small "breakthroughs" have taken place in legislation and women's awareness of their equal rights and interests; however, limitations and challenges, like disparities between different women groups in addition to gender disparity, continue to exist. Second, factors for limitations and challenges are discussed: the out-of-balance social development arising from economic-advancement-prioritizing policies, drawbacks in legislation and ineffective enforcement of laws and regulations, the strong influence of tradition, and the absence of good understanding or awareness of women's development in the whole society, in particular in an environment dominated by market and consumer culture. Finally, this paper concludes that although women's development in Guangdong under the current market system has been slowly moving forward overall, it is nonetheless hindered by both institutional and ideological barriers and different groups of women have different opportunities; also, a large-scale and major breakthrough is not likely to be realized until a comprehensive and balanced social development takes place, women themselves become aware of their own issues and are permitted to actually solve their own issues. In addition, a few suggestions are provided for future investigation: more studies on focus groups are necessary due to the variety of subgroups of women; participant observation is an appropriate methodology for accurate interpretation of perceptions and facts under the current educational level in China overall; and observation and monitoring of women's advancement following the Eighteenth National Congress of CPC, which concluded in November of 2012, will be of particular value with regard to potential comprehensive reforms.

## **Women's Development in Guangdong: Unequal Opportunities and Limited Development in a Market Economy**

### **INTRODUCTION**

It has been more than thirty years since China's economic reform of the late 1970s. Chinese people have experienced dramatic changes in their lives in terms of improvement in material conditions, increase in individual freedom and influx of diverse values. The adoption of new values and new lifestyles has caused conflicts against tradition and may even be transforming it. After two millennia of oppression under a patriarchal system, Chinese women finally began to enjoy liberation in the late nineteenth century. Along with China's century-long modernization, social status of Chinese women has been improving generally. In particular, Mao's advocacy that "women can hold half of the sky" and "women can do everything as men can" had such great influence that it is still frequently cited in people's daily talk. Though many argue that women's liberation in Mao's time, which mainly emphasized women's labor participation, was insufficient, it is widely believed that Deng Xiaoping's market-oriented economic reform which promotes equal opportunities for competition in the post-Mao era has put women in a very disadvantageous position, and resulted in setbacks in the course of women's liberation (Yuan, 2005; Li, 1994). Deng's prioritizing of economic development over women's liberation may also be demonstrated in the absence of his documented speeches in the section of *Zhongyao Wenxian* [Important historical documents, which are mainly speeches and theories by party-state leaders] on the website of the All China Women's Federation (ACWF, n.d.)<sup>1</sup>.

However, do these setbacks really show the whole picture of women's development after the reform? Some recent news makes me doubt this single-faceted conclusion. In May 2011, the following article appeared in a local paper in Guangdong: "Girl from Guangzhou gave the local committee of development a ball as gift after their failure to publicize required reports," by which she meant that these government departments were shirking responsibilities

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<sup>1</sup> In the page of "Important historical documents" of the ACWF website, party-state leaders whose discussions and theories on women's work listed include Mao Zedong, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao (these three are chairmen and presidents of the party and the state), Wu Yi (female, the former vice premier) and Wang Zhaoguo (a current member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee). Deng Xiaoping belongs to the category of chairmen and presidents as the second generation of leader.

among each other as “kicking balls” like little boys playing football<sup>2</sup>; also, in August this year (2012), we read “some high school girls from Guangzhou protest gender discrimination in college admission” to oppose unfair gender-based practices in the society.<sup>3</sup> Though the later news shows the reality that gender discrimination still exists, and most likely widely, the courageous action of these girls demonstrates their consciousness of themselves as citizens equal to men. These young women contrast greatly with the traditional stereotype of Chinese women as being quiet, obedient, and absent from the public sphere. I can envision their mothers who were born in Mao’s time and experienced the Cultural Revolution, saying “How dare are you?” in fear and surprise.

More than thirty years since the reform, the controversial generations of the 80s and 90s, who were born and grew up in the post-reform reform era and under the one-child policy, have developed their own cultures very different from those of their parents, and have been now gradually participating in the labor force and becoming major social players. *Kuadio de yidai* [the beaten generation] and *shiluo de yidai* [the lost generation], as well as “being selfish and irresponsible,” are frequent criticisms toward them. However, are they really selfish and irresponsible? At least, in the news reports above, what these girls did in fact shows their concern for the society; also, more than just keeping their ideas and opinions to themselves, they are confidently taking action, speaking out and exerting influence on the society. In terms of family and marriage, they even dare to have *nuohun* [literally, “naked marriage”], feeling easy with the reality of no car, no house, no diamond ring or wedding, which is in dramatic contrast to the “*zhangmuniang xianxiang*” [phenomenon of the potential mother-in-law/wife’s mother],<sup>4</sup> where mothers of girls set high standards for their potential sons-in-law, which are

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<sup>2</sup> Kicking ball is frequently used in recent years by Chinese, in particularly Cantonese, to lampoon the phenomenon of shirking responsibilities among government departments. See, Guangzhou nvsheng yaoqiu zhengwu gongkai weiguo, xiang fagaiwei zeng daici piqiu [Girl from Guangzhou gave the local committee of development a ball as gift after their failure to publicize required reports](June 12, 2011), retrieved September 21, 2012 from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/local/2011-06/12/c\\_121523435.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/local/2011-06/12/c_121523435.htm)

<sup>3</sup> It has long been heard that boys are more likely to be admitted than girls with the same scores on the college entrance examination. However, few protests are reported. These high school girls in Guangzhou say they must speak out not only for themselves, but also for other female students who are or will be confronting gender discrimination in college admission. See, Guangzhou gaozhongsheng kangyi gaokao luquxian nannv chabie daiyu [High school girls in Guangzhou protest for gender discrimination in college admission]( August 19, 2012), retrieved September 21, 2012 from <http://lady.163.com/12/0819/15/899FJETU002649P6.html>

<sup>4</sup> It is reported that the phenomenon of wife’s mother exists widely. It is believed that factors lead to this phenomenon include gender imbalance caused by one-child policy that is promulgated since the early 1980s and mothers’ wishes that their daughters, many of them maybe only child, can have a good life, mainly in terms of financial security. Among all the standards, owning their own place is most important. See, “Zhangmuniang xianxiang” de shizhi shi shenme [What is the

mainly materially oriented, such as having a good job, a car and an apartment.

Apparently, great differences in various aspects of life have emerged between the older generation and the younger one, who are born before and after the reform, respectively. While the young people are pursuing their lives, it seems that gender disparity is seldom mentioned among the younger generation. In terms of women's development, does the younger generation still confront disadvantages caused by the economic reform that hinder the enhancement of women's status? Is gender disparity merely a legacy of the old social system? What does the reform mean to the younger generation? Does it provide the young women a more favorable environment for development? In general, though obstacles may still exist, I assume that the younger generation of women has more opportunities for development, benefiting from more resources provided by greatly improved social material conditions, various opportunities and personal choices from dynamic environment, as well as experience of different cultures and ideas pursuant to the country's "opening-up" promoting integration into international society.

This paper explores women's development in China in the context of the thirty years following the major economic reform since the late 1970s. Specifically, I will focus on the reform's influences on women's lives in terms of education, employment and career development, political participation, income and welfare as well as family and marriage, by studying the case of Guangdong province, a coastal province in southern China, which is the first to experiment the economic reform and opening-up policy. In the following section, I will first review the history of women's liberation in China since 1949, trying to identify its major achievements as well as its limitations.

## **WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN THE NEW CHINA**

### *Efforts and Limitations in Mao's Era (1950s-1970s)*

The greatest efforts in women's liberation after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), in particularly in Mao's era, are the promulgation of Marriage Law and the Constitution, the official advocacy of women's participation in production, and the establishment of the All China Women's Federation (ACWF). The Constitution of the PRC

states that the oppressive feudal system has been abolished and women are entitled to freedom and equal rights to men in all aspects of life, including politics, economics, culture and education, and family and marriage (Yang, 1999, p.37; Zhu, 1999, p.62). The 1950 Marriage Law, and some others, further emphasize women's freedom and rights in a democratic marriage system, by prohibiting common practices in the old feudal society including "polygamy, arranged marriages, child-adoption marriage, prostitution, the buying and selling of women, and other overt abuses from the past against women"; and regulating the age for first marriage for both sexes; also banning traditional practices such as child marriage, bridewealth, dowry and entitling women to the right to initiate divorce (Bonvillain, 2001, p.150; Yang, 1999, p.37). Under the influence of Friedrich Engel's argument in *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that the realization of gender equality should rely on women's participation in production outside of the family, women in the new China are earnestly encouraged by the state to go out to work; in particular, the charismatic Chairman Mao advocated that "women can hold half of the sky" and "women can do everything men can do" (Yang, 1999, pp.37-38; Yuan, 2005, pp.51-52; Zuo & Tang, 1993, pp.125-126).

Regardless of the good intentions of the new communist government with respect to enhancing women's status, it seems that improvement is limited and the approach to women's liberation has caused many criticisms. These criticisms are directed toward a wide range of issues, including work, pay, family, marriage, and the relationship between women and the state (Bonvillain, 2001; Yang, 1999; Yuan, 2005; Zuo & Tang, 1993).

With regard to women's labor participation in Mao's time, women's employment rates increased from 7.5 percent in 1949 to 13.48 percent in 1956, at an annual rate of 23.7 percent; by the turn of 1980s, about one third of Chinese women were in the labor force (Yuan, 2005, p.60; Zuo & Tang, 1993, p.131). However, regardless of the obvious increase in women's labor participation, work-related problems concerning pay and family responsibilities have emerged. Yuan <sup>5</sup>(2005) argues that the radical advocacy of women's participation in production outside of the family was problematic, in terms of pay from work and labor division at home. Though

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<sup>5</sup> She is a feminist scholar who was born in Beijing at the beginning of the new China and has experienced many major social changes in Mao's time such as going to the countryside in the Culture Revolution (1966-1976). See, Yuan, Lijun (2005), *Reconceiving Women's Equality in China: a Critical Examination of Models of Sex Equality*, New York, NY: Lexington Books, p.xvi.

women in urban areas could earn the same pay as men for the same work and in the same position, women in agricultural production were paid less than men under a physically-based compensation system (Yuan, 2005). Men in agricultural production could earn as much as 10 work-points in compensation, while women were limited to earn only 7.5 points. As the majority of the Chinese population was in agriculture (which is still true today), I can assume that unequal pay was very common at that time. Yuan also emphasizes the problematic “double-burden” of women in Mao’s time. She argues that women in Mao’s time actually “held up twice as much of the sky as men,” rather than the “half sky” stated in Mao’s slogan; this was because social expectations on women had not changed much then, and women were still the major homemakers. In particular, traditional values were still very influential in rural areas. In addition, because of women’s domestic responsibilities, they were less likely to receive any education when they were young; as a result, women were in a more disadvantaged position with regard to income and work promotion, even though the gender gap in school enrollment and higher-level occupations had become smaller (Yuan, 2005; Zuo & Tang, 1993).

In addition to the criticisms directed at inequalities in women’s labor participation, many analyses focus on the relationship between the state and women’s development, and argue that women’s subordinate role in the social and economic development of the state is a major obstacle to women’s development (Zuo & Tang, 1993; Yuan, 2005; Yang, 1999). In her analysis of the history of women’s liberation in contemporary China, Yuan (2005) has shown us a picture of intertwining feminism, nationalism and communism. She argues that women’s liberation has been subordinated to the male-led social advancement; in Mao’s time, the call for women to participate in production was also mainly out of the consideration of labor demand for the state’s socialist construction and development<sup>6</sup>. Zuo and Tang (1993) also argue that the Communist Party of China (CPC) seldom addressed women’s issues in a feminist light, but only in a political sense in which all women’s liberation efforts merely serve the goals of socialist revolution and socialist construction. Some scholars (Yang, 1999) even applies the term “state feminism” to define women’s liberation in China, in particular under the communist government in Mao’s time, arguing that the efforts of the CPC to liberate women

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<sup>6</sup> This may be still valid today, which is demonstrated in the “Important documents” page on the ACWF website: Wu Yi is the only female among the five leaders listed with major theories and speeches on women’s work.



were directed toward breaking the boundary between public life and private life; and they were simply attempting to replace traditional ideologies with communist ideologies. Such subordination of women's development to the state developmental agenda is evident from the "decisions" made by the various congresses of the ACWF, which usually begin with the reaffirmation of the state's developmental tasks and guiding theories by the party-state leaders at different historical stages. For example, we can see statements of revolutionary tasks "to fight imperialism, feudalism, bureaucracy to the end" in the 1949 Congress; tasks of socialist construction and industrialization drawing on the "advanced construction experience of the Soviet Union" in 1953; "determination and commitment to take the Socialist road" in the 1957 report; and also "to make contribution to the state's modernization" and to promote the development of "the course of Socialism with Chinese characteristics," as well as "to build a well-off society in an-round way" in the post-Mao's era<sup>7</sup>. Thus, based on women's lack of dominance in women's liberation, Yuan (2005) proposes a new democratic approach, in which she highlights women's self-consciousness of their oppressed status, women's own voices and also their self-directed actions. Specifically, she highlights the role of NGOs, which engage in grassroots efforts.

#### *Women's Situation in the Post- Mao's Era (1980s- 1990s)*

Confronting limitations on women's liberation, many feminists in China have been searching for "a way out"<sup>8</sup> (Li, 1994, p.360). Li Xiaojiang, a famous feminist scholar in China, states in one of her essays in the early 1990s that "a way out" for women's liberation is the improvement of women's material conditions and ideological change. According to Li, although there has been great progress in women's liberation in terms of a higher labor participation rate of women, the limitations still mainly lie in the unawakened collective consciousness of women themselves and the restriction of women's participation in social activities for their own issues. She finds this predictable, since women's liberation in China has historically been about class conflicts led by men.

Does the economic reform that has provided "a way out" to China's modernization also

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<sup>7</sup> Reports of ACWF's various congresses are accessed December 6, 2012 at <http://www.women.org.cn/Mulu/11/1.html>.

<sup>8</sup> "A way out" in Chinese usually refers to a means to break through in difficult circumstances, based on my understanding as a Chinese speaker.

provide “a way out” to women’s liberation, attributed to which Chinese have experienced great improvement in material life and increase in individual freedom? From her essay in the early 1990s, Li Xiaojiang seems to be dubious about the positive effects on women, seeing pressure brought upon women by the reform (Li, 1994). She saw a resurgence of tradition and setbacks in women’s liberation similar to those found in many studies on Chinese women following the market-oriented reform. Particularly, in the new market system, women were the first to be laid off by state-owned enterprises (SOEs); they confronted more difficulties in reemployment than men in the market; many rural girls had to discontinue their education for work opportunities in export-oriented factories or low-end service industry; and concubinage and prostitution, which had been outlawed right after the establishment of the PRC, emerged again (Li, 1994; Yuan, 2005). However, Zuo and Tang (1993) argue that the effects of the economic reform on women are mixed, since women also have more opportunities and at a higher level of individual freedom, despite the growing gender gaps in employment and in income and the reemergence of sexism. They also notice that education for women overall has actually improved in terms of enrollment of female students, although many girls in rural areas have been deprived of educational opportunities, due to work demands created by the export-oriented economy. Yuen, Law and Ho’s (2004) study on marriage, gender, and sex in a village in Shenzhen<sup>9</sup>, Guangdong province in the 1990s also observed the rise of the two conflicting phenomena regarding women’s situation. Based on participant observation research conducted between 1993 and 2002, they found an obvious increase in self-consciousness in the younger generation of local women; however, they also observed that the sex trade and prostitution that commercialized women’s bodies had reemerged significantly, due to the fact that a large population of female workers migrated to the Pearl River Delta from less developed provinces and areas.

