

# *An Analysis of Employment Inequalities on the Eastern Coast of China*

TSZ HIN LIN<sup>1,a,\*†</sup>, Yunhan Wang<sup>2,†</sup>, Lixiang Zhu<sup>3,†</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Tsinglan School, Tainan Rd.No.8, Songshan Lake, Dongguan, Guangdong, China.*

<sup>2</sup>*Shanghai Southwest Weiyu Middle School, Yishan Rd.No.671, Xuhui District, Shanghai.*

<sup>3</sup>*High School Affiliated to Shanghai JiaoTong University, 42 Yingao Road, Baoshan District, Shanghai.*

*a. 20230127@tsinglan.cn*

*\*corresponding author*

*†These authors contributed equally to this work*

**Abstract:** In this paper, we analyze the disadvantage and discrimination of women in the eastern coastal areas of China. We hope that through our analysis and suggestions, we can spread the word about gender equality in the workplace and increase people's knowledge of it. Through already-existing legislation and the theories of the majority of researchers today, we have defined the definition of gender discrimination in the workplace. Method of literature review is applied in this paper to enumerate and to analyze the disadvantages of women in the workplace from three aspects: Recruitment level, Promotion Level and Salary level. Then we find out several factors that affect gender discrimination in the workplace, like economic benefits, business operations' heavy pressure caused by Women's pregnancy and childbirth and the stereotypical constraints of traditional gender concepts. Finally, we suppose that issues regarding pregnancy are the single largest factor contributing to existing gender discrimination and come up with two approaches to relieve the problem. Firstly, it is crucial to rely on the law to clearly define the type and duration of maternity leave and that this leave will be shared by both spouses. Secondly, ensuring the right of men to take maternity leave will make a positive impact.

**Keywords:** Inequality, Workplace for women, Workplaces discrimination, Gender identities.

## **1. Introduction**

As China's economy continues to grow, more and more women are entering the workforce there, particularly in the eastern coastal regions. As a result, the unfair position of women in social recruitment and the discrimination against female employees by enterprises have become a heated topic in today's society. There exists many gender stereotypes and social bias in the workplace in China [1]. Firstly, for example, women are always labelled as "IT illiterate", when it comes to female programmers, stereotypes lead us to believe that she cannot write as good code as male programmers. There are always some typical "male occupations" and "female occupations" in our mind, like male programmers and female nurses. Women are often engaged in logistics, human resources, secretary and other positions which are not the core of a company's business. Demonstrating that female

workers are disproportionately concentrated in professions with low skill requirements, low salaries, and low social standing is not difficult. Male workers take absolute dominant advantages of high technology jobs. Secondly, many female employees are forced to change positions and reduce their salaries during pregnancy, maternity leave and lactation because companies would like to minimize the cost of maternity leave even though this is a serious violation of women's rights in the workplace. And women who return to work after maternity leave also find it difficult to resume their previous upward career path. Thirdly, there are always have "glass ceiling" for women to promote [2]. "Glass ceiling" was first proposed by Hymowitz and Sehellardt in 1986, which is a hidden phenomenon of sexism in the workplace. Bias caused by ideology and organizations that limit the promote of capable women to top positions in a company. Also, since the las stipulates that companies must not discriminate women in employment on the grounds of gender, many employers do not put forward direct discriminatory requirements in the social recruitment process, but show them through implicit discrimination. For example, they show more interest towards male employees; ask more difficult and professional questions towards female employees than male employees; have "gender matching" in the recruitment, women must recommend other suitable men in order to be hired and so on. These are all the adverse position of women in social recruitment and workplace's discrimination against female employees[3]. The European Union, the United States, and other industrialized nations have extensive experience combating discrimination against women in the workplace. Through special institutions and the development of new legal theories, the phenomenon of gender discrimination in the workplace has been largely alleviated. But in our country, the supervision department aims at gender discrimination in employment still remains to be systematically established. Of course, we cannot directly copy other countries' policy because different countries have different national conditions. But we can through analysis to come up with a best way to help our country reduce gender discrimination in the workplace. Eastern coastal cities in China have similarities with some western developed countries, so we can also analyze and improve their policy to apply the policy to the present situation in our country.

