

# ***Gender Equity in the Distribution of Educational Resources in Higher Education in China***

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**Abstract:** Since the expansion of college enrollment in 1999, the proportion of women in higher education has been increasing, and the gender structure of college students has become more balanced. However, even with the same higher education, male and female students will be treated differently due to gender differences. This article through gender differences in access to higher education, the gender stereotypes in higher education and the gender difference in graduate employment choices in China to figure out to what extent gender equity is in the distribution of educational resources in higher education in China. Female students face more obstacles and challenges than male students when pursuing higher education or looking for a job as a result of the traditional idea and stereotypes of females in society. In addition, the expectations and influences of families on their children, and physiological factors brought on by their gender also cause the situation. The allocation of resources for higher education is still disproportionately devoted to men.

**Keywords:** Gender equity, higher education, gender stereotype

## **1. Introduction**

Education enhanced China's general population's cultural quality during the process of economic and social growth and supported the demand for a variety of high-caliber skills in these areas. The percentage of women in higher education has been rising since the expansion of college enrolment in 1999, and the gender makeup of college students has improved. The gender gap, however, continues to have distinct consequences on different persons even with the same level of higher education. In order to advance and achieve gender equality in higher education, it is crucial to investigate the distribution of educational resources resulting from gender inequalities in higher education. This article aims to review gender differences in access to higher education, the gender stereotypes in higher education and the gender difference in graduate employment choices in China.

## **2. Gender Differences in Access to Higher Education**

### **2.1. Gender Ratio Differences in Different Major**

In China, there has always been a clear difference in the number of males and females who have the opportunity of receiving higher education. Since 1999, because of the influence of the policy, the government encourages conditional provincial-level governments to experiment with various forms

of "Gao Kao" reform, and expand the autonomy of schools in recruiting students and the choice of candidates in order to gradually establish a more scientific and fair higher education selecting system with a variety of choices, the universities in China have started to expand their enrollment on a large scale. This gives women, who have long been disadvantaged groups in Chinese society, more opportunities to receive higher education. According to the data shown by China Statistical Yearbook, the proportion of female students who have the ability to get higher education had reached 51.75%, which is specifically 532,000 female students more than male college students in 2013 [1]. Since more females can get higher education, the differences in the quality and structure of higher education between women and men become quite obvious, especially, since the gender ratio difference between men and women in the choice of major is relatively more obvious. A survey shows that the top ten majors of male students in Chinese universities in 2013 are all science and technology, and the proportion of male students is more than 80%, while female students are mainly concentrated in law, literature, economics, management, and other majors, and the proportion of female students in nursing is as high as 92% [2]. Another study found that male students are concentrated in science and engineering disciplines such as life sciences and technology, mathematics and science, information, and chemistry, while female students are concentrated in humanities disciplines such as literature and journalism, economics, international relations, foreign languages, and education [3]. Therefore, traditional perceptions of Chinese society and stereotypes of different majors in Chinese society also influence the gender imbalance that exists in many majors.

## **2.2. Gender Difference in Individual's Expectation on Getting Higher Education**

Different genders have different views on access to higher education. As in the Chinese social structure, men are still dominant, so they usually are able to receive more support and opportunities than women for accessing higher education, especially in some socially dominant majors. Meanwhile, female students pay more attention to their families than male students, while male students pay more attention to the monetary value of future jobs. Hence, male students tend to choose higher education to improve their level of education in order to make themselves more competitive in society. For female students, as they are in China where male occupy a higher social status, almost all the female suffers from social stereotypes about higher education and subjects. For example, a lot of traditional Chinese parents believe that even though both men and women have access to higher education, men have more advantages than women when they graduated and are going to find work. Therefore, higher education has little impact on women's future life. Moreover, they assume that men are suitable for studying science and engineering subjects, while women are more suitable for literature and history subjects. These kinds of stereotypes that led to the fact that the percentage of women in higher education was only 38.3% before the mass enrollment in Chinese universities started in 1999. The gross enrollment ratio of Chinese female in access to higher education is 51% until 2019 [4]. Besides, also because mass enrollment in Chinese universities provided more opportunities for students to access higher education, the number of female students who choose to access higher education increased from that time. As mentioned before, female students pay more attention to their families. They consider the chance of accessing higher education as an opportunity for them to get in touch with more people who also get higher education. They think accessing higher education is a good way to build relationships that will help them improve their family's quality of life in the future.