It is undeniable that the increased pressures on women to return home and the re-adoption of traditional values and practices have hindered Chinese women’s liberation to a certain extent. Does this mean the economic reform has actually been a disaster for women in China? As I note that studies on Chinese women seldom focus on gaps between the generations who were respectively born before or after the reform, so I wonder if the positive effects of the

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<sup>9</sup> Shenzhen is located on the border between Guangdong and Hong Kong, and is one of the three earliest Special Economic Zones (SEZs) under the economic reform and opening-up policy.

economic reform on women's liberation will begin to emerge following the recent years when the generation born after the reform (mainly in the 1980s and 1990s) gradually become major social players. I assume that this young generation is replacing the older generation of their grandmothers and mothers, who are the major victims in the process of privatization in the 80s and 90s. Born and raised in a free market environment, does the younger generation of women encounter more opportunities for personal development? In particular, do economic development and increase in social wealth favor women's education and career development? Do increasing tolerance for personal autonomy and adoption of foreign values attack the traditional value system that still assigns women such a great amount of familial responsibilities? In order to examine women's recent development in China under the influence of economic reform and the opening-up policy, I propose that it is valuable to study the experience of Guangdong province -- the forerunner in China's modernization in the past thirty years, in light of the economic reform and opening-up. In the following section, I will provide a brief introduction, explaining the reasons why I target Guangdong.

### **GUANGDONG AND CHINA'S ECONOMIC REFORM AND OPENING-UP**

Because of Guangdong's important role in China's modernization, it is necessary and meaningful to study the experience and situation of Guangdong so as to obtain a deeper understanding of the relationship between women's development and China's economic reform and opening-up. I believe that Guangdong's important role can be explained in two ways. For one thing, Guangdong, located in southern China and adjacent to Hong Kong and Macao, has been the forerunner in the social and economic development since China promulgated the most influential economic reform and opening-up policy in the late 1970s, and an important model for other provinces and areas in China; for another, Guangdong has been absorbing a great number of migrant workers from all over China, with whom the influence of Guangdong expands into other places along the migration routes.

Guangdong as a big province on the southern coast of China has for centuries been in the vanguard of China's modernization, in terms of economics, politics, and also culture. Regarding Guangdong's historical pioneering role in connecting China to the outside world, Ezra Vogel has made a comprehensive summary in his book *One Step Ahead of China*:

*Guangdong under Reform* (1989),

Guangdong's foreign trade dates from the eight century; the province has long been on the forefront of China's relations with the outside world. After 1699, when the British established a regular trading base in Canton<sup>10</sup>, it was a center for the China trade, and from 1760 until the end of the Opium War in 1842, Canton was the only Chinese port open to the outside. The city remained at the center of the interaction between China and the West until 1949 (p.3).

Thus, we can see Guangdong residents (Cantonese) have gone abroad and brought in "western ways" more often than other Chinese; and Guangdong also plays an important role in China's political modernization (Vogel, 1989, p3). Early access to Western culture also made Guangdong the birthplace of many pioneering social reforms, and social revolutionaries who also advocated women's liberation through their social interventions (Yuan, 2005; Vogel, 1989).

Though its long-standing national pioneering position was greatly weakened during Mao's time, Guangdong immediately rebounded, taking advantage of the economic reform and opening-up policy since the late 1970s. Guangdong was not only allowed to "take the lead in experimenting -- to walk one step ahead" but also had been "China's economic powerhouse" ever since (Li & Yang, 2003, p.208; Vogel, 1989, p.2). Then party-state leader Deng Xiaoping considered that Guangdong was a great choice for testing the breakthrough in China's economically difficult position following the two-decade-long social unrest: this was not only because of its proximity to Hong Kong, but also its distance from Beijing, which suggested that it would not cause nationwide political upheaval in the event the reform failed (Vogel, 1989). According to Li and Yang (2003), Guangdong's success has gradually emerged as a specific model which has been expanding over the country, drawing on advantages of preferential policies, foreign investment, close connection with expatriate Chinese, proximity to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, government restructuring and increased local autonomy, as well as a great number of migrant workers. Allowing Guangdong to take the first step ahead as a laboratory of the reform for all of China was also the central government's original major

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<sup>10</sup> Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, used to be called Canton by foreigners. See, Vogel, Ezra F. (1990), *One Step Ahead in China: Guangdong under Reform*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p.1

intention (Vogel, 1989).

Guangdong, playing the role again as the pioneer and middleman connecting China to the outside world right after the reform, started with its communication and business activities with Hong Kong and Macao -- two well-established international metropolitan centers with cultural and linguistic links to Guangdong. Since the economic reform, Guangdong, and the Pearl River Delta in particular, had first attracted most of Hong Kong's manufacturing enterprises; and by 1998, Guangdong has executed 189.6 thousand contracts with Hong Kong and Macao, with an investment amount reaching 134.2 billion US dollars (Li & Yang, 2003, p.214). Communication and cooperation have become even more intense since China's access to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001; and Guangdong and Hong Kong have recently reached increased consensus on speeding up the integration of the Pan-Pearl River Delta economic area.

By 2008 when the economic reform and opening-up policy reached its thirtieth year, Guangdong, as the forerunner of China's economic reform and opening-up policy, had already ranked number one nationally in terms of GDP for nineteen consecutive years, with the per capita GDP exceeding 4000 USD annually, thus meeting the standard of middle-income countries. Along with the economic reform, Guangdong has also been exploring new models of social management, promoting advancement in politics, education and culture as well as ecological and environmental improvement, all of which serve the goal of sustainable social development. Though the majority agrees that Guangdong's model is far from perfect, Guangdong's thirty-year experience in economic reform and opening-up has been widely studied and promoted, particularly when the reform reached its thirty-year anniversary in 2008. In addition to Guangdong's experience in social and economic development, values of being creative, pragmatic, willing to take risk, inclusive and open-minded as well as beliefs in equality and autonomy, which emerged from history, are promoted as important elements during the reform. Some scholars argue that the historical progress of Guangdong's reform and opening-up is in essence a miniature of China's modernization.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the promotion by the government and social elites, Guangdong's

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<sup>11</sup> Information of this paragraph is from the series of reports on Guangdong's thirty-year experience of reform published in Nanfang Net (Southcn.com), retrieved October 2, 2012 from <http://theory.southcn.com/lizhuanti/ggkf/>

experience is also expanding along the massive population of migrant workers from other provinces, who are attracted to the rich economic opportunities in the dynamic environment. The migration of workers began right after the reform, with a large number of professionals and workers flocking into Guangdong, in particular the area of the Pearl River Delta; and this trend still continues today (Li & Yang, 2003). In fact, Guangdong has been known for its absorption of greatest number of migrant workers in China; and, in 2011, the population of migrant worker in Guangdong reached about 40 million, among whom more than 20 million have stayed more than a half year.<sup>12</sup> The results of the sixth nationwide census published in 2011 also indicate that Guangdong has the largest population among all provinces in China, one third of which are migrant workers who have resided in the province for more than six months.

However, no matter how long these migrant workers have stayed, it is common for them to return home or relocate to other places. According to Zhou Daming (2012), an anthropologist from Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, the migration of rural workers to Guangdong province started in the early 1980s; following the rural economic reform, a great number of migrant workers flocked into Guangdong, particularly to the Pearl River Delta, searching economic opportunities. The population of these rural immigrants, who may work on temporary jobs or be self-employed, exceeded 10 million in the early 1990s and has reached 80 million in recent years. Based on his long-term study on this group, Zhou notices that the younger rural migrant workers, who are more educated and grew up in a more industrialized environment, have different expectations for their lives compared to the generation of their parents. In addition to the improvement in material conditions, they expect equality, autonomy and openness from their jobs; and they are more accustomed to the urban life. Moreover, as he notices, these immigrants, like a clock pendulum which moves back and forth, move periodically between the labor-exported areas and labor-imported areas. The famous “*chunyun*”

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<sup>12</sup> Guangdong's resident population is 85 million, as shown in the published results of the sixth nationwide census in 2011. See, *Xin Kuai Bao* [New Express, an affiliated paper of Yangcheng Media Group], April 29, 2011, A06, retrieved September 14, 2012 from [http://www.ycwb.com/ePaper/xkb/html/2011-04/29/content\\_1098706.htm](http://www.ycwb.com/ePaper/xkb/html/2011-04/29/content_1098706.htm). It is also reported that the migrant population in Guangdong province has increased from less than 50 thousand in 1980 to 36.75 million in 2010, constituting one third of the total population of the province and one seventh of the nation's migrant population. See, China News (August 2, 2011), Guangdong liudong renkou chao sanqianwan, sanshi nian jian zeng qishi bei [Guangdong's migrant population exceeds 30 million, increased by 70 times within 30 years], retrieved September 14, 2012 from <http://www.chinanews.com/df/2011/08-02/3228685.shtml>

["spring transportation," literally, passenger's transportation around the Spring Festival – the Chinese lunar new year], one of the world's largest annual population migrations, is a good example: during this period every year, migrant workers are transported between their hometowns and the more developed coastal areas before and after the Spring Festival ("An Annual," 2009). And *chunyun* in Guangdong has been the focus for its large volume of transportation; in 2010, 24.34 million passengers were transported by the Guangdong railway alone (Guangdong Government, 2010). According to the 2010 statistics from Guangdong Human Resources and Social Security Department, the number of influx migrant workers reached 45.7 percent of the number of those who left, by February 22 -- eight days after the festival<sup>13</sup>; and 98 percent of them were returned workers who would continue to work on their previous jobs (GDHRSS, 2010).

Thus, I believe that the modernization of Guangdong has not only changed the life of local people, but also has had great influence on the lives of many migrant workers who would help expand these changes to other places in China in an informal way.

## METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

While processing my research, I have come to recognize that the Women's Social Status Research (WSSR), whose three waves of investigation have been conducted in 1990, 2000 and 2010 respectively, is the most comprehensive study on Guangdong women's situation after the reform, including study sections on education, economy, political participation, family and marriage, health and lifestyle, as well as knowledge of women's rights and gender perception.<sup>14</sup> Drawing upon its all-round study framework, I have structured my study into five main sections: education, employment and career development, political participation, income and welfare, and family and marriage. My exclusion of the lifestyle and gender perception sections that appear in the official research does not mean that they are not important; however, I believe the five main sections of my study framework represent the major spheres that constitute women's daily life at the present time, in which women's

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<sup>13</sup> Spring Festival was on February 14 in 2010.

<sup>14</sup> The best reports of the results of the 2000 and 2010 research are available on Nanfang Net, accessed October 15, 2012 respectively at <http://www.southcn.com/news/gdnews/hotspot/gdfndc/bgjq/200203041639.htm> and at [http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content\\_39287389.htm](http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content_39287389.htm); however, no report on the 1990 research is found.

knowledge, values and perceptions are integrated and demonstrated. Although the WSSR, as the most comprehensive and systematic study, is a great resource to draw on, it is still necessary to gain access to more sources in addition to this largest study conducted by the government, so as to get a clearer picture of the current situation of women's development in Guangdong.

When I began to do the research for my paper, I tried as usual to rely on sources from the United States and found that few were available on my topic, not even much on Guangdong province. Thus, I believe that it is better, indeed perhaps necessary, to look for data and information from local resources on Guangdong that are available online. As my study is focused on the gender gap and generational disparities, I expected to find data and information that not only show the changing relationship between the two sexes, but also the transformation of Guangdong women's lives between the older and younger generations since the economic reform and opening-up policy in the late 1970s. Based on my previous experience, I expect to find the information and data I need from three categories of sources: the provincial government of Guangdong and organizations under the government that publish official reports; local universities, academic research organizations and Guangdong-based NGOs that are concerned about women's issues and conduct research on women; and local mainstream media and papers that provide reports and editorials on women's issues.

For the first category, I locate the official websites of the provincial government of Guangdong, the Guangdong Women's Federation (GDWF), Guangdong's Bureau of Statistics (GDBS), and also the official website of Guangdong's working committee on women and children (GDWCWC). Except for Guangdong's statistics yearbooks by GDBS that provide some statistical data by sex in aspects of population composition, employment and income, labor composition, and marriage, women-related information provided by the other three mainly includes public service directories, documentation of regulations and laws, documentation of governmental plans and policies, information on women's rights and legal aid, links to relevant organizations like Guangdong Provincial Department of Civil Affairs, and information about women's lives. The information about women's lives posted on these websites is primarily about fashion, health, employment, relationships, childcare, family and marriage, which is neither necessarily related to women's development, nor formal or sufficient for a study with an objective of constructing a complete picture of the women's



development situation in Guangdong.

For the second category, I turn to Guangdong-based NGOs and organizations who conduct studies on women. It emerges in the course of my investigation that the Women's Studies Institute of China (WSIC), established in 1991, is the most visible, largest and most important women's study network in China. Though it can be regarded as an NGO that is not intended to be directly under the Chinese government, it may not be completely independent under the administration of the ACWF as stated in its profile. According to its profile, the WSIC has functionally conducted the nationwide WSSR every ten years since 1990. Although it is undeniable that the WSIC provides a great amount of comprehensive information about women's issues, most of the information is about China in general instead of focusing on Guangdong province. However, from the WSIC, I become aware of some Guangdong-based organizations of women studies, including the Gender Center of Sun Yat-sen University (GCSYSU), Guangdong Women's Studies Association, and Guangzhou Women's Studies Association. Among these three, the GCSYSU is the only one that has separate website, while the other two are under the local women's federations, and have no separate websites or further information available; thus, I have been unable to access to any information from them, or even to ascertain whether they actually conduct research. Although the Sun Yat-sen University is the most prestigious higher education institution in Guangdong, particularly in terms of social sciences, the GCSYSU, established in 2000 as the first gender studies institution in south China, is still not able to provide sufficient information on women's development in Guangdong as I expected. This is true, despite the fact that as stated in its profile: studies at this center focus on "women's rights, women's education, and women's culture and history"; and their goals are to "promote gender and economic equality," so as to "promote the social development in an equal, just, peaceful and sustainable manner."<sup>15</sup>

In regard to local mainstream media and papers, my preference includes but is not limited to *Guangzhou Daily*, *Yangcheng Evening* [*Yangcheng*, literally the city of goats, refers to Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong], *Nanfang Daily*, Nanfang Net (Southcn.com), all of which provide a great amount of diverse local news updates and also editorials on diverse

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<sup>15</sup> The GCSYSU profile (in Chinese) is translated by the author, accessed on October 15, 2012 at <http://gendercenter.sysu.edu.cn/aboutus/introduce.htm>

topics.

Due to limited resources available, this study may not be able to sufficiently answer my original questions or fully test my hypotheses; but it can serve as a pilot study, drawing on any useful information and data available, which will help identify more possible topics and provide more ideas for further studies in the future.

## **LEGISLATION AND POLITICIES**

Women's liberation in China has undergone the "state feminism" characterized by "gender erasure" and the so-called equal competition for both sexes, and the resurgence of tradition and sexuality following the market-oriented economic reform since the late 1970s that introduced consumer culture (Yang, 1999, pp.35-67). Although the personality-repressive "state feminism" in Mao's era has been criticized as being both against human nature and "fragile," the withdrawal of the state's protection for women in the market economy has nevertheless caused new issues in the 1980s and 1990s that worried many Chinese feminists, including: women's loss of jobs from SOEs; pressures on women to return home; difficulties in reemployment and competition due to their lower level of education and skills; gender discrimination in education and in the workplace; the reemergence of sexism in terms of prostitution, being kept as mistresses for money; and also a surge in woman-victimizing crimes such as domestic violence and trafficking of women and girls.

The repressed personalities of the entire generation in Mao's times, and in particular the personal desires, including sexual desire, were greatly released right after the economic reform; and this is vividly depicted in the book *Marriage, Gender, and Sex in a Contemporary Chinese Village*, based on an eight-year-long participant observation study conducted in a village in Shenzhen, Guangdong, by a group of researchers from Hong Kong in the 1990s (Yuen, Law & Ho, 2004). In their study, the researchers first witnessed a great, rapid improvement in material living conditions of the local residents; then they met educated young women with a higher level of self-awareness, as well as financially and psychologically insecure housewives whose husbands were making a living in Hong Kong, and mothers and daughters-in-law who argued over marriage and gender relationship while watching Hong Kong TV shows; they also spoke with men from all walks of life who indulged in sex with the help of an increase in personal

wealth and the influx of a large number of female workers from less developed provinces.