Firstly, the author intend to analyze existing secondary data. Secondly, we define and explain the workplace inequality on China's eastern coast, find out the causes of gender discrimination in employment. Finally, we propose some suggestions and solutions to help deal with the sexism in the workplace. This paper aims at putting forward relevant suggestions to ease the problem of gender discrimination in the workplace in east coastal areas of China by analyzing laws, phenomena and secondary data. This paper mainly divided into three parts. Firstly, we list relevant laws in China

## 2. Literature Review

Gender inequality in the workplace has been a persistent problem for decades. In terms of work, men and women can never be looked at the same way by others. As we all know, women are more caregivers, while men are given more difficult tasks. Gender stereotypes have always played an important role in assigning women to jobs with lower wages and status than men. In China, and indeed the world, the issue of women's work inequality has risen to a certain level. sometime, employees are subjected to gender discrimination as well as other factors like race or ethnicity. Many employers are reluctant to accept women who are thinking of having children and so on. However, there is also a lot of policies in place to protect these women, like the fact that employers are supposed to pay insurance premiums according to the individual local regulations, which workers cannot pay. At the same time, women employees have more rights. (The civil rights act of 1964, Title VII) Employers are accountable to this law, and it is against the law for them to treat you unfairly because of your gender, race, religion, or nationality. As of June 2020, a Supreme Court decision extends this protection to gender identity and sexual orientation as well [4]. Also, in China, equal occupational and social security rights for men and women are maintained by the state. Employers are prohibited

from letting women go for of pregnancy or marriage. Articles 27 and 22 of the People's Republic of China's Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests, Standing Committee of the National People's Congress [5]. In addition, according to the People's Republic of China's Constitution, women have the same rights as males in all spheres of political, economic, cultural, social, and family life. This proves that women actually have some legal protection in their work in China [6]. It is clear from the above that there are many laws in place in both the US and China that address the issue of inequality in the workplace for women. This essay will focus on the practicality of these laws, what factors contribute to these problems, and will also analyze some secondary data on gender inequality in the workplace.

### **3. Problems of Employment Inequality in Eastern Coast of China**

The characteristics of female workplace discrimination are: (1) It is the opposite of the principle of equal employment and fair treatment;(2) It should have exceptions. The Convention on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation provides for exceptions. For example, all distinctions, exclusions, or preferences based on the intrinsic needs of a particular occupation shall not be considered discriminatory, and all measures taken against persons who are believed to be involved in activities that endanger national security shall not be considered discriminatory [7].

Most studies in China consider that all acts that treat workers differently or exclude them because of their gender characteristics, not inherent characteristics of their occupation, are considered workplace gender discrimination. Some scholars point out that gender discrimination in the workplace refers to the unequal treatment in employment opportunities, salary and job promotion due to gender characteristics alone in the case of similar or equal labor productivity [8].

In summary, this paper defines female workplace gender discrimination as: under the same conditions, employers or labor unions, trade federations, and other organizations have the right to discriminate against women because they have a negative attitude toward them. In this paper, gender discrimination in the workplace is defined as the unreasonable difference in the recruitment, employment and termination of employment between women and men due to the gender bias of employers or organizations such as trade unions or industrial federations.

#### **3.1. Factors and Expressions**

The direct causes of discrimination against women by employers are discrimination based on the birth of a woman and differential treatment based on purely gender factors. The main discriminatory practices of employers include "non-employment," "transfer," "labor dispatch," "forced separation," "differential treatment," and "discrimination against women. The seven categories of discrimination are: "not hiring", "transferring", "labor dispatching", "forced separation", "differential treatment", "illegal termination of contract", and "sexual harassment"[9]. It is important to note that in the same case, there may be multiple means of discrimination by the employer. In the case of maternity discrimination, the employer most often discriminates against pregnant women by "unlawful termination of contract". In the case of discrimination based on gender alone, the employer most often discriminates against women by "differential treatment". Among all types of discrimination cases, the success rate of "childbirth discrimination" cases far exceeds the rate of "dismissal of lawsuits", which shows that "childbirth discrimination" is the more obvious type of gender discrimination in the workplace. It is clear that "maternity discrimination" is one of the more obvious types of discrimination in the workplace, and it also has a more serious impact on the rights of the discriminated person. In terms of differential treatment, in terms of female job applications and promotions, according to the 2017 China Women's Workplace Status Survey Report, more than 80% of women believe that there is gender discrimination in job applications and promotions.

