

GENDER EQUALITY FOR SOCIOECONOMIC PROGRESS IN CHINA

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The modern globalized economy is characterized by a fierce competition among countries for the natural resources, technologies and skilled labor force. Each state struggles to maintain and improve its competitive position by unlocking the potential of its human capital. Thus, intellectual and creative abilities of the labor force became a major driver of socioeconomic progress. At the same time, the United Nations (U.N.) acknowledges the fact that female talent and skills are often being underused due to prejudice and stereotypes. Women do not have the full and unrestrained access to training, medicine, politics and labor market; such situation undermines their aspirations, and slows economic progress in a country.

Gender equality is the key issue worldwide, that's why the U.N. defined it as one of Millennium development goals and, consequently, it is specified as one of 17 sustainable development goals to transform the world till 2030 year. It is seen as a fundamental human right and foundation for peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world [4]. Moreover, the U.N. "HeForShe" pilot initiative demonstrates that men are also broadly engaged in the campaign to eliminate gender inequality and foster female economic and political empowerment. The powerful message, that poverty is sexism and extreme poverty cannot be fought without gender equality, was signed by many global business, art and political leaders, including Mark Zuckerberg, Bono, Melinda Gates, Condoleezza Rice, Elton John and Sheryl Sandberg [3]. Furthermore, male leaders of such influential countries as Canada and the United States of America (U.S.) called themselves feminists, helping to decrease the negative connotations associated with this term [1 2].

The importance of female empowerment is also acknowledged by Xi Jinping, the Chinese leader, who has reaffirmed the commitment of the People's Republic of China to gender equality. China searches for ways to maintain the economic progress momentum. However, the possibility of extensive growth via industrialization is approaching its natural ceiling, and the need to apply an innovative strategy and building a knowledge-based economy is pressing. That's why the creative human potential is becoming the key factor for sustaining the Chinese economic success, where the inclusion of all society members disregarding their gender should be highlighted as a vital element for socioeconomic policy.

Gender bias has been deeply embedded in the cultural pattern of China, and its extreme cases have resulted in negative consequences. For example, gender-based abortions have caused disproportions in the Chinese population, namely the prevalence of males over females. Nowadays millions of young Chinese males vainly struggle to attract a woman to create a family, which causes depression and decreasing labor productivity associated with fruitless efforts for

personal happiness. The modern stage of development requires women to have equal social, economic and political rights to unlock their full potential and use their talent for the welfare of the whole nation. It is obvious that the removal of structural obstacles should be followed by transformation of cultural values that impede female empowerment.

Our research sheds light on shifts in cultural values regarding female empowerment according to the World Values Survey [5]. We refer to people, who agree with gender equality values, as supporters for female empowerment, and calculate the change in attitude using the following formula:

$$\% \text{ Change in \% of support for female empowerment} = \frac{(S_{\text{new}} - S_{\text{old}}) * 100}{S_{\text{old}}}, \quad (1)$$

where S stands for percentage of supporters for female empowerment in China based on their answers to the stated below questions.

The results of calculations are based on formula 1 data relating to the changes in percentage of supporters for female empowerment in China, who disagree that men should have more right to a job than women, if jobs are scarce. The support for empowerment of women improved by 23.33 percent during 2007–2012. The percentage of people, backing up the equality of women and men as political leaders, decreased by 2.56 percent in China in 2005–2012. It is striking, but the share of supporters, who disagree that university is more important for a boy than for a girl, in China dropped by 12.5 percent (from 64 to 56 percent) in 2007–2012. The results shown in Table 4 highlight a declining trend of percentage of supporters for empowerment of women, who disagree that men make better business executives than women do, which fell by 8.16 percent.

According to our calculations, a shift in cultural values towards female empowerment in China is negative in the areas of higher education, business and political leadership. This trend is hazardous for the Chinese future as a prosperous country. Considering the economic and political importance of China, such a trend poses a threat to the global welfare.

The People's Republic of China has been demonstrating an impressive economic growth during the last decades. The current slowdown on its pace to becoming one of the most developed countries of the world is a sign that the extensive growth via industrialization has reached its limits. The new development strategy, based on knowledge and innovation, should be introduced. Thus, human capital, especially the creative potential of women, could become a driving force for enhancing Chinese economic competitiveness.

Considering the negative shifts in Chinese cultural values towards gender equality calculated in our research, it is important to cultivate female leadership in politics and business, as well as promoting the importance of higher education among women. In such circumstances, until the culture bias is surmounted, we suggest that China follows the European approach and introduces female quotas in politics, as well as female quotas for top positions in business. Taking into account the important role of communist party in the Chinese society and the prevalence of

public enterprises, these measures could be very efficient and contribute greatly to the economic strength of the nation.

References

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