The economic reform has brought both setbacks and opportunities to women's development, as observed in the study above, which is also reflected in the state's legislation and policies, particularly those in Guangdong province -- as noted, the forerunner of China's economic reform and opening-up. When it comes to the legislation concerning women's liberation in China, the 1954 Constitution and the 1950 Marriage Law are the most frequently cited, as they not only "did away with polygamy, arranged marriage, child-adoption marriage, prostitution, the buying and selling of women, and other overt abuses from the past against women" which were common practices under the traditional feudal system, but also entitled women to "equal rights in the political, economic, cultural/educational, social, and familial realms" (Yang, 1999, p.37). Despite the significance of these laws in removing traditional oppression of women and the entitlement of basic rights to women, their having been created in a context of class conflict make them insufficient in response to the social transformation into a market economy.

In response to the changing conditions since the economic reform and opening-up, many laws and regulations concerning women's issues were made or revised both at state and local levels. In the post-Mao era, the 1992 Law on Protection of Women's Rights and Interests is the hallmark in legislation related to women, stipulating as it does that women's equal rights and interests in politics, economy, education and culture, family and marriage are protected by law and any offense against women's rights and interests should be reported and subjected to punishment; and its local version in Guangdong was promulgated in 1995, which also provides comprehensive protection of women's rights and interests within its administration. Some other special laws issued since the 1980s further stipulate women's rights and interests in various realms.

In education, the 1986 Compulsory Education Law, the 1995 Education Law, the 1992 Law on Protection of Minors, the specific implementing regulations of Guangdong with regard to these, and Guangdong's Self-Study Regulations, stipulate that women at any age are entitled to equal educational rights; and both the family and the government are responsible to maintain the rights of school-age girls in receiving the nine-year basic education. In labor participation and employment, the 1988 Regulations on Labor Protection of Female Workers, the 1995

Labor Law, and a series of related laws promulgated in Guangdong between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, particularly some for the female workers in Special Economic Zones (SEZs), as well as the 2010 Law on Employment Promotion, all stipulate that female employees have equal rights in employment, promotion, pay and benefits; in particular, female employees are entitled to special protection from hard working conditions during menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and the early maternity period, in all kinds of enterprises. In terms of family and marriage, there are further laws and regulations, in addition to the Marriage Law that entitles equal rights to women in family and marriage. These include the Law on Protection of Minors, Law on Population and Family Planning, and Guangdong's Regulations on Banning Prostitution in 1987 and Regulations on Divorce, all of which further guarantee special protection of women's and girls' rights and interests in family and marriage, from infanticide, discrimination, domestic violence, dispossession of property, and similar offenses.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to legislation, the government has also incorporated women's development as part of the entire plan for social and economic advancement since 1995 when the United Nations World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. To date, Guangdong has issued its local women's development plan of 1996-2000 (1996-2000 Plan), its plan of 2000 -2010 (2000-2010 Plan), and the newest plan of 2011-2020 (2011-2020 Plan) in 2011, adjusting the national agenda to the local reality and conditions. When I compare all the national plans and Guangdong's local versions, the frameworks are similar: they all highlight gender equality as a basic national policy, the significance of women's development in the social modernization process and China's participation in international competition and global economy, and also efforts to be made in the realms of education, economic and political participation, hygiene and health, social security, social environment, family and marriage, as well as legislation. It is also emphasized that women's development requires the concern and participation of whole society, and the government at all levels is in particular responsible for it. Moreover, some specific issues are further highlighted in the local Guangdong plans, including: creating and maintaining women's educational opportunities at all levels, reemployment and social security

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<sup>16</sup>Information of laws and regulations concerning women issues at state and local levels that are enforced in Guangdong are available from the websites of the WISC and the Committee of Work on Women and Children under the Guangdong government, <http://www.wsic.ac.cn/policyandregulation> and <http://www.pwccw.gd.gov.cn/law/news202.asp>, which are accessed on October 17, 2012.

of “step-down” female workers who were laid off from jobs in SOEs, and crackdowns on domestic violence and women trafficking crimes.

In its 2011- 2020 Plan, Guangdong particularly emphasizes special attention to discrimination in the workplace, disparity in women’s development between urban and rural locations, and developmental disparities between groups at different socioeconomic levels; also, particularly focuses on the basic needs and development of women and girls from migrant families. It states that, based on the great improvements following the 1996-2000 and 2001-2010 Plans, Guangdong, as the first to realize modernization in China, will insist on the basic principles – “*xianshi xianxing*” [taking the first try and first step], “*zhuzhong gongping*” [paying attention to fairness], “*yiren weiben*” [being people-oriented] and “*funv canyu*” [women’s participation as the subjects] -- and continue to improve the environment and public services for the development on behalf of women from all kinds of backgrounds, so as to promote the “harmonious and synchronous development of both sexes.”<sup>17</sup>

According to Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang (1999), a cultural anthropologist in East Asian Studies, the women’s situation in China “may be better than [in] the United States” in terms of legislation and policies, “since the Equal Right Amendment includes a gender provision in the U.S. Constitution [that was] never passed, despite heavy lobbying by American feminists (p.37).” Also, these women’s development plans of China and Guangdong, in many ways, demonstrate the government’s concern and determination to promote women’s development. However, as the plans reflect, women’s development in Guangdong has made great progress during the period of “*shiwu*” and “*shiyiwu*” [the Tenth and Eleventh Five-year Plans for Economic and Social Development] between 2000 and 2010, but women are still confronting new challenges, and new tasks have emerged at the hub of social and economic transformation. As it is acknowledged that great progress in women’s development has been made, even while limitations and challenges continue to exist, how much progress has Guangdong actually achieved in the course of women’s development? In particular, if their efforts are effective, the younger generation should be the beneficiary. How well has their work been done? The government has conducted its evaluations, which I will examine in the following section.

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<sup>17</sup> The national plans for women’s development and the local plans of Guangdong are available from the websites of the WISC and the Committee of Work on Women and Children under the Guangdong government, accessed on October 18, 2012 respectively at <http://www.wsic.ac.cn/policyandregulation> and at <http://www.pwccw.gd.gov.cn/law/news202.asp>.

**GUANGDONG WOMEN'S SOCIAL STATUS RESEARCH**

The Women's Social Status Research (WSSR), organized by the cooperation of the ACWF and China's Bureau of Statistics (CBS), has been functionally conducted by the Women's Studies Institution of China (WSIC) every ten years since 1990, under the supervision of the ACWF (WSIC, 2010). The latest study was conducted between 2010 and 2012, and the purpose was to examine the changes of women's social status pursuant to the economic and political transformation of Chinese society in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Specifically, it examines the relationships between women and the market system; modernization and gender equality; the changing trends of gender disparity in social status; and the developmental gaps among different groups of women in the last ten years. This work serves to provide the government with reference information for making public policies, and also to evaluate the previous women's development plan. According to its methodology, the study includes modules for accessing economy, political participation, education, social security, family and marriage, lifestyle, legislation and gender perceptions. The collection of data and information was mainly based on individual questionnaire surveys and community surveys, and it applied the Probability Proportional to Size method (PPS) to sample subject households, together with random sampling to select respondents within the households. The study has selected a balanced sample of rural and urban as well as male and female participants. It was also claimed that effective measures have been applied so as to promote the reliability and representativeness of the research, such as weighted averaging technique for processing data.

As part of the national women's social status research, the WSSR of Guangdong follows this framework and methodology. The results of the first research in 1990 are not available; however, the brief results of the second round of research in 2000, and the third conducted between 2010 and 2012, were released and reported by many local media. Though complete reports are not available, information provided by news reports seems comprehensive and balanced. For example, the interpretation of the results of the 2000 WSSR demonstrates the public surprise concerning the setbacks in women's development. Regarding the 2010 research, the results were released during a particular press conference, in which representatives from the GDWF reported findings, including positive results and also problems and limitations, and

reporters from various media were able to raise questions about the research. By brief comparison of the two public disclosures of study results, I believe that they are not trying to conceal negative results and limitations, which is demonstrated by the quite different responses to the results of the two rounds of research that were conducted ten years apart; however, there are obvious limitations to this research, which I will discuss in later analysis.

Despite the fact that the report of the first research conducted in 1990 is not available, it is indeed necessary to look at both the 2000 and 2010 studies, so as to gain better understanding of women's development in Guangdong following the economic reform and opening-up.

The best report on the 2000 WSSR of Guangdong available is by the news website Nanfang Net ("Zonghe zhuanti," 2002), which has published a special report on this research. The main theme of the report is demonstrated by the topic question: "the more advanced economically in Guangdong, the more traditional in gender relationship?" ("Zonghe zhuanti," 2002) This research reflects the changes in women's situation in Guangdong in the second decade after the reform, which was generally showing a resurgence of tradition regardless of some improvements.

In education, women's achievement level had gradually risen (at the level of junior secondary or above, about 20 percent higher than the older group in the cohort of women aged 18 to 35), but the gender gap was very apparent (women's average duration of school retention was 0.88 year shorter than that of men in urban areas and 1.58 years shorter in rural areas, and the gender gap of school completion at senior secondary education or above was about 20 percent in the cities). In terms of employment and career, Guangdong still maintained a high women's employment rate (particularly in urban areas, where it was 67 percent) with a gender gap smaller than 5 percent; and more women (particularly young women) worked in non-agricultural industries while only 14.7 percent of rural women were employed. It was also reported that more women found jobs by themselves instead of being assigned by the personnel department of the government (about 20 percent higher than in 1990, and 1.6 percent higher than their male counterparts), and more women also started their own businesses. The gender disparity in employment styles may be explained by women's greater vulnerability in the process of privatization and their first being laid off, according to some scholars (Yang, 1999; Yuan, 2005). However, the gender gap on this issue was optimistically small in Guangdong,

and only 9.0 percent of male respondents and 7.6 percent of female respondents stated that they were more likely to be laid off compared to others with similar skills. Meanwhile, in political participation and social management, about 20 to 30 percent of women responded that they were concerned about community affairs (about 15 percent higher than the national level), and/or had tried to contribute suggestions and ideas to their local communities or the organizations they worked for, and about 40 percent of them had participated in activities for public good such as donations; however, reports still showed a gender gap of about 20 percent in the actual participation rate in community affairs. Due to a lack of detailed description in the women's social status research of "activities for public good," such participation in public affairs could be construed to mean solely "donation" because a high participation rate of donation in Guangdong is quite possible: the province's designated role of taking the first step in China's modernization has led to its higher economic position overall, and also its responsibility to help other less developed areas. The latter in particular was specified by Deng Xiaoping's words of "xiangfu daidong houfu" [People and regions which become rich first should help those who have lagged behind] during his 1992 trip to south China, and also by a 2012 report by Forbes that Guangdong is listed at the top of China's Charity List (Xia, 2012; Forbes China, 2012). Regarding income and welfare, although the average income of Guangdong women had increased compared to the national level, the gender gap in income had become broader, particularly at high income levels; and the rural women were the most disadvantaged: 77.6 percent of them remained at the lowest income level with monthly income of less than 500 yuan (less than 100 USD). In addition, this research did not cover welfare conditions such as pensions and medical insurance of Guangdong women, but only reported that almost 50 percent of female respondents believed that they were physically healthy; while 11.2 percent of rural women reported that their physical conditions were very poor, which was mainly due to their inability to afford necessary medical care. The absence of welfare research can be attributed to the fact that Guangdong had not yet begun to establish a social welfare system until 2003, one year after the report of 2000 WSSR was released (Guangdong Government, 2003)<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> The Guangdong government issued the notice on implementation of the ten projects concerning the public wellbeing on August 30, 2003. Establishment of the social welfare system was part of the projects, which included housing, employment,



In addition to the limited improvements demonstrated in women's public participation in Guangdong, gender perceptions on family and marriage were particularly disappointing: about 60 percent of the respondents agreed with the traditional labor division mode of *nanzhuwai nvzhunei* [men go out to work while women take care of the house], which was 14.8 percent higher than that in 1990. However, about 90 percent of the respondents, regardless of gender and residency, had autonomy in choice of marriage, which was higher than the national level. Additionally, more than 50 percent of households responded that important family decisions such as housing, asset investment and children's education were made jointly by the husbands and wives.

In summary, results from 2000 WSSR of Guangdong indicate that women's development in education, political and social participation and income had slowly improved; however, the privatization during the market-oriented economic reform had resulted in broader gender gaps in terms of education, employment and income. Though the absence of a social welfare system affected both sexes, the poorer financial situation had put women, particularly those in rural areas, into a worse situation in terms of physical wellbeing. If Guangdong's advancement in the third decade after the economic reform did benefit women's development, all the limitations above were expected to be reduced or eliminated, which was supposed to be reflected in the results of the 2010 WSSR of Guangdong.

Before the 2010 WSSR, the 2006 mid-term evaluation of Guangdong's 2001-2010 Plan can also provide some insight. According to this evaluation report, "the gender gap in education has basically been eliminated" mainly in terms of enrollment of female students at all levels of education ("Guangdong funv xingbie," 2006). It was reported that high enrollment of female students was seen at all levels of education, and the school enrollment problem of migrant children was also basically solved. All these achievements, as reported, can be attributed to the 18 percent increase in public funding in education, which reached 5.9 billion yuan (about 0.94 billion USD) per year during the period between 2001 and 2005, the governments' efforts of enrolling migrant children to the local public schools, and also the effort of promoting privately-maintained schools. While news reports on this evaluation mostly

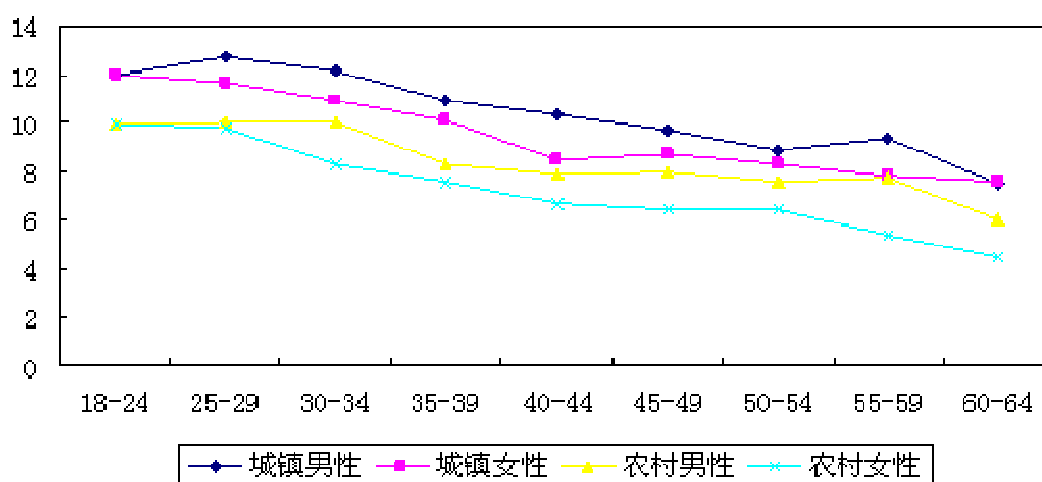
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promoting increase in farmers' income, education, disability assistance, protection of migrant workers' rights and interests, people's physical wellbeing, environmental protection and improvement, drinking water issues in rural areas, and also disaster prevention and reduction in both urban and rural areas.

delivered an optimistic message, no more detailed and complete data and information had been provided so as to enable a closer assessment of the situation.