## 3.2. Differences in the Current Situation

### 3.2.1. Recruitment Level

For women in the hiring process, the issue of gender discrimination is particularly important. Many businesses are reluctant to hire women who are of the correct age and have not yet given birth because of the special attention provided to female workers during the "three periods" in order to preserve the rights and interests of women. "Are you considering starting a family?" In interview conversations, questions like "Are you married?" and "Do you have children in the future?" are frequently posed to female job applicants. Particularly in the first-tier cities like North, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, the majority of female job seekers choose to hold back in order to get a job opportunity in the fierce competition. Female applicants are not only required to reply to these personal questions, but also must deal with the pressure of losing job opportunities due to forthright answers.

Moreover, there are countless examples of female job applicants being turned down for positions because their total performance is superior to that of male applicants. In the "Research Report on Gender Discrimination in China's Workplace," 19.2% of female potential employees with graduate degrees and higher are rejected, and 16% of women are denied employment when their performance is superior to that of male job applicants. Despite the fact that these roles are not specifically tied to gender convenience, there is a "unspoken norm" in several sectors that only men are hired or given preference over men.

### 3.2.2. Promotion Level

Women are affected by the "ceiling" effect in the process of promotion, and they are often unable to obtain status or remuneration based on gender rather than working conditions. Because women have no stereotypes about management characteristics such as "competitiveness and influence", and they have equal opportunities for promotion, senior managers prefer men to hold management positions, and women prefer to hold other support positions. This implicit choice bias makes women's career path more difficult. New research shows that the difference between men and women in management increases with the improvement of their status, and the proportion of women in management positions drops sharply. As far as the possibility of promotion is concerned, men are more likely to be promoted to different levels than women. At higher levels, men are nearly 13% more likely to be promoted next year than women.

In addition, the topic of delivery has turned into a "bumper" in the way of women becoming promoted. Women give birth at their highest rates between the ages of 23 and 40, which is also a crucial time for women's professional growth as it prepares them to enter the rising era. Since the "second child" policy was introduced in 2016, women have been increasingly concerned about how their careers would evolve in the future owing to pregnancy concerns.

### 3.2.3. Salary Level

Our belief is that the average monthly wages for Chinese men and women in 2019 are RMB 9,476 and RMB 7,245 correspondingly, a difference of RMB 2,231 over the previous year. The salary gap is mostly caused by two things: First, due to the phenomena of occupational gender segregation, more men work in high-paying sectors and businesses like banking, logistics, and the internet, and the majority of males select high-paying jobs like sales and technology, while fewer women do. Our belief is that the average monthly wages for Chinese men and women in 2019 are RMB 9,476 and RMB 7,245 correspondingly, a difference of RMB 2,231 over the previous year. The salary gap is mostly caused by two things: First, due to the phenomena of occupational gender segregation, more

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### **3.3. Causes of Workplace Inequality**

#### **3.3.1. Companies Seek to Maximize Economic Benefits**

Low cost and high efficiency are the basic goals of enterprises. Therefore, in order to control costs, enterprises will strive to reduce labor costs and maximize economic benefits. Objectively speaking, male labor force is stronger than female labor force, and the position of needing health is more popular than male labor force. Therefore, enterprises can pay the same wage cost in exchange for more efficient labor force. In China's current pension system, the retirement age of women is five years earlier than that of men. This difference actually affects the value of female labor force. In addition, in order to protect the rights and interests of pregnant and childbirth women, China's Labor Protection Regulations clearly stipulates that female workers are entitled to more than 98 days of maternity leave, depending on the situation. Unfortunately, they are entitled to 15 or 42 days of maternity leave. During this period, the company will not only pay direct costs such as wages and job vacancies, but also bear indirect losses such as loss of work skills and insufficient knowledge after returning to the post. Companies are reluctant to hire women to achieve more efficient goals.

