

PROGRESS IN THE RIGHTS AND INTERESTS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN CHINA.

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China one of the largest Asian countries has the largest population than any country in the world. Since the early 20th century China has experienced the most momentous transformation in its history, affecting every aspect of life: economic, social, political, intellectual, ethical and cultural. Early changes were at first sporadic, the automatic result of infiltration of alien ideas and foreign commodities.¹ The advent of modern education in the 1920's also played an important role in disrupting traditional society.

Pre-modern China, in the manner of agrarian societies every where, asserted the superiority of men over women, supporting that perception with its ethical justifications, legal codes and customary practices. Contemporary China under communist leadership advocated equality between the sexes, working towards that goal through exhortations in the mass media, legal reforms and mass media, legal reform and administrative pressures against some of the offending customary practices.²

Historically, there were cases of powerful and learned women and within the family elderly women often achieved an important position, but the association of males with family continuity and economic support, and of females with prescribed patterns of virtuous behaviour, contributed to many forms of differentiation between the sexes. Females suffered infanticide and crippling effects of bound feet and inferior nurturance in early childhood that produced a biased sex ratio, confinement to the home to prevent mixing with unrelated men, opposition to the remarriage of widows among elite and aspiring families.

During the course of the struggle for women's rights over the first half of the 20th century and in the three decades of partial implementation of the Marriage Law of 1950, attention has been repeatedly drawn to the unequal state of women. Over

these years the gap between urban and rural areas has widened; women have made greater gains in the cities, where there is less interference from relatives and neighbours, and where more developed individual employment and schooling have transformed the conditions of life.³

The political, social and cultural revolutions since 1949 have produced tremendous changes. The role of the family, of women and of education have all been changed. The vast social changes sweeping China during its modernization affected women's lives with regard to their education, their work and in general way. China has made active endeavors in promoting equality between men and women and safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of women. Women enjoy equal rights with men in state political life in accordance with the Law.⁴

The economic, social and cultural rights of women have also been guaranteed. Presently female employees made up about 46% of the total employed people in China, higher than the world average rate of 34.5 percent. The number of women workers in cities and towns increased from 54.65 million in 1994 to 57.55 million in 1995, accounting for 38.6 percent of the total workforce in the country's cities and towns. China implements the principle of men and women enjoying equal pay for equal work. Working women receive special protection during pregnancy and are entitled for three months maternity leave with pay after their delivery.⁵

Women's rights to receive education have further been protected. In the four decades and more since the founding of New China, the government has helped 110 million illiterate women how to read and write, cutting down the ratio of illiterate women from 90 percent to 32 percent in 1995. In 1996, the ratio of school attendance for girls across China soared to 98.63 percent from 80 percent in 1990. The gap in the ratio of school attendance between girls and boys decreased from 2.9 percent in 1991 to 0.35 percent in 1996. The ratio of female students in middle schools and colleges and universities increased from 42.2 percent and 33.7 percent respectively in 1990 to 45.5 percent and 36.4 percent in 1996. By 1995, China had built,

1,679 women's secondary vocational schools and three women's vocational colleges, which offer 60 specialties suitable for women. More than 30 million women had been enrolled by adult schools throughout the country.⁶

Women's health conditions have improved considerably. Health care networks for women and children have been built both in urban and rural areas. By 1995, China had built 349 hospitals and 2,832 clinics for women's and children's health care, 49 obstetrics and gynecology hospitals and 35 children's hospitals. The mortality rate of pregnant women and women in labor was reduced from 67.3 per 100,000 in 1993 to 61.9 per 100,000 in 1995. The average life expectancy of women climbed from 36 years in 1949 to 72 years in 1995, three years longer than average life expectancy for men in China, and seven year longer than the average life expectancy of 65 years for women set by the United Nations for the year 2000⁷.

China attaches importance to protecting the interests and rights of children. It has built a relatively complete legal system for protecting children's rights and interests with the Law on protection of Minors as the mainstay. To effectively guarantee the healthy growth of children, the legislative, judicial and relevant government departments and social organization in China have built institutions which take charge of coordinating and promoting government departments concerned to do a good job, in safeguarding the interests and rights of women and children. The state Council has set up the Women and Children Work Committee. Thirty provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have also set up committees to work for women and children. The majority of prefectures, cities, and districts have also established women and children work committees.

The conditions for Chinese children's development have been remarkably improved and the mid term goal for children's development in the 1990s set by the state have been attained. Since 1991, China had been conducting a large-scale baby-friendly hospitals. The mortality ratio of infants and children under five have declined year by year, dropping to 36.4 per thousand and 44.5 per thousand, respectively, in 1995. During the 1991-

95 period, the mortality rates of infants and children under five dropped annually by 7.7 percent and 7.6 percent, respectively, on average. The Chinese government attaches great importance to the convalescence of disabled children. By 1995, over 2000 convalescence centres for disabled children had been set up in large and medium sized cities through out the country. By the end of 1995, more than 60,000 deaf children had received training in hearing and speech courses, and 1,00,000 mentally handicapped children had improved their abilities to care for themselves and to learn through training. Over 30,000 children with poor sight had received eyesight-aiding devices to improve their vision. Children who suffered from sequelae of infantile paralysis and congenital cataracts had received medical treatment with more than 200,000 disabled children restored to health in the 1991-95 period.

China's social welfare institutions mainly take in orphans who have lost their parents and have no legal guardians. To provide guarantee for the orphans in living, medical care and convalescence, local governments funded welfare institutions with a total of 515 million yuan between 1990 and 1994. During the same period the central govt. allocated 740 million yuan of special funds for improving the living conditions of children in welfare institutions. In recent years, many children's welfare institutions have raised funds to have restorative operations for disabled children in welfare institutions. In 1995, the country launched a nationwide project for the convalescence of disabled children, urgently hospitals above grade three to operate on disabled children living in welfare institutions. As a result, over 200 disabled in welfare institutions were restored to health.

The Chinese government devotes energetic efforts to developing health care undertakings for women and children and raising the health care and educational level of nurseries and kindergartens.

CONCLUSION:

China, though being the largest populous Asian Country and experiencing the most momentous transformation in all

aspects of life has made active endeavors in raising the status of women and safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of women and children. Women enjoy equal rights with men in state political life in accordance with the law. The economics, social and cultural rights of women have also been guaranteed. China implements the principle of men and women enjoying equal pay for equal work. Women's rights to receive education have further been protected. Women's health conditions have improved considerably. Health care networks for women and children have been built in both urban and rural areas. Thus, the status of Chinese women compares favorably with that of women in other Asian Countries and their rights are being properly safeguarded. In China importance is also give in protecting the interests and rights of children. A complete legal system has been adopted for protection of children's rights and interests. The legislative, judicial and relevant government departments and social organization in China have built institution to deal with promoting and safeguarding the rights of women and children. China's social welfare institutions are mainly involved in working for the betterment of the orphans i.e. to provide guarantee for the orphans in living, medical care and convalescence.

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