However, according to the report of the 2010 research, which was released in March this year (2012), education of women in Guangdong has indeed been greatly improved in terms of women's enrollment in higher education and average education retention compared to the situation in 2000 ("Guangdong nvsheng gaoxiao," 2012; "Guangdong funv shehui," 2002). More female students are enrolled in colleges, and women's average overall school retention has increased to 8.97 years compared to 6.2 years in 2000, which means that they have almost completed the junior secondary education.

It is also indicated that women's educational level is negatively correlated with the age of respondents, and the younger generation of women tends to be more educated; the gender gap has become much smaller, even though the rural-urban gap still exists ("Disanci," 2012). Specifically, the average school retention for women in Guangdong is 9.04 years, with 9.79 years for the urban women and 7.16 years for rural women. This report further demonstrates that 15.1 percent of the female respondents have received higher education. However, a great disparity emerges between the urban and rural groups: 20.7 percent of urban women, but only 2.7 percent of rural women have attained this level (Figure 1). In addition, more women had attended continuing education and various kinds of occupational training in recent years. For example, about 50 percent of women in Guangdong who have an associate degree or above received their degree through continuing education.

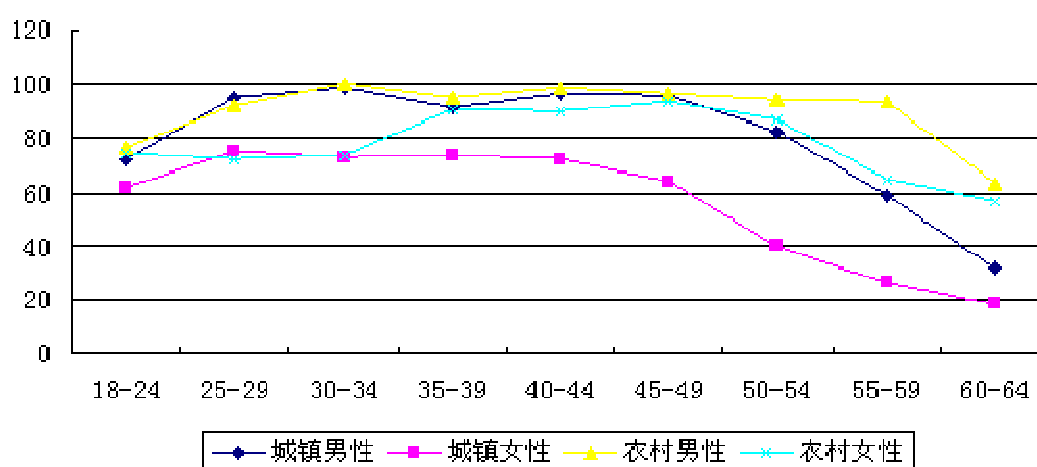


Translation for Caption in Figure 1: Urban Men, Urban Women, Rural Men, Rural Women

**Figure 1: Years of Schooling by Region, Gender and Age.**

Source: Nanfang Net (2012), Disanci Guangdong funv shehui diwei diaocha qingkuang xinwen fabuhui [Press conference of the Third Guangdong Women's Social Status Research], retrieved October 20, 2012 from [http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content\\_39287389.htm](http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content_39287389.htm)

In terms of employment, although Guangdong maintains a high employment rate of women, both the gender gap and rural-urban gap exist, and urban women have the lowest employment rate (Figure 2). According to the report, 68.7 percent of women in Guangdong are employed (as compared to a men's employment rate of 87.4 percent); 62.8 percent of urban women are working, compared to 81.9 percent of rural women. No more details indicate women's occupation and career development opportunities in this report, but the majority of unemployed women are homemakers, with a small group as full-time students; statistics also show that a majority of working women are in non-agricultural industries with about 45 percent in the service industry.



Translation for Caption in Figure 2: Urban Men, Urban Women, Rural Men, Rural Women

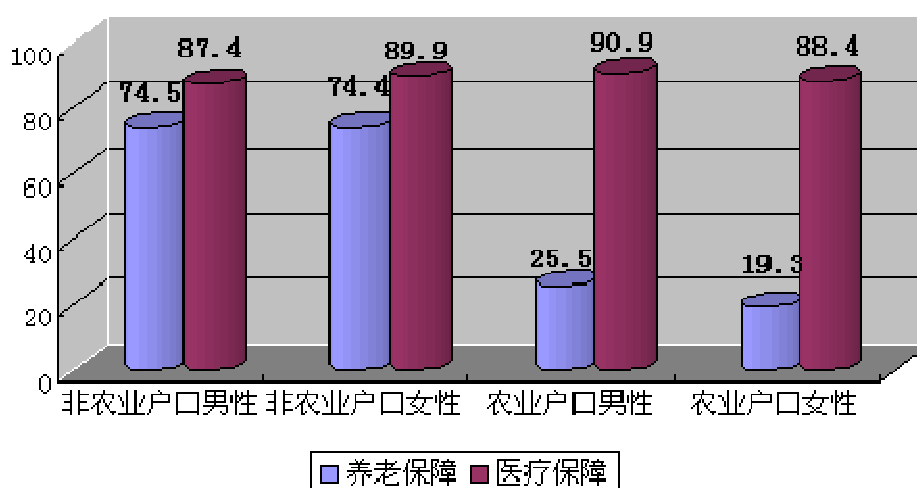
**Figure 2: Employment Rate by Region, Gender and Age.**

Source: Nanfang Net (2012), Disanci Guangdong funv shehui diwei diaocha qingkuang xinwen fabuhui [Press conference of the Third Guangdong Women's Social Status Research], retrieved October 20, 2012 from [http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content\\_39287389.htm](http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content_39287389.htm)

However, the report demonstrates that the women's participation in public affairs and

social management in Guangdong does not progress at the same pace as participation in labor force. According to this research, 95.9 percent of female respondents show concern regarding public affairs, with no obvious gender disparity. 84.1 percent of women have ever participated in local elections, in particular the election of village committees. However, only 20.3 percent have ever made suggestions to their work units and communities, 12.4 percent have ever participated in the management activities of their work units and communities, and only 11.8 percent respond that they have any influence on the decision making.

In terms of income and social welfare, the gender gap in income continues to exist, and women in Guangdong make only about 60 percent of that of men. Regarding social welfare, compared to the situation ten years ago, the majority of women in Guangdong have been enrolled in social insurance including pension and medical coverage; while a much smaller group of rural residents have enrolled in pension, compared to their urban counterparts. However, statistics demonstrate that this gap applies to both sexes in rural areas, but is not a gender issue per se. Social insurance has increasingly covered more Guangdong residents since the system was established in 2003, and we do not see an obvious gender gap in social insurance coverage, either in rural areas or urban areas (See Figure 3).



Translation for Caption in Figure 3:

Line 1: Non-agricultural Male Residents, Non-agricultural Female Residents, Agricultural Male Residents, Agricultural Female Residents.

Line 2: Pension, Medical Insurance

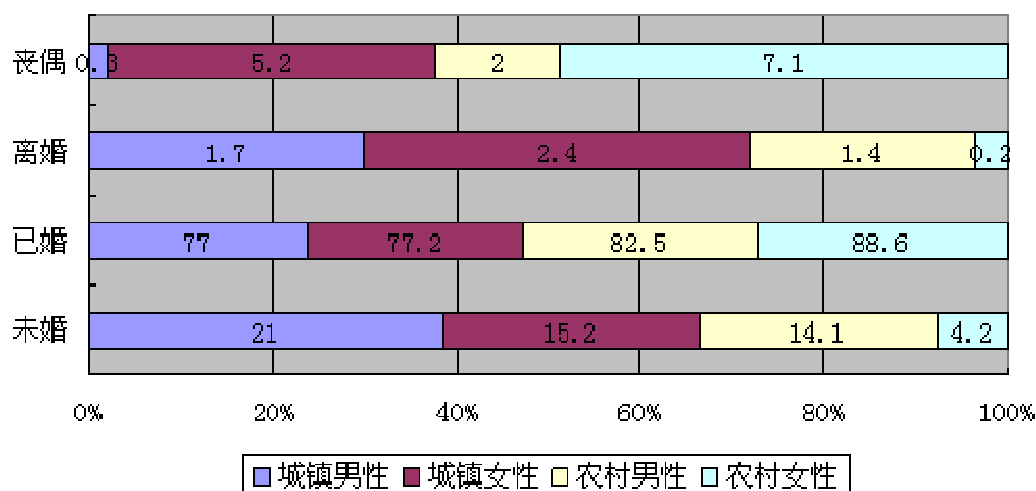
**Figure 3: Enrollment Rate of Social Insurance by Gender and Type of Registered**

**Residents (Non-Agricultural and Agricultural).**

Source: Nanfang Net (2012), Disanci Guangdong funv shehui diwei diaocha qingkuang xinwen fabuhui [Press conference of the Third Guangdong Women's Social Status Research], retrieved October 20, 2012 from [http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content\\_39287389.htm](http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content_39287389.htm)

Note: Bars in light color indicate pension, and bars in dark color indicate medical insurance. Four sets of bars from left to right respectively refer to: non-agricultural male residents, non-agricultural female residents, agricultural male residents, and agricultural female residents. Non-agricultural residents are usually from urban areas, while agricultural residents are living in rural areas.

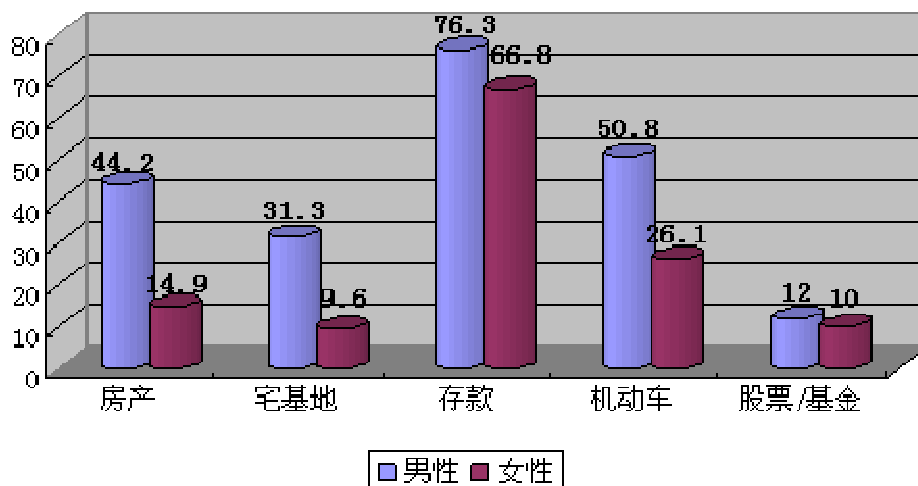
In terms of family and marriage, statistics from the 2010 WSSR demonstrate that a majority, about 80 percent, of the respondents are married. We see an obvious rural-urban gap among these single or divorced respondents. Specifically, more men than women remain single in urban areas (21 percent of urban men, compared to 15.2 percent of urban women); and there are more divorced women than men in the cities (2.4 percent of urban women, compared to 1.7 percent of urban men; see Figure 4). This report also shows that there is a more equal relationship between husbands and wives among the married respondents. About 80 to 90 percent of married women respond that they are supported and respected by their husbands, and are satisfied with their current status in the family. However, regarding ownership of family assets, gender disparity still exists (Figure 5). The gender gap in ownership of house property is the most obvious, which is about 30 percent; and only 38.2 percent of women have a house/apartment registered under their names. In addition, women tend to work longer daily (including work outside of the family and housework), and have less time on weekends for rest, compared to men. This indicates that the traditional labor division within the family still exists, although more women work outside the home today.



Translation for Caption in Figure 4:  
 Horizontal: Urban Men, Urban Women, Rural Men, Rural Women (from left to right)  
 Vertical: Widowed, Divorced, Married, Single (from top to bottom)

**Figure 4: Marital Status by Region and Gender**

Source: Nanfang Net (2012), Disanci Guangdong funv shehui diwei diaocha qingkuang xinwen fabuhui [Press conference of the Third Guangdong Women's Social Status Research], retrieved October 20, 2012 from [http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content\\_39287389.htm](http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content_39287389.htm)



Translation for Caption in Figure 5:  
 Line 1: House Property, Land, Cash on Deposit, Vehicles, Stocks/Funds (Family assets from left to right)  
 Line 2: Male, Female

**Figure 5: Ownership of Assets by Gender**

Source: Nanfang Net (2012), Disanci Guangdong funv shehui diwei diaocha qingkuang xinwen fabuhui [Press conference of the Third Guangdong Women's Social Status Research], retrieved October 20, 2012 from [http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content\\_39287389.htm](http://fbh.southcn.com/c/2012-03/01/content_39287389.htm)

Note: Bars in light color indicate men; bars in dark color indicate women.

In summary, as this official research indicates, women's social status in Guangdong has been enhanced in many aspects of their lives in the last decade, with the most obvious improvement in education. Women's enrollment at the level of higher education in Guangdong has exceeded that of men for the first time. In addition, more women, with an increase of 37.4 percent, work in non-agricultural industries, which is 18.5 percent higher than the national level. However, women's improvement in rural areas is still very limited. They are less educated than their male counterparts and also their urban counterparts; additionally, it is reported that more rural women lost their lands during the process of industrialization, 10.4 percent higher than in 2000 and 1.4 higher than the national level ("Disanci," 2012). In general, the research also shows women in Guangdong today are more knowledgeable about their rights and interests; however, it seems the resurgence of tradition still continues, and there is an increase of 3.3 percent in the number of women who agree that marrying a good man is better than finding a good job. According to the analysis of some local scholars (Y. Huang, 2012a), there are mainly two reasons that may explain this attitude: the persisting influence of tradition that originated from long history that is not easy to eliminate; and the ineffective implementation of laws and regulations, which causes unjust treatment to women (for example, gender discrimination in the workplace). After reviewing the two recent rounds of research, we do see improvement in general, and problems that are still challenging as well.

The situation of women's development in Guangdong appears to be more complicated. Although the official studies have provided some insight in general, it is insufficient in understanding the achievements and also possible limitations. Thus, we need more evidence from the reality of women's daily life in Guangdong, which will help us further understand their current situation in the various domains considered in this study.

**GUANGDONG WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT IN REALITY: UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITED DEVELOPMENT IN A MARKET ERA**

Education has long been regarded as the most important means to empower women and to promote women's development. As reflected in the recent 2010 WSSR of Guangdong, women's average educational level has greatly increased overall, and the enrollment of female students in colleges has exceeded that of male students for the first time. However, achievement in education still seems not to be sufficient to help women to become independent; many of them still believe that it would be better to marry a good man than to have a good job. In such a context, Guangdong took the initiative to introduce the special course of *nvxing jiaoyu* [female education] into primary and secondary education so as to cultivate girls to be "sizi nvxing" ["four-self women" literally; referring to those who adhere to the four principles of self-esteem, self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-improvement], and mainly to resist the spread of the "mistress epidemic" (Jiang, 2011). Though this is a nationwide phenomenon originating in the Chinese culture as argued by Li Yinhe, a female sociologist in China, Guangdong -- as the first to experience opening-up and rapid increase in social wealth along with the economic reform -- became the breeding ground of the revival of such social illness, which has often been described in studies on women in Guangdong, as I will further discuss below.

When the official representatives hold a positive attitude, this special course of female education has aroused wide controversies: it is not easy to change long-term tradition; it is unfair to blame women personally, regardless of the negative influence of the social environment; and it will also introduce young girls to something that they have never thought of (Jiang, 2011; R. Huang, 2011; "Jiaoyu pinglun," 2011; Zhou, 2011). As was recalled in some of these news reports, extramarital affairs have never been allowed since the establishment of China's communist regime in 1949; however, *ernai* [literally as "second breast," the word commonly used to refer to a mistress], which originated from the traditional practice of keeping concubines before 1949, reappeared following the economic reform. Studies conducted in Guangdong on the women's situation after the reform such as those two conducted in Shenzhen in the mid-1990s, which usually include descriptions of such phenomena (Yuen, Law & Ho, 2004; Pun, 2007). As these studies analyze, the prevalence of the sex trade and keeping



mistresses is due to the increase in personal wealth and the introduction of consumer culture; and the migrant female workers from poorer areas are usually those who become involved, while women with a higher level of education were more likely to hesitate or even feel repelled by such behavior. However, this “social illness” is even found among some female college students or graduates today.