#### **3.3.2. Women's Pregnancy**

Due to the fact that women are in charge of childbirth, their periods of pregnancy and nursing may have some impact on how productive they are at work. Additionally, balancing work and home obligations may put psychological strain on female employees. The impact may not be significant for large businesses with many employees and a developed human resource system, but for small and medium-sized businesses with few employees, the concurrent pregnancies of several female employees will put a lot of pressure on the company. This is especially true when the pregnancies and deliveries of several female senior leaders are concentrated together, which will increase the company's operational challenges.

With the openness of national policies in recent years, many women have decided to have a "second" child. However, most women have their second child while they are already in the peak of their job growth, which is when they are most likely to receive a promotion.

#### **3.3.3. The Stereotypical of Traditional Gender Concepts**

According to research, established gender stereotypes are one of the causes of women's employment discrimination. The idea that males are more suited for social work because of their physical prowess, inventiveness, and adventurousness, while women are better suited for home labor because of their sensuality and attention to detail. Many people still support and embrace the traditional belief that "the lady is the head of the family and the man is the head of the home." This concept has resulted in workplace discrimination based on gender, which to some extent reduces women's possibilities to work in social work. In addition, society has distinct expectations for men and women in terms of their careers. Women are seen as being more conservative and cautious, with a greater sense of home values, and more likely to give up their employment for family reasons, while males are seen as having a higher drive for work success, as well as more excitement, energy, and willpower. But as society has evolved and views have changed, more and more couples are having joint children, women are devoting the same amount of time and effort to their homes as men, and women are taking on greater responsibility in the workforce[10].



### 3.4. Suggestions of Improving Gender Inequality in Workplace

Given that issues regarding pregnancy are the single largest factor contributing to existing gender discrimination, the following are some ideas that may be useful in the area of rights protection. The suggestions are based on equal rights between men and women for their maternity leave.

Firstly, it is crucial to rely on the law to clearly define the type and duration of maternity leave and that this leave will be shared by both spouses. Specify the time of leave to be used for the woman's recovery and other leave. Maternity leave is shared by both spouses. For example, the current minimum maternity leave is 98 days, minus the time used by the woman to recover, with both spouses taking turns, each taking a mandatory full 30 days, and the other 38 days, which can be shared by both spouses according to the actual situation. During the leave period, enterprises are required to ensure the normal payment of basic salary, that is, both are paid leave.

Secondly, ensuring the right of men to take maternity leave will make a positive impact. On the one hand, to strengthen the promotion of male maternity leave and maternity incentive leave, so that men taking maternity leave and maternity incentive leave become a social consensus; on the other hand, to restrain employers by legal means, so that employers realize that men taking maternity leave and maternity incentive leave are as compulsory as women, and thus achieve the purpose of equal treatment of enterprises in employing workers.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper focus on the issue that the gender discrimination in the workplace in China's east coast. In this paper, we define the gender discrimination in the workplace as the act of an employer or an organization such as a labor union or a trade federation that treats women differently and unfairly in the recruitment, hiring, and termination processes because of their gender bias. We analyze the disadvantage of women in the workplace from three main aspects: levels of pay, promotions, and recruitment. There is always a "glass ceiling" for women, which prevents them from obtaining higher positions and pay based solely on their gender and not on working conditions. Additionally, according to research, there is a significant wage gap between men and women, with the average monthly income of men being significantly higher than that of women. Through these situations, we find out several factors that affect gender discrimination in the workplace. Firstly, companies always seek to maximize economic benefits. But because of some inevitable reasons like physical ability, the retirement age, pregnancy and so on, these reasons put women in adverse position in employment because for these reasons alone, women bring far fewer benefits to companies than men. Secondly, Women's pregnancy and childbirth puts pressure on business operations.

Finally, there are still the conventional limitations of traditional gender notions, such as the widespread acceptance and propagation of the traditional belief that "the lady is the head of the family" and "the male is the head of the home." We suppose that issues regarding pregnancy are the single largest factor contributing to existing gender discrimination. Therefore, we come up with two approaches to relieve the problem: 1. Rely on the law to clearly define the type and duration of maternity leave and that this leave will be shared by both spouses; 2. Ensure the right of men to take maternity leave. However, due to the limitation of time and conditions, we cannot verify the effectiveness of these two schemes in practice.

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