Why would women with college degrees be willing to become mistresses in today's Guangdong, so that it has to launch a special course of female education? A college degree used to be something respectable but “unattainable” to poor female workers who were striving for personal freedom and material improvement (Pun, 2007). I believe that the main reason lies in the increasingly clear stratification in Chinese society following the economic reform and its further development. While the reform has brought more opportunities to both men and women generally, they are not allocated equally or fairly, and different groups of women have different opportunities. This trend of inequality emerges in every aspect of women's lives: education, work, political participation, income and wealth, and family and marriage; and all of these are so interrelated that an advantage in one aspect will bring more and favorable opportunities in another. In Pun Ngai's study (2007), she emphasized that female workers in the foreign-invested factories were suffering multiple oppressions: the patriarchal tradition, the socialist state, and the global capital, aided by the rural-urban division created by China's resident registration system, and also by the new market-oriented economy. Though her study was conducted in the mid-1990s, her findings have not become outdated, and are in fact reconfirmed by the results of the 2010 WSSR: gender disparity is no longer the only issue concerning women, but disparity between women at different socioeconomic levels has become increasingly evident. Drawing on more available information and data, I will further examine the reality of women's development in Guangdong in the following analysis.

*Education: More Choices or No Choice***Table 1: Females in Higher Education Institutions (Percentage)**

Year	Graduates	Yearly Enrollment	Students at School	Faculty
2005	40.90%	46.86%	45.84%	44.66%
2007	47.26%	48.75%	47.83%	45.28%
2008	46.65%	50.09%	48.77%	45.70%
2009	48.97%	50.27%	49.40%	45.93%
2010	48.03%	49.36%	50.03%	46.26%
2011	50.56%	50.58%	50.47%	46.17%

Source: Guangdong Statistical Yearbooks 2006 – 2012

Note: Yearbook 2007 is not available, so the data for 2006 are missing. Percentages are calculated by author.

Similar to the results of the 2010 WSSR, data from the Guangdong statistical yearbooks between 2006 and 2012 demonstrate that there is an obvious improvement in women's education, in particular at higher education levels, in recent years. Specifically, the proportion of female college students has greatly increased from 40.90 percent in 2005 to 50.56 percent in 2011, which now even exceeds that of male graduates (Table 1). Meanwhile, the enrollment of female students and the proportions of female faculty members have also been undergoing slow but stable increase. In short, at the level of higher education, gender gaps among both the students and faculty have become narrower in the last few years. Though the number of female faculty members is still lower than that of males, female students now exceed male students, which is a reverse trend of gender disparity on the campuses.

However, an increase in number does not necessarily indicate a real great improvement, as the reality is usually more complicated than mere numbers. What majors are these female students in? What positions do these female faculty members fill? Similar issues as these, which are important in understanding women's development in education, and also how they can benefit from the education they receive, need further examination.

While there are more female students on university campuses in Guangdong today, one

may well ask what they are studying, since everyone knows that the chosen majors will lead to different *qiantu* [literally, “the road of future,” referring to prospective development; and also, jokingly, “road to money,” due to these two terms’ similar pronunciation in Chinese]. Although there are no relevant statistics available, a report in *Guangzhou Daily* provides some insight that the increase of female students is common in many universities (Qiu & Du, 2006). Qiu Ruixian and Du Anna, two reporters from *Guangzhou Daily*, interviewed several faculty members from some local universities in Guangzhou about the reverse trend in gender ratio in higher education. Many of them witnessed rapid and obvious increase of female students since the higher education expansion in the late 1990s, regardless of whether they were in liberal arts-oriented colleges or engineering-oriented colleges<sup>19</sup>. Some of these faculty members recalled that they would hardly see a girl in classes in the 1980s. However, many colleges have now become “*nverguo*” [kingdoms of girls], as they observed. For example, in Sun Yat-sen University, a comprehensive university, the ratio of female students and male students in the graduate program of Chinese Language was 6 to 1 in both 2004 and 2005, and rose to about 7 to 1 in 2006; also, they admitted 53 females out of the total of 100 students into the 8-year program of Clinical Medicine in 2006, which had enrolled more male students than female students for a long time; moreover, engineering schools (which are usually regarded as boys’ schools locally), like South China University of Technology, also enrolled 9 female students out of the total of 16 in the graduate program of Environmental Science in 2006 (Qiu & Du, 2006). It is even so in “girls’ schools” (I coin this term in describing those colleges which for long have more female students, as widely known locally), like Guangdong University of Foreign Studies<sup>20</sup>; the constant increase of female students has even demanded the school to reconstruct some men’s restrooms into women’s in recent years (S. Lin, 2011). If these faculty members are correct that the gender gap in education is almost eliminated and has even turned into a reverse trend in Guangdong, women are also very likely to make further achievements in many other aspects of their social lives, which I will explore later in this paper.

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<sup>19</sup> There are no large-scale statistics available on gender ratios of liberal arts majors and engineering and natural science majors; however, it has long been almost a norm in China that girls are suitable to study liberal arts while boys are better in natural sciences and engineering.

<sup>20</sup> This is a liberal-art-oriented university which I attended for undergraduate study. Since girls in China are believed to be good at language, many girls would like to attend this school if they are not leaving the province. Take my class, for example: 24 out of the 30 were girls, with only 6 boys in the cohort.

Such an increase of women in higher education in Guangdong is undeniably a great inspiration for feminists, girls and women generally, or anyone who is concerned about women's development. However, what factors lead to these positive outcomes? How do girls benefit from these outcomes? Does every girl or woman have the same equal opportunity? In a particularly striking example, the 2010 WSSR demonstrates an obvious gap between rural and urban women, and the youngest cohort of rural women (aged between 18 and 24) are much less likely to complete high school than their urban counterparts (Figure 1).

According to these college faculty members and professionals in education, the main reasons that can explain this reverse trend in Guangdong's higher education include: empowerment of girls by the one-child policy, expansion of enrollment of higher education since 1999, girls' increased consciousness of independence and self-development, and girls' suitability with regard to the current examination system (S. Lin, 2011; Qiu & Du, 2006). In addition, at the levels of graduate or above, it is believed that employment pressure is the main reason for women to enroll, including either difficulties in finding a job with a bachelor's degree, or the desire to pursue better employment opportunities, like teaching in universities (Qiu & Du, 2006).

Among those interviewed by Qiu and Du (2006), many agreed that girls usually study harder than boys, since they are more mature and are well aware of the significance of education to them in order to compete in the society. However, some believe that girls are more suitable to compete under the current education and examination system, which emphasizes knowledge memorizing instead of logical thinking; nonetheless, this perception is not held by everyone. For example, Li Weimin, a sociologist from Sun Yat-sen University, has reservations about this explanation, and argues that we should attribute the increase of female students to more educational opportunities open to women, but not to the privileging of women under a system that hinders everyone from reaching their potential. According to this news report, there was some other opinion pointing out that many girls, as the only child in the family, were also expected to achieve more in education both for themselves and for their families, particularly since "the traditional belief *yanger fanglao* [raising sons to provide for old age] was outdated." A similar conclusion was found in a study conducted in Dalian, a coastal city in northern China (Fong, 2002), which observed: China's one-child policy enabled mothers to get paid work, and

in this sense it proved daughters' ability to provide old parents with financial support; along with the absence of competition for resources from brothers, daughters were able to receive investments from parents. In addition, since the *gaokao zhidu* [college entrance examination system] has not changed much since the 1980s when male college students were dominant (Kang, 2011), the argument of girls and women taking advantage of current education and the college entrance examination system is neither reasonable nor fair. If this opinion becomes mainstream, as I am concerned that it might, is it likely to lead to an educational reform particularly designed for men?

While we do not know yet if there will be a large-scale educational reform designed in favor of male students, special measures (either implicit, or overt as setting different admission requirements based on gender in specific) can already be found among many schools as being necessary for them to balance the gender ratio of students. This kind of gender-based discrimination at higher education levels is no doubt a big discouragement to women and girls today, when they expect to have more educational opportunities. Fortunately, women's improvements in education tend to have effectively strengthened their backbones to fight against such unfair treatment. A "hair-shaving protest" by some high school girls from Guangzhou in August this year (2012) has attracted national attention (Christie, 2012). These protesting girls required the Ministry of Education to explain these unfair gender quotas. However, the answer was that "out of national interests, a few colleges and universities are allowed to adjust the gender ratio of students enrolled into some special programs." Some professionals in education even claimed that these gender quotas "reflect the market demand." Moreover, they did not explain why the programs (like International Relations) were special, or why they were not just as suitable for girls<sup>21</sup>. According to some lawyers in this field, this kind of gender quotas violates laws and regulations, including the Laws of Protection on Women's Rights and Interests, Laws of Education, and also the Regulations on College and University Admission Work; and the "market explanation" does not justify the discrimination against women (Christie, 2012; Mao, Zhao & Guo, 2012). There is no report found about gender quotas in local universities and colleges in the Guangdong area this year; however, the

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<sup>21</sup> According to Xiong Bingqi, the vice president of the 21 Century Education Research Institution, there is indeed segregation in some special colleges and universities. For example, military schools and navigation schools are usually male dominated; while programs like nursing and flight service have a majority of female students.

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies stated overtly in 2006 that “admission will be based on scores of entrance examination and the applied programs, with suitable consideration of gender balance” (“Guangdong waiyu,” 2006).

Are women welcome to colleges? We see conflicting attitudes. Zhang Minqiang, a professor of education from the South China Normal University, said “it is worrying,” concerning the domination of female students in the school, although he did not further explain what is “worrying.” However, regarding the gender quotas, he said that it was very common in colleges and universities, though schools needed to pay attention as to how they handle this fairly; and he suggested that schools should give advance notification as to which programs would only admit male students (Qiu & Du, 2006). Li Weiming, the superintendent of Guangdong provincial government, who believes that girls take advantage of the current education and examination system emphasizing knowledge-memorizing instead of logical thinking and creativity, has even proposed that the disproportional gender ratio (more female students than male) should be addressed as problematic, with the solutions including improving teachers’ income and benefits to attract more male teachers, and reforming the examination system into one that emphasizes logical thinking and creativity.

However, in contrast to these opinions, some other faculty members tend to welcome female students, because of their strong willingness to participate in students’ work and services, and the organizational skills and leadership they demonstrate. In addition, the long-term “monks’ schools” (I coin this term drawing on the term “*heshangban*” -- monks’ classes, which humorously refers to male-dominated classes in technology and engineering schools), like Guangdong University of Technology, initiated the “Girls’ Festival” in 1991, which takes place every year in the third week of November. Under the principles of “*guan’ ai nvsheng*” [caring and being concerned for female students] and “*nvsheng dashai*” [Cantonese, meaning “female students are supreme”], this festival is intended to promote men’s respect toward women, and also women’s “*zonghe suzhi*” [comprehensive quality], such as “abilities to think, to read, to work, and to maintain healthy mentality” (“Guangdong nvshengjie,” 2009). Though such activities may promote the public consciousness of respecting and having concern for women, I still have reservations about it. Activities such as free movies, feasts, sending gifts to girls, free computer repair, image designing, make-up class and the like, as

introduced in the event description, demonstrate it to be a more entertaining and social event than one that promotes women's independence and abilities. To a certain extent, it even strengthens women's dependence on men, as this series of activities contains an embedded theme: women are waiting for men to take care of them. For example, a girl made a wish at an activity during the 15th session of the festival, stating that "I wish I could find a boyfriend who is rich and handsome, and cares for me so much that he takes me to school on a bike everyday, and will accompany me to see Jay Chow (a pop singer from Taiwan)."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, while some other schools are trying to balance out the number of female students, we do not see any of these "monks' schools" taking any measure to attract more female students.

In terms of higher education, there is no information available focusing on analysis of the disparity between urban women and rural women; even the report on the press conference of the 2010 WSSR did not provide relevant description. However, statistics from the 2010 WSSR of Guangdong have already revealed the fact that rural girls and women are less likely to attend colleges than their urban counterparts, since they receive on average 7.16 years of education, which is only a level of middle school, compared to the urban women's average school retention of 9.79 years -- a high school level. It is also shown that even the youngest (aged between 18 and 24) and most educated rural women are not able to complete high school, let alone older groups of women<sup>23</sup> (Figure 1). Thus, it is evident that rural women are in a more disadvantaged position in terms of education.

The disparity of women's education between different groups in Guangdong is also demonstrated by the GDWF's strategies on reemployment of middle-aged women, both in urban and rural areas, which mainly focus on vocational training qualifying them to work at low-skilled jobs with low-level income. Such kinds of strategies for training rural women were first introduced in the late 1990s when Guangdong's industrial transformation began, and it "took the first step" to establish the "schools for rural women," which mainly trained them with

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<sup>22</sup> As read in a picture titled "a wish made by a girl (who called herself 'little prince') from the School of Applied and Chemical Engineering, during the 15<sup>th</sup> session of the Girls' Festival". Accessed on October 29, 2012 at [http://file.gdutbbs.com/forum/forumid\\_77/091108110164b3e8d1e588e9ea.jpg](http://file.gdutbbs.com/forum/forumid_77/091108110164b3e8d1e588e9ea.jpg)

<sup>23</sup> China applies a "liusansan xuezhì" [six-three-three education model], which means six-year primary education and six-year secondary education with three years of middle school and three years of high school; and it usually takes twelve years to complete three level of education before higher education. This model first appeared in Guangdong in the early twentieth century following the end of the imperial examination system. See, He, Jianhui (June 6, 2011), Jiaoyu gaige duo dianfan, shuaxian shishi "liusansan" [First to apply the six-three-three education model, becoming models of China], *Information Times*, retrieved November 6, 2012 from [http://edu.ifeng.com/gundong/detail\\_2011\\_06/06/6841140\\_0.shtml](http://edu.ifeng.com/gundong/detail_2011_06/06/6841140_0.shtml)

practical agricultural skills to assist the rural women to realize “*zhifu benkang*” [becoming rich and living comfortable lives] (Yang, Zhang & Wu, n.d.). As urbanization and industrialization extend further, work-training programs are created under the joint efforts of the local government and private organizations to promote the transfer of the rural labor to non-agricultural industries in response to the market demand (GDWF, 2007).

Meanwhile, in the urban areas, domestic services are widely promoted as suitable work opportunities for unemployed women, and training for housekeeping, nursing, and elder care are organized by the government, operationally by the GDWF (Zeng & Ren, 2002). These unemployed women (“stepped-down female workers,” as they are usually called in China) are even persuaded to “accept the reality of their positions in the market,” meaning that they are less marketable because of their age and limited education; thus, they have no alternative choice but to work in housekeeping and nursing services, in which they can use the full range of their good personality of “*shanjie renyi*” [being considerate and tolerant] and their rich experience in housework (“*Funv yu jiuye*,” n.d.). These strategies of vocational training for unemployed women seem to be the last resort; in addition, such strategies tend to be limited as being able to provide women with life-long learning opportunities so as to promote women’s development, as stated in both the 2000-2010 and 2011-2020 Plans. For one thing, women in these training programs lost their autonomy by the manipulation of the government and the market; for another, their traditional roles as housewives are again highlighted by their being persuaded that domestic work is the only choice for them.

While we optimistically believe that younger girls and women are all supposed to enjoy more educational resources than the older cohorts, the fates of girls from thousands of immigrant families in Guangdong indeed demand our concern. Though there is no systematic study on this specific group available, evidence demonstrates that they are in a disadvantageous situation, which at least is worse than the local residents. Regardless of gender, children from migrant families in general are still not able to receive the same quality education as those from local families. Applying the “Zhongshan <sup>24</sup> model” of resident registration reform, Guangdong began to allow migrant workers to register as local residents in 2010, as

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<sup>24</sup> Zhongshan is a city located in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong, and is named after Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen), a great nationalist revolutionary of China in the early twentieth century, who established the Kuomintang/Nationalist Party.



long as they have satisfied certain requirements such as education, work, and their contribution to the social security fund; still, only if they are registered as local residents are they eligible to public services like public education for their children (Luo & Li, 2012). However, this policy is not yet equipped to benefit every child from migrant families, since many parents may not be able to meet the requirements. Moreover, as the results of a poll published early this year (2012) indicate, migrant workers, although they have positive attitudes toward Guangdong in general, are very unsatisfied with the public services, particularly education and housing; and about 40 percent of their children are attending inferior, privately maintained schools, which are usually poorly run (Suo, Wang & Ming, 2012). Even though the 2001-2010 Plan of Guangdong required that the difficulties of the school-aged girls from immigrant families must be addressed, the reintroduction of this issue in the 2011-2020 Plan, the drawback of registration reform and the complaints from the parents mentioned above demonstrate that this issue is very complicated and has been hardly addressed, regardless of some reports of improvements (J. Lin, 2010).

#### *Employment and Career Development: Survival or Self-Realization*

As the results of the 2010 WSSR of Guangdong indicate, Guangdong maintains a high women's employment rate, which is 68.7 percent overall; 62.8 percent for urban women and 81.9 percent for rural women are in the labor force. Without more details, it is merely reported that a majority of working women, about 45 percent, are in the third industry/service industry sector. What kinds of service jobs do they usually work on? Can these jobs lead them to a higher level of development in the larger sense?

In the post-reform era, the most disadvantaged groups of female workers must be those urban women laid off from SOEs during the privatization and the rural women who lost their land during the process of industrialization. In order to promote their reemployment, the government's major strategies are "to direct the unemployed women to change their mindset, to help them understand the reality of their positions in the market and to become flexible with employment choices," such as jobs in the domestic industry and in individual and private enterprises; to provide the unemployed women with training in housekeeping and nursing, so as to promote their employability; and to promote self-employment, "in response to the market

demand" (GDWF, 2004; "Guangzhoushi fulian," 2012). Even though jobs in domestic industry are actively promoted by the government as major solutions for these women, they know very clearly that these are low-level jobs with low income ("Gaoxueli nvxing," 2010). As Ms. Feng -- the deputy party secretary from a neighborhood community of Guangzhou -- has remarked, the unemployed women in their 40s and 50s were the most stressful and least happy, relying on low income from low-level domestic jobs to support their families and children. Thus, for these women, even survival was not always guaranteed, let alone having the opportunities for career development or self-realization.

**Table 2: Guangdong's Top Six Sectors for Employed Women (2007-2011)**

Sectors	Year									
	2007		2008		2009		2010		2011	
	Rank (Percentage of Total Employed Women, %)									
Manufacture	1	(49.82)	1	(47.56)	1	(48.31)	1	(48.29)	1	(47.13)
Education	2	(12.70)	2	(13.39)	2	(13.30)	2	(12.91)	2	(12.40)
Health Care, Social Security and Social Welfare	3	(6.01)	3	(6.39)	3	(6.42)	3	(6.61)	3	(6.52)
Public Administration and Social Organizations	4	(5.47)	4	(5.71)	4	(5.38)	4	(5.30)	4	(5.45)
Wholesale and Retail Trade	5	(3.98)	6	(4.08)	6	(3.93)	6	(4.00)	5	(5.00)
Finance	6	(3.61)	5	(4.13)	5	(4.15)	5	(4.30)	6	(4.45)

Source: Guangdong Statistical Yearbooks 2008-2012.

Note: Percentages are calculated by author and ranked in descending order.

Neither are the data from the Guangdong Statistical Yearbooks showing an encouraging picture of women's employment: the manufacture sector accommodates most of the working women in Guangdong (almost 50 percent), followed by education with about 13 percent of the total of working women, and the other sectors with percentages of lower than 7 percent (Table 2). Among those sectors in the rank above, all belong to the tertiary/service industry except for manufacture<sup>25</sup>. What does this indicate? Since jobs in manufacture, wholesale and the retail

<sup>25</sup> According to the Statistical Standards of China, national economy is divided into primary industry, secondary industry,

trade are commonly labor-intensive, with low-skilled or low-educational requirements, women working in these industries usually earn much less than the average income level (rank 15<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> respectively among the 19 sectors by average income; see Table 6), and accordingly have limited room for career development; thus, women in these industry sectors are employed merely at a level of working for survival, but not likely to have opportunities for self-development. Those who work in public services -- such as education, health care, social security and social welfare, or public administration and social organization -- are usually in a better situation in terms of income, benefits and social status due to their connections to the government and the higher level of educational requirements (rank 10<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> respectively by average income; see Table 6). However, regarding opportunities for career development, I believe that women's prospects are still limited, even though some of them will become "cadres" (see note in Table 5 for explanation), which I will explore further below.

According to the evaluation results of the 2001-2010 Plan of Guangdong, there has been an increase of female cadres in SOEs, government departments and agencies during the past decade (Zhang, 2010). However, as statistics from this evaluation report indicate, the improvements are not obvious, in particular for public servants (increased from 20.18 percent in 2000 to 20.39 percent in 2009; see Table 3). Moreover, what these statistics show is merely an increase in number and proportion, which can be easily achieved by setting quotas (which I will discuss further below); thus, it is more important to examine the influence of women on decision making, specifically if they occupy important positions or work in management. Statistics from the Guangdong Social Sciences Association shows a disappointing reality, as Huang discovered (Y. Huang, 2012b): "increased in proportion overall, but few in principal positions; many in departments of health, education and social organizations, but few in economic departments (which are considered more important); regarding the case of scholars working in social sciences, about 50 percent are women, but there is a sharp decrease at higher levels, and women constitute only 10 percent in full professorships."

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and tertiary industry. Primary industry refers to agriculture that provides raw products, including plantation, forestry, animal husbandry, and fishery; secondary industry refers to sectors that process raw products from primary industry, such as mining, manufacturing, and others energy industries; and tertiary industry, also called service industry, includes all sectors not covered by the other two industries and provides all kinds of services for manufacture and consumption. See, Woguo sanci chanye huafen biao zhun [Defining standards of the national industries of China], accessed October 30, 2012 at [http://www.gdstats.gov.cn/tjbz/sccyhfbz/200406/t20040629\\_17081.html](http://www.gdstats.gov.cn/tjbz/sccyhfbz/200406/t20040629_17081.html)

**Table 3: Female Employees in SOEs and Government Departments (2000, 2009)**

Positions	Year	
	2000	2009
		(%)
Female Cadres in SOEs	36.13	42.44
Female Technicians in SOEs	32.33	47.69
Public Servants	20.18	20.39

Source: Data from Zhang (2010).

Similar to those in public sectors, women in private sectors also confront glass ceilings. According to a news report in *Guangzhou Daily* (Y. Huang, 2010), the statistics released on the 2010 South China MBA Human Resources Forum indicate that even though more than 50 percent of the administrative staff of enterprises in China are female, few of them work in management positions, and no more than 10 percent at high levels. On the forum, some local female managers from Guangdong who had similar experiences argued that the traditional stereotype of women, such as being obedient and family-oriented, was still restricting women's development in the workplace. In particular, married women who have children usually feel hesitant to take a further step in their career, considering their family responsibilities; many of them would finally choose to give up their career development for their families, especially for their children. According to Wang Jianjing, the program director of the China Executive MBA of Sun Yat-sen University, "although these prosperous female executives are able to afford domestic help, they would still prefer to do the housework and take care of their children by themselves; however, the higher the level of their positions, the less likely it becomes that they can balance work and family." Ms. Lai, the manager of Tower Watson Guangzhou and Shenzhen Branch, who attended the forum, remarked that "work-life balance is just an ideal." In addition, a recent study also indicates that only about 20 to 30 percent of male workers accept female supervisors, as cited (Y. Huang, 2010). The study does not specify in what ways the male workers express lack of acceptance, but any indication of tension in the workplace is likely to influence management policy.

While glass ceilings in well-established organizations restrict women's career development, starting their own businesses may become the last choice; and fortunately, it seems that Guangdong is able to provide them with a relatively favorable environment in which to take advantage of this alternative. According the Hurun Report of the Richest Women in China, Guangdong, with the largest number of headquarters of women-started companies in China, has been "the most favorable place for female entrepreneurs" since this list was first published in 2010<sup>26</sup> (Table 4). Although detailed analysis of this report is not available, I believe that the more dynamic economic environment and relatively mature market system of Guangdong, the first province to launch economic reform and opening-up are important factors that attract female entrepreneurs; in addition, the government has also been encouraging unemployed women to start businesses as an employment solution. For example, in both the 2001-2010 and 2011-2020 Plans of Women's Development, the Guangdong government states that they should "encourage and direct women to start businesses and private enterprises by improving supporting policies, providing relevant training and small loans, and tracking services...."<sup>27</sup> However, women who are more likely to succeed in starting businesses maybe those who are more educated and who have more resources. Moreover, the government's small loans for unemployed women in both urban and rural areas have been scarce. According to the GDWF (Lin & Tu, 2011), demand for small loans for women to start businesses in Guangdong was about 24 billion yuan (about 3.9 billion USD) in 2011, while the provincial government's financial allocation could be only 32 million yuan (about 5.2 million USD), which means that the government's financial support was only able to meet the demand by about .13 percent and the government's advocacy of women's starting businesses tends to be less feasible in practice.

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<sup>26</sup> "Hurun Report Established in 1999 by Rupert Hoogewerf, the 'godfather' of the China Rich List; today the Hurun Report is widely recognized as the foremost authority in tracking the rapid changes amongst China's high net worth individuals." See "About us" for more detailed introduction of Hurun Report, accessed on Oct 30, 2012 at <http://www.hurun.net/user/Aboutus.aspx>

<sup>27</sup> See, Guangdong Women's Development Plan 2011-2020 (Chinese, no English version available), available at <http://www.pwccw.gd.gov.cn/layout/gdfn2011.asp>

**Table 4: “Richest Women in China” -- Top Three Regions (2010-2012)**

Region	Number of Listed Female Entrepreneurs		
	Year		
	2010	2011	2012
Guangdong	12	10	14
Beijing	7	9	7
Zhejiang	4	6	8

Source: Website of Hurun Report (<http://www.hurun.net/zhcn/Default.aspx>)

While women in Guangdong are struggling to break the glass ceiling and to change the stereotypical perception of women as “not good at doing business” (W. Zhang, 2009), they also have to deal with gender-based employment discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. However, the absence of specific provisions and effective enforcement of laws, and also the public’s weak legal consciousness to follow such laws or use laws to defend the rights and interests of women, have greatly hindered progress on the elimination of these barriers to women’s careers.

For example, at a job fair in 2003 in Guangzhou, many companies stated that they would consider whether the female applicants were suitable for certain jobs with particular working conditions mainly based on their physical endurance, rather than their capabilities for those jobs (“Biyesheng,” 2003). And in a 2007 survey of enterprises in the Pearl River Delta, we are informed that many employers complained that female college graduates need to cultivate professional working attitudes, worldly sophistication, and social skills before they leave campuses, though 75 percent of the interviewed employers said that they would not reject female applicants just because of their gender, and also acknowledged that female college graduates had become very competent (Liang, 2007; “Jinri Guangdong,” 2007). In addition to these concerns about women’s “suitability” for certain jobs and working attitudes, their absence from work due to marriage, family responsibilities, pregnancy and the early maternity period also deters employers significantly. According to a recruiter from a local college, they did prefer male applicants to females because they had once experienced difficulties when they

recruited a majority of female teachers, among whom many were absent for pregnancy at the same period of time (Liang, 2007).

However, how can we define the suitability of jobs for women, and by what standards do employers judge the working attitudes of female employees and their worldly perspective and social skills? Obviously, these are all stereotypes of women; and the laws and regulations are not effectively enforced, so employers are able to select employees mostly based on their personal experiences. Moreover, according to relevant laws and regulations (such as the 1988 Regulations on Labor Protection of Female workers, 1995 Labor Laws and the 2010 Law on Employment Promotion), female employees need special protection from hard working conditions during menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and the early maternity period in all kinds of enterprises. As the college recruiter said, such gender discrimination was actually very prevalent, but just not conducted overtly; and the employers regard this as a no-choice preference for male employees, in order to avoid disruption in work continuity because of women's taking maternity leave (Liang, 2007). His own experience of difficulties caused by the maternity leave of many female teachers at the same time seemed to be a good justification to him, when the college had a majority of female teachers a few years ago. Thus, as it seems, such gender discrimination in employment has long been justified and tolerated even by women themselves, under the circumstances of weak legal consciousness on the part of the public.

However, after being silent for so long, some women in Guangdong have finally become aware of the fact that their equal rights and interests are being violated, and have begun to take action to protect their rights. Two important events that have attracted national attention took place in Guangzhou this year (2012): Zheng Churan's letter against gender discrimination in employment to the China Fortune 500 and the labor lawsuit case of Ms. Dong vs. the PClady.com.cn (Wan, 2012; Wang, 2012). Zheng Churan (female), a 2012 graduate from Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, wrote a letter to the CEOs of China Fortune 500 in April this year, calling on them to make a declaration of gender equality in work opportunities, so as to eliminate the unjust employment requirements against female college graduates. Meanwhile, the case of Ms. Dong in May 2012 was a typical instance of discharge due to pregnancy; however, what distinguishes it are not only Ms. Dong's high level position as the Chief

Executive Editor of a “women-run-for-women” portal site, but also its being the first case accepted by the GDWF concerning gender discrimination at work (Su, 2012). Ms. Dong stated that she had never expected that this would happen to her (as someone with high qualifications and outstanding work performance), after she was forced by her female supervisors to resign when they were informed of her pregnancy. The implications of this “betrayal” in a women’s conflict will be discussed further in my conclusion.

Similarly, the fight against sexual harassment in the workplace has also just begun; and the 2010 case of Ms. Lu vs. her Japanese supervisor from a Guangzhou-based foreign-invested company has become a major “breakthrough” as the first case of workplace sexual harassment to be judged in favor of the victim, according to Yang Shiqiang, the director of the Department of Women’s Rights and Interests under the GDWF (Yang, 2012). However, he also concluded that “there is still too much to do so as to prevent and stop sexual harassment in the workplace.” As he said, even though a series of laws and regulations has been improved and refined recently -- in particular, the introduction of the clear definition of sexual harassment in the 2010 Guangzhou’s Regulations on Protections of Women’s Rights and Interests -- few victims would file a complaint and most of them would instead pursue private settlements. He further pointed out that the difficulties in obtaining evidence, in investigating cases prior to filing, and also in determining compensation were major obstacles; and Ms. Lu’s victory in the case was largely attributed to the key evidence – a few pictures unintentionally taken by one of her colleagues<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, the monetary compensation that Ms. Lu finally received was not enough to cover her costs for the lawsuit and her loss of employment. It may well be that public felt some revulsion for Ms. Lu’s Japanese supervisor owing to Sino-Japanese relations as well as the impression of pornographic culture in Japanese society; however, Ms. Lu would have not been able to win the case without those unintentionally-taken pictures. Thus, more obviously and importantly, the lesson that the public has learned from this case is the need to place more emphasis on evidence collection (Yan, 2009).

When we confront this series of barriers in employment and the workplace detailed above, even the high employment rate of women in Guangdong can hardly demonstrate that women have much better opportunities for career development. What’s worse, while some

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<sup>28</sup> These pictures are available at <http://news.sohu.com/20091219/n269060444.shtml>, accessed December 6, 2012.



women are more capable of climbing up their career ladders by starting and running their own businesses, there is no guarantee that opportunities will be shared among their peers. In short, there is still a long way to go.

*Political Participation: a Right or an Assignment*

**Table 5: Proportion of Female Cadres at Various Levels (Various Years)**

Categories of Cadres* (%)	Year			
	2002	2005	2010	2012
Total Female Cadres of Guangdong	38.50	40.50	--	42
Female Representatives of Guangdong's People's Congress	25.80	--	--	27
Female Members of the CPPCC**	16.52	--	--	18
Female Party Representatives	22.04	--	--	--
Cadres at the Provincial Level	--	--	14.29	--
Cadres at the Prefectural level	--	--	12.23	--
Cadres at the County Level	--	--	18.41	18
Female Members of the Village Committees	--	--	18.10	--
Female Members of Community Neighborhood Committees	--	--	47.10	--

Sources: Author's collections from various sources, including Guangdong Information Net of Women and Children Development, Nanfang Net, and the State Civil Services Examination Net.

Note: There are no systematic and comparable data available, and many of the percentages from news reports are approximate rates.

\*There is no formal definition of cadre available; however, the title "cadre" has been widely used in China and mainly refers to those who serve the public and enjoy relatively high social status. For example, students who serve in class management committees or student unions for the sake of their classes or schools are called "student cadres."

\*\*Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Results from the 2010 WSSR in Guangdong indicate that even though about 80 to 90

percent of women in Guangdong are quite concerned about public affairs and social management, similar to their male counterparts, women's percentage of real participation was very low.

From the very limited data shown in the table above (collected from various sources, mainly news reports and public speeches by some local government and party leaders), women's political participation in Guangdong is still not common. As the data show, Guangdong maintains a relatively high rate of female cadres at all levels of government or in governmental agencies in general, and these women have constituted about 40 percent of the total population of the cadre in 2002, 2005, 2010 and 2012. However, when we look at the percentages at various levels, most of their participation rates have dropped to the levels of about 10 to 20 percent, except for that of urban community neighborhood committees. Despite this elevated percentage of female positions in urban community neighborhood committees, they are the lowest, least influential spots and have long been regarded as women's jobs, which I will discuss below.

Even though the general data are valid, I still suspect the mechanism behind the creation of these results. Take the quotas, for example. Zhu Mingguo, the deputy secretary of Guangdong Provincial Committee, stated on his inspection tour to the GDWF and its affiliated agencies in 2010 that "we must work harder in training and selecting female cadres; must have good knowledge about the appointment and work assignment of female cadres; and *"yingzhibiao"* [hard quotas] should be emphasized so as to promote women's political participation rates" (GDFW, 2010). Following this, we can see many recent reports from lower-level administrations regarding their achievement of recruiting female cadres, and many reported "100 percent fitted out with at least one female cadre," as posted on the GDWF website.

In addition, despite the fact that female cadres are widely distributed and in a quite high rate, it still hardly shows whether they are capable, or indeed influential, in making policies, which largely depends on their specific positions and work. Although there are no systematic statistics available, some evidence still indicates their limitation in making a difference. Zhou Liqiong, the Executive Vice President of the GDWF, even acknowledged during the press conference of the 2010 WSSR early this year (2012) that "due to some institutional and

ideological obstacles, great disparity of political participation still exists between men and women; there is still a long way for women to go, so as to enhance their awareness of political participation; and a supporting social environment and a just competition and selection system should be established” (“Guangdong nvxing canzheng,” 2012).

Moreover, we will commonly see that the proportion of female cadres in village committees is very low due to the relatively lower level of education and the stronger influence of tradition in rural areas. Take the grassroots level, for example: the proportion of female members in the urban community neighborhood committees is almost twice that of rural village committees in 2010 (Table 5). Since obstacles such as influence of tradition, bias against women, women's weak self-awareness, and their lower educational level overall still hinder women's political participation in rural areas; therefore, the government resorts to “quotas” and requires that the village committees must include at least one female member after election (Yu & Deng, 2008; Yu, 2010). Reaching the requirement of the quotas does not cost the grassroots administration much effort; and by the end of 2011, it was reported that 100 percent of the “two committees” (the village committees and the community neighborhood committees) have female members, and the overall percentage of female members in this grassroots level administration was 29.3 percent, compared to that of 11.8 percent in 2008 (Huang, Wang & Chu, 2011); however, the actual influence of these women is negligible, as we shall see in the following discussion of work in the “two committees.”

Regarding the much higher percentage of female cadres in urban community neighborhood committees compared to that of village committees, it is still not very encouraging, since those are normally believed to be women's jobs. The public's stereotype of staff in the community neighborhood committees is that they are always middle-aged women visiting families and dealing with family issues in the neighborhood; their work is for the public good, but their income and benefits are much less than those of regular public servants, and even lower than the average level of the whole society; and they are “*laodama*” [literally “old mothers”], who take care of many details of residents' lives by visiting their homes with their official stamps (“Gei juweihui,” 2011; Yang, 2011). These jobs are usually for women with a certain amount of education but no real prospects for good employment.

Similarly, improvements at higher levels are also limited; becoming cadres does not

necessarily mean that women are able to exert their full potential to influence policies and public affairs. As a recent report analyzes (Y. Huang, 2012a), similar to any other working women, these female cadres also confront obstacles to their careers in the political realm: more of them are working in marginal and supporting departments (such as education or culture) and not those important departments like urban planning and economic development; they are still being restricted by the glass ceiling; they always remaining on lower level positions or second-in-command or “vice” status; and they experience difficulties in the balance between work and family responsibilities. Ms. Guo Jiao, a cadre and the Vice President of a local university, who was interviewed by Huang, pointed out that many female cadres in Guangdong themselves were still influenced by the tradition that women belong to family and showed little interest and confidence in competition and career development.

In short, based on available information, we can see that the situation of women's political participation in Guangdong is still far from satisfying. Their participation is symbolic to a certain extent: they become cadres because the male-dominated leadership believes it to be necessary, and they usually work in marginal and supporting departments, because the male-dominated society reinforces the idea that those jobs are suitable for women who have been playing supporting roles. Moreover, during my research, I have noticed that information about women's political lives is much less prevalent than that concerning their economic participation. Is this merely an incidental phenomenon? Or is it a manifestation of the current situation of imbalanced social development in the post-reform era under the principle of prioritizing economic development? This will prove to be a complicated political issue which is beyond the scope of the present study. However, if it is really an indication of socially imbalanced development, I believe that the situation of women's political participation will not be improved much until more comprehensive social reforms are launched, in particular political reform which leads to a more democratic and liberal environment. And political reform is the public's major expectation of the CPC's “*shibada*” [the Eighteenth National Congress of CPC], which takes place during November 8 to 14 this year (2012).

What is worth mentioning is that it seems the young people have begun to speak up and participate in social management in their own ways. The initiator of a recent influential event of social management participation in 2011 happens to be a female -- Ou Jiayang, a college girl

from Guangzhou, whose action regarding these conditions was mentioned in the Introduction above. After some relevant governmental departments failed to provide the feasibility report of a public construction project, she openly sent them a ball as gift, lampooning their shirking responsibilities as “kicking balls.” What’s more, her action, titled as “Guangzhou de minyi” [People’s Voice in Guangzhou], was broadcast all over the country through a program called *Xinwen Yijiayi* [News One plus One] by the China Central Television (CCTV) -- the largest official television network in China (China Central Television, 2011). As it appears, major improvements in women’s political participations in Guangdong have just begun. It may be too early to judge if major political reform efforts are really to be made in coming years, but tolerance for such an action and its broadcast by the official television network seems reason for optimism that there will be in the future.

*Income and Welfare: Iron Rice Bowl<sup>29</sup> or Insecurity*

**Table 6: Income Rank of The Top Six Sectors by Female Employment (2011)**

Sectors	Percentage of Female Employees	Percentage of the Average Income	Rank
Manufacture	47.13%	79.46%	15
Education	12.40%	107.28%	10
Health Care, Social Security and Social Welfare	6.52%	128.02%	5
Public Administration and Social Organizations	5.45%	127.61%	6
Wholesale and Retail Trade	5.00%	97.65%	13
Finance	4.45%	217.30%	1

Sources: Guangdong Statistical Yearbooks 2008 - 2012.

Note: Percentages are calculated and ranked by the author, based on the published average income of urban units of various sectors. According to China's Statistical Standards of National Economy, there are 19 industry sectors. The average annual income for all sectors is 45,152 yuan (about 7283 USD) in 2011.

<sup>29</sup> “Iron rice bowl” has long referred to the long-term security of employment, income and welfare for employees of the state under China’s planned economic system.

As the results of the 2010 WSSR show, the gender gap in income is obvious in Guangdong, and women's income is about 60 percent that of men. More statistics support these results, demonstrating that a majority of working women work in manufacture, with income much lower than the average level, ranking fifteenth among the nineteen sectors (Table 6). Even though women in education enjoy a relatively high social status, the average income in education is just slightly higher than the average level and ranks tenth among the 19 sectors, 107.28 percent of the average level. Moreover, the situation of the 4.45 percent of working women in the finance sector, which ranks highest by income, is still not very favorable. According to Ms. Wang Guizhi, the manager of the Guangzhou branch of Guangdong Development Bank (GDB) and one of the Ten Outstanding Women in Guangdong of 2010, female employees constitute more than 50 percent of employees in Guangdong's finance industry, and there are 626 females out of the 1330 (47 percent) employees in her Guangzhou branch of GDB; however, only 27 of 80 middle-level managers are women, which constitutes only about 30 percent ("Gaoxueli nvxing," 2010). Thus, even though people working in the finance industry generally have much higher income and more promotion opportunities than employees in many other sectors, it still tends to be men-dominated, and an obvious gender income gap within this sector is typically found. Unfortunately, this seems to be a global phenomenon, about which we can as easily find articles like "Gender Pay Gap Is Largest On Wall Street," stating that women in the financial sector can only earn 55 to 62 percent of that of men's earnings, due to the persistence of women's remaining in low-paying jobs regardless of their often higher educational levels (Seitz-Wald, 2012).

In addition to the restrictions on sectors and positions, the current retirement system, particularly the gender disparity in retirement age, also has a negative effect on women's income. According to the current retirement system that was established in 1978, all men (either cadres or workers) and female cadres must retire at the age of 60; female cadres are allowed to retire at 55, but female workers must retire at the age of 50, considering that women require special concern and protection ("Zaiyi nannv," 2011). Take the case of Shenzhen, for example: female cadres working in government agencies will earn 343,500 yuan to 412,500 yuan (about 55,403 USD to 66,532 USD) less if they retire 5 years earlier than their male counterparts ("Nvxing canzheng yizheng," 2012).

Under such circumstances, retirement system reform, particularly the elimination of the gender disparity in retirement age, has been an important topic with regard to women's development. However, the realization of same-age retirement is never an independent event, and is particularly related to the payment of pensions, which requires adjusting the retirement age for both sexes. Thus, discussion of retirement reform in Guangdong in the last decade has been mostly concerned with postponing retirement, early retirement, and flexible retirement. There has been no consensus achieved yet. Some argue that women are bearing heavy pressure both from work and family today, so early retirement will not only help balance their lives but also make room for younger women; while many other favor postponing retirement, as this allows capable women to realize their full potential and also to maintain or even increase their current income level, in particular for non-manual employees (Sun, 2011). However, the mainstream public tends to prefer a flexible system, in which both men and women are allowed to choose their own retirement age within a certain range. According to a study conducted in Guangzhou early this year (Wu & Liang, 2012), among the 121 respondents (including 47 cadres, and 22 males and 99 females, among the respondents), 88.4 percent prefer flexible retirement reform for women. As it is reported, those in favor of flexible retirement believe that it demonstrates respect for individual choices and gender equality, and also allows capable women to realize their full potential. While the discussion above mainly focuses on gender equality, there is also criticism about the current "double-track system" between public and private sectors that has created inequity for both men and women, arguing that it is a prerequisite for a fair reform to eliminate the "double-track system," which leads to unequal distribution of income and benefits <sup>30</sup> ("Nvren jujue," 2012).

However, even though it is reasonable and necessary to promote retirement reform to realize gender equality and allow women to realize their full potential, these debates seem to be conducted merely among working women in urban areas. Women in rural areas, who are more disadvantaged in terms of income and benefits, are marginalized. As we can recall from the

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<sup>30</sup> The current retirement system in China is double-tracked. One is for the public servants and employees of the government and its agencies, in which the employees do not need to contribute to social security, and their pensions will be directly allocated from the public finance. (Cadres usually belong to this category.) The other is for regular employees in private sectors who need to contribute 20 percent of their monthly salaries to social security so as to receive pensions when they retire. However, employees in the first category can receive pensions much higher than that of the second group. See, Nvren jujue beituixiu [Women refuse to be "retired"] (2012), *Wangyi Women Action*, Vol. 3, retrieved on November 4, 2012 from <http://lady.163.com/special/sense/nvrenxingdong03.html>

2010 WSSR of Guangdong, only 19.3 percent of rural women have participated in the social pension system, compared to 74.4 percent of the urban women (Figure 3). Moreover, retirement and pensions, in fact, have long been privileges for employees of SOEs in urban areas, but have nothing to do with rural residents who live by farming (Yan, 2012). In addition, according to official data from the Guangdong statistical yearbooks, average income of workers in agriculture has historically been the lowest, and is only 37.26 percent of the average level in 2011. Their disadvantaged financial position, as compared to the urban women, is very evident.

Unfortunately, inequity and injustice for rural women are even more than that. Rural women -- particularly those married out of their original villages -- are usually deprived of their rights of sharing the revenue from land during the recent trend of rapid urbanization and industrialization. In Guangdong, the term *waijianv* [married-out women] refers to women whose husbands are not from their original villages, regardless of these women's registered residence (Huang, n.d.; Lu, 2006). Statistics indicate that infringement upon the rights of rural married-out women and/or their children exists widely. As the 2004 study conducted by the Women and Gender Study Center of Sun Yat-sen University on seven districts of three cities in the Pearl River Delta indicates (Lu, 2006), 80 to 90 percent of the married-out women were refused dividends and benefits from their villages after getting married; 30 percent of them were not permitted to share revenue from land sales; about half of them had not received *zhaijidi* [housing land]; and few of their children were eligible for any kind of benefits according to local village rules. Statistics from the GDWF, as cited in this study, also demonstrate the prevalence and severity of this problem: in 2004, about half of the cases of married-out women's complaints were not properly solved; by the end of 2005, unsolved cases of married-out women's issues had negatively impacted more than 100,000 women. This report also cites historical data from Nanhai District of Foshan (a city near Guangzhou), which shows an increasing trend in affected women: 115 women between 1994 and 2004 have been negatively impacted, compared to 24 between 1965 and 1993. According to Lu Ying (2006), from the legal-aid team at GCSYSU, this disparity between the two periods demonstrates an obvious drawback in legislation, allowing wanton violations against women's rights and interests; however, the matter has yet to be systematically investigated.



Why are these married-out rural women excluded from benefits? It is still because of the influential tradition of *nanzun nvbei* [men are superior while women are inferior], under which the married-out women are regarded as valueless outsiders, or “poured-out water”; and such unreasonable tradition is still able to flourish under the current ineffective legislation system (Huang, n.d.; Lu, 2006; Sun, n.d.). The case of Xinshi Cun (a village in Yangjiang city in southwest Guangdong), reported by the local Women’s Federation, further demonstrates such obstinate discrimination against rural women (“Waijianv quanyi,” 2012). According to the village rules, “all male residents of the village are eligible for dividends from land sales, including their children,” but dividends are not for married-out women, even though they too were born in the village; also, both the village committee and the local court refuse to overturn these rules, for fear of “social instability” in the village. Despite the fact that both the village committee, as an administrative unit, and the local court, as a judicial authority, are no doubt supposed to follow all laws protecting women’s rights and interests, their consideration of possible “social instability” – which perhaps sounds like an equivocation -- indicates the danger and challenge of the still-influential tradition. Obviously, the realization of income equality will take more work, and even more time.

*Family and Marriage: Modern Equal Relationship or Refuge from Unjust Social Treatment and Financial Security*

Since it seems that the gender equality regarding income and benefits is not likely to be realized in a short period of time, will women accept the reality and resort to marriage for financial security? Evidence shows that this could be the trend.

Results of the 2010 WSSR of Guangdong indicate that 50.1 percent of the female respondents (and 43.9 percent of the male respondents) believe that “gan de hao buru jia de hao” [a good husband is better than a good job] (Y. Huang, 2012a). According to Ms. Wang Hongwei, a professor in Politics and Public Administration from a local university, this result does not necessarily represent the reality, due to the limitations of such a dichotomous question and also the fact of women’s wider variety of alternative life choices today. Nevertheless, another survey by the GDWF in 2007 also indicates that more women in Guangdong than the national level prefer “good husbands” over “good jobs”; many other surveys in Guangzhou in

recent years also report an emerging trend that young women still prefer potential mates who will be capable of providing material support (“Guangdong xingbie,” 2007; Mo, 2010; Fang, 2011; H. Lin, 2011). However, considering the inaccessible methodologies of these studies and Ms. Wang’s remark, these “trendy” conclusions, ubiquitous on the internet, are insufficiently reliable. In particular, it is difficult to know how representative the results of these surveys can be, without more information about the respondents. However, what is worthy of concern is the possible influence of the message being transmitted through this advanced technology on people’s behaviors and individual choices. Is this message reflecting public opinion, or will it in turn manipulate public opinion? Or, is there a dialectical relationship between them? We clearly and urgently need more in-depth research with scientific survey design and suitable sampling.

While the influence of new technology on women’s attitudes towards family and marriage is yet to be studied, some evidence still demonstrates that women are indeed being pushed back onto the traditional roles of family and marriage to a certain extent, regardless of their education levels. When many female college students or graduates say that they would like to marry “good husbands” (usually referring to rich men), *fuerdai* [the second rich generation], or “*qianligu*” [literally, “potential good stock,” men who are likely to become rich], etc. (“Guangdong xingbie,” 2007; Mo, 2010; Fang, 2010; H. Lin, 2011), feminists such as Li Jianlan, the president of Guangzhou Women’s Federation (GZWF), and Li Yinhe, a female sociologist in China, show their worry and disappointment concerning the negative effect of this trend “during the rapid economic development” on women’s independence and development. However, their concerns do not apply to everyone, and there is still some voice from the social science realm justifying this as “rational and mature logic” of “the female college students’ practical and utilitarian attitudes toward marriages in the era of commodity economy” (Mo, 2010; Z. Lin, 2010; Zhang, 2010). In addition, while the 2007 survey by the GDWF found that less educated women (particularly the rural women) had a stronger desire to marry rich men, a recent case in Guangzhou demonstrates that this desire to depend on men is not limited to less-educated rural groups: an academic couple in which both partners are professors, for example, still regards owning a house as the primary requirement for their potential son-in-law (“Guangdong xingbie,” 2007; H. Lin, 2011). However, the parents’

opinions do not necessarily represent that of their daughter, which was not considered in the report. Does she or her generation hold a different view of marriage from the older generation? While the social scientist justified women's desire to marry rich men or potential rich men as being rational and mature attitudes in the new era, he/she also pointed out that it's still a reflection of "diversification of values" and "individual differences" (Mo, 2010). If this is true, I anticipate more research in order to explore the transition of attitudes toward family and marriage between generations.

In addition to the disappointing signs of influential tradition that may hinder women's development, the report of the 2010 WSSR of Guangdong itself even provides conflicting information concerning family and marriage in relation to women's development. While the survey results indicate that women's family status in Guangdong today is higher, with about 80 to 90 percent of the married female respondents feeling satisfied with support and respect from their husbands, it also demonstrates resurgence of tradition: more women than in 2000, 56.5 percent, agree with the traditional gender roles of *nvzhuwai nvzhunei* [men should work outside while women belong to the families] (Lai, 2012). Whether or not women's status in the family in Guangdong is actually promoted, the researchers' methodology in measuring this promotion, and even the respondents' understanding of these concepts of family and marriage are quite troubling and, I suspect, less reliable. However, what we can at least be convinced of is that traditional views of family and marriage are still not given up, and women in Guangdong still hold rather conservative attitudes toward family and marriage. Whether these claims are hiding an attitude that is somewhat more progressive needs a survey design that circumvents women's possible reluctance to give true opinions.

First, although some individual cases in Guangdong reported by local media demonstrate that some husbands are willing to take care of housework and children when their wives are busy with work outside, all of these cases are of more educated white-collar workers living in urban areas; there are few cases, however, indicating similar trends taking place in rural areas, or in other groups at different social levels (R. Lin, 2010; Liu, 2012). In addition, another study in 2005 by the GDWF indicates that urban women, and women who received a higher level of education, are more likely to have equal rights in the family; however, unemployed women (both rural and urban), particularly those in their 40s and 50s, are more

dependent on their husbands, financially and psychologically. In this sense, disparities tend to emerge between different women's groups, in particular between the older and younger generations, along with the urbanization and the increase of the public's overall educational level. However, though it is hard to show the connection between this study and the 2010 WSSR, this can at least indicate the relative ambiguity of the general report of the 2010 WSSR, and also the clear necessity for more scientific research, in particular on focus groups.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

After the economic reform and opening-up passed its thirtieth anniversary, women's development in Guangdong has indeed been gradually making progress, in particular in terms of many "breakthroughs": enrollment of female college students exceeds that of male students for the first time; high school girls begin to fight against gender discrimination in college admission; victims of sexual harassment in the workplace are no longer silent; female employees become aware of discrimination in employment against them and begin to take action to safeguard their equal rights and interests; and others are able to exercise their rights as citizens to require transparency from the government on behalf of the public. Meanwhile, we also see limitations and challenges from the obvious out-of-balance development between the course of women's development and economic development, and also that among different women groups. More specifically, there are several critical factors that have been hindering women's development in Guangdong in the context of continuing economic reform and opening-up: the problematic policy of prioritizing economic advancement; the imperfection of legislation and ineffective implementation of regulations and policies; the strong influence of tradition; and the absence of consensus in understanding the objectives of women's development.

First, the economic-prioritizing development model has greatly distracted the attention and efforts of both the government and the public from "marginal social undertakings" like women's development. Women's development in Guangdong or in China during the transformation of economic reform and opening-up has actually inherited the development logic of that in Mao's era, or even in the earlier period of social reforms and revolution. That is, women's development has remained in the framework of social reform and development by the

male-dominated leadership, which has been strongly criticized by many Chinese feminists, but still continues today. Deng Xiaoping's initiative resulting in China's economic reform and opening-up was introduced by the end of the turbulent Cultural Revolution when Chinese people were in an extremely poor situation. After the "first step" by Guangdong, both the government and the public become strongly convinced of the benefits of market and economic advancement. Economic development and improvement of material conditions have naturally become the primary task of government at all levels, and so has the increase of personal wealth to regular people. This overemphasizing-economic growth, of social development, is overtly indicated by the incorporation of the official plan for women's development into the entire plan of social and economic improvements, by Guangdong's strategies of enhancing unemployed women's employability "in response to the market demand," by the response of consideration of "national interests" and reflection of "market demand" to the high school girls who protested for gender equality in college admission, and also by the case of Ms. Dong vs. the PClady.com.cn, in which Ms. Dong as the Chief Executive Editor was discharged by her female supervisors due to her pregnancy for the good of the company. Benefits from the market and economic advancement have justified their priority roles in social development, so that the market and profit have become the major standards and thwart women's development.

Second, ineffective enforcement of laws and regulations and weak legal awareness of the public have handicapped the entitlement of equal rights and interests to women in a market. In fact, the relative drawback of legislation construction as compared to the economic progress has also been an outcome of the economic-prioritizing development model. According to the interpretation by local scholars in Guangdong of women's preference of returning home to work outside the family (Y. Huang, 2012b), this resurgence of tradition reflects the unjust and unfair treatment that women encounter today in their career development. More specifically, many cases in Guangdong concerning discrimination against women in education, employment and distribution of public property, have demonstrated that laws and regulations concerning women's issues are not able to effectively protect their rights and interests. As noted, these include overt educational discrimination against women in college admission by gender disparity in requirements and difficult access to public educational resources for children (including school-aged girls) from immigrant families, and also discriminations in

employment and benefit distribution like irregular employment standards mainly based on personal stereotypical perceptions and experiences of employers and recruiters as well as the wanton manner in which married-out women are deprived of their rights in public property by illegal village rules. In addition, although some of them have begun to pursue safeguarding of their rights and interests, the imperfection of legislation and the drawback in popularization of legal awareness have brought them great obstacles. As Yang Shiqiang analyzed Ms. Lu's case of sexual harassment by her Japanese supervisor in the workplace (Yang, 2012), even though her victory of the case was a major "breakthrough" in legislation of women's issues, it was rather too soon to establish whether it is a trend, since the victory was due to the unexpected evidence of pictures unintentionally taken by one of her colleagues at the company's annual party, which emphasizes the importance of evidence gathering, as I have already observed. The influence of ineffective legislation can be found widely in both the public and private sectors, and it will take more work and more time to improve.

Third, tradition is still too influential to further promote equal rights and interests of women to men, particularly in rural areas. Although we see greater educational achievement of women becoming more acceptable and encouraged in Guangdong today, along with a persistent high rate of women's labor participation and also a better environment for women to start businesses, it is hard to deny that tradition is still greatly influential in Guangdong. Cases in Guangdong not only indicate that biased perceptions of women still exist: women are less capable than men in study and work; women belong to family while men are those to support the family; women are born to be weaker and need special protection; women are suitable for jobs in domestic industry and service, rather than those requiring higher level of education and skills; and worst, women are not permitted to have a share of public property as independent persons. In general, we still see that women in Guangdong are widely regarded as incapable of being to be independent or of making decisions; and these traditional gender perceptions are even believed by the women themselves.

Last but not least, consensus on the objectives of women's development is hardly to be found, and women's development in Guangdong is rather a symbolic political goal than an actual effort allowing women to grow and exert influence. In fact, this problem has long been recognized by some Chinese feminists as a major obstacle to women's development in China;

women's collective self-awareness and women's participation as subjects that can solve their own issues have been advocated (Li, 1994; Yuan, 2005). However, regardless of this long-term advocacy, the necessity of women's self-awareness and self-participation in women's development has not been accepted by the government until recently, as we can see from the Guangdong 2011-2020 Plan for Women's Development, designating "*funv canyu*" [women's participation as the subjects] as one of the basic principles. This is certainly a good sign for women's development in Guangdong. However, effective outcomes are yet to be seen. Limitations in understanding of women's development still widely exist in Guangdong at the present time, which is true in both public and private sectors: a "Girls' Festival" in colleges aimed at promoting respect and attention to women becomes a series of events and activities that highlights women's traditional characteristics and roles; the government's efforts to assist women with employment turn into measures of transferring labor "in response to the market"; women's participation in public affairs and social management is simply filling assigned "quotas"; and the business "run-by-women-and-for-women" is merely a business whose aspirations are no higher than survival and profiting in the market.

In particular, I find the case of Ms. Dong vs. PClady.com.cn the most indicative of the widespread poor understanding of women's development in Guangdong, or even its absence in the market. The PClady.com.cn, established in 2004 as a leading professional portal site for women, focuses on "cultivating fashionable, intelligent, confident, independent, and healthy women in the new era" and "providing users with the latest and most comprehensive information in fashion trend and consumption patterns."<sup>31</sup> Ms. Dong's discharge due to her pregnancy ironically demonstrates that a woman's efforts for development, both for herself and other women, are betrayed, under the pressure from market, by her female colleagues who might also be in a similar difficult position on their ways to career development.

In conclusion, this paper has presented and discussed various changes, both improvements and limitations, of women's development in the case of Guangdong -- the first province to undertake economic reform and opening-up in China. By drawing on information and data mainly from official research and published official statistical yearbooks, from news

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<sup>31</sup> Information is from "Wangzhan jieshao" [Website profile] of PClady.com.cn, accessed November 15, 2012 at [http://corp.pclady.com.cn/lady\\_index.html](http://corp.pclady.com.cn/lady_index.html)

reports and editorials by various media, and a few scholarly studies, this study reveals that women's development in Guangdong is still very limited in the context of the market-oriented economic reform that has been in progress for over thirty years. As noted, we have witnessed overall increase of "numbers" in education, employment and political participation, and also small "breakthroughs" in legislation and women's awareness of their equal rights and interests, but great limitations and challenges -- like the disparity between various women groups, in addition to general gender-based disparity -- continue to exist. These limitations and challenges lie in an imbalanced social development model that prioritizes economic advancement, drawbacks in legislation and its ineffective enforcement, a strong backward-looking influence of tradition, and the absence of good understanding or awareness of women's development in the whole society, in particular in an environment dominated by market and consumer culture. In a nutshell, women's development in Guangdong under the current market system has been slowly moving forward overall; but hindered by both institutional and ideological barriers, different groups of women have widely differing opportunities which determine their different limitations and challenges for development, and a large-scale, major breakthrough is not likely to be realized until a comprehensive and balanced social development takes place, and until women themselves become aware of, and are permitted to actually solve, their own issues.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES**

During my study, I have come to recognize that there are several major limitations in conducting research on this topic, which I would expect future studies to address. First, it is difficult to access more reliable and diverse information and data. Because of the current political and academic situation in China, as might be expected, I can hardly find quality and systematic information and data on my topic. It could be non-existent, or merely not published. Although I have attempted to locate more sources besides the government, quality studies by scholars or by NGOs remain scarce.

Second, it is necessary and urgent to conduct studies using focus groups, so as to understand the conditions of different cohorts of women whose real situation varies greatly by generation, location, economic status, and other factors. However, it must be noted that there is



no well-established and widely-applied study model of social stratification in China at the current time, as reviewed by Li Chunling -- a researcher from China's Social Sciences Academy (Li, 2005, pp.53-126). Regarding the large-scale official research of women's social status conducted every ten years, the methodology of mainly relying on questionnaire and the simple division of samples by gender and type of region (rural and urban) is problematic due to China's current limited level of education and the increasingly diverse population. Thus, I would suggest that participant observation study on focus groups (such as the generations of the 80s and 90s, female migrant workers, urban middle-aged unemployed women, and landless rural women, etc.) should be the best choice; this could not only avoid respondents' misunderstanding of questions and the researchers' misinterpretation of responses, but also be able to collect more detailed and comprehensive information that would help researchers get closer to observing and representing the reality.

Finally, it is worthy of mentioning: more breakthroughs in women's development are to be expected in the coming decade as the Chinese government has reflected on the old model prioritizing economic development, and begun to shift to one that is more comprehensive and sustainable. Although this model-shift began about a decade ago when the government promulgated the development principle of "harmonious society" and "happiness of individuals," which emphasized people-oriented, comprehensive and sustainable social development, it is only in the coming decade, following the commitment to social elevation put forth by the CPC's "*shibada*" [the Eighteenth National Congress], just concluded on November 14, 2012, that we truly expect the opening of a new page in China's history. This recent congress has not only introduced a new party-state leadership, but it also established a blueprint for China's development in the coming decade, which highlights a "five-in-one" development strategy, including economic, political, cultural, and societal construction, as well as the construction of ecological civilization.<sup>32</sup> Although women's development may not be specifically stated as a goal in the report of the "*shibada*," the potential for advancement is worthy of further observation with respect to the enhancement of women's position, under the

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<sup>32</sup> Li, Zhongjie (November 8, 2012), *Shibada dingdiao weilai zhongguo zouxiang -- fazhan zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi fenli ba gaige kaifang tuixiangqian* [The 18<sup>th</sup> national congress setting China's direction – further developing the socialist model with China's characteristics and insisting on economic reform and opening-up], *China Radio international Online*, retrieved November 15, 2012 at <http://gb.cri.cn/27824/2012/11/08/2165s3918235.htm>

government's commitment to promoting comprehensive social betterment.

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