## **2.3. Parents' Different Educational Expectations of Sons and Daughters**

In the structure of Chinese society, parents always have an overwhelming say in many turning points in their children's lives, which means their decisions have a profound impact on their children. Parents, as the older generation, are more deeply influenced by traditional Chinese concepts, compare to the

young generation. One of the traditional concepts which is "men should focus on work and take the responsibility of earning money for the family, women should focus on family and take the responsibility of caring for her husband and children" leads parents to be more supportive of their son's access in higher education. Because a good education is a big advantage for individuals to find a job in society, and in the parents' eyes, this advantage is only reflected in their son. For women, who ultimately need to take care of and manage the family as their life priority, it seems that it is not that necessary to receive higher education and have a good degree. And also, females value "parental and family influence" more than males, which is one of the influences of the gender differences in access to higher education. However, family income levels influence parents' views on the need for their children to pursue higher education as well. Compared to low-income families, families with middle and higher incomes are more equal in their treatment of the issue that whether should their children to access to higher education or not [5]. Both sons and daughters are supported to access higher education equally by their parents. In addition, in those families, parents usually have higher educational expectations of their sons' or daughters' performance and their achievement in the higher education learning process. Moreover, middle- and upper-class families give their children more freedom of choice when it comes to their major choices, moreover, they encourage their children to delve into the subjects that interest them. Families with low income, more often ask their children, especially their sons to choose more mainstream majors, such as finance, computer science, etc. because they think by taking those majors, the opportunities to get a related job are more than other majors like art. Furthermore, instead of sending their daughters to higher education, families with low income usually choose to let their daughters go straight to work to earn money for the family because they believe that accessing higher education for females is a waste of time.

### **3. Gender Stereotypes in Higher Education**

#### **3.1. Gender Stereotypes about Males and Females being Good at Subjects**

A gender stereotype is a generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by women and men or the roles that are or should be performed by men and women. Gender stereotypes can be both positive and negative for example, "women are nurturing" or "women are weak". Talking the gender stereotypes about males and females being good at subjects in China, can separate into several different majors.

First of all, there are always strong gender stereotypes in the nursing profession. The nursing profession has always been a predominantly female profession, but as society has evolved, men have begun to work in nursing as well. It has become a trend for men to pursue nursing careers, and studies have shown that men have irreplaceable advantages in nursing careers, such as good physical fitness, mental capacity, logical thinking, and emergency response skills [6]. Male nurses have physical and mental advantages when performing emergency treatment and moving patients. However, male students have gender stereotypes about the nursing profession. The main reason for this is that men believe that nursing is something that women should do. Also, inpatients have formed gender stereotypes about the nursing profession, believing that only women are suitable for nursing, just like Nightingale did in the past. It has become a fact that women should be the ones to do the nursing work.

Secondly, gender stereotype like men is better at learning computer science than women is indeed common among Chinese university students. The reason for this is that due to the different divisions of labor in society, women tend to take on more family responsibilities, and many of them avoid professions that are highly competitive or require high professional development. And also, employers try to choose relatively stable positions when they are employed by graduated university students. As a result, fewer women are engaged in computer science in their professional choices [7].

Over time, this has created the illusion that women are not engaged in programming because they are not good at it. This stereotype also has a negative effect on females, who engage in self-limiting behaviors in their professional choices.

### **3.2. Teacher's Different Expectations of Male and Female Students**

According to the Initial Acceptance Test (IAT) experiment, professors have implicit stereotypes about their students in the university teaching process, which means they will think that their majors are more suitable for male students or female students [8]. This belief is inevitably reflected in the professor's attitude toward students of different genders, which will affect the professor's teaching process, and even more seriously, it will also affect the students' motivation and initiative. Moreover, gender stereotypes can have a negative impact on student performance when professors bring gender stereotypes to the class or grade student work. For example, some professors may deliberately hold certain assignments to extremely strict standards in order to prove that their perception of students is not based on gender stereotypes, instead, it's based on their teaching experiences. That's one of the reasons that for some majors like science subjects, the grade of males is always higher than the average grade of girls. Obviously, this discrimination is not fair to students who pay a lot of effort in it.

Secondly, according to the same IAT experiment, both male and female professors that regardless of their disciplinary background, they have gender stereotypes about the suitability of students for a particular major, indicating the prevalence of gender stereotypes about students' choice of major. Besides, the experiment is hard to determine to what extent the differences in attitudes affect students as well as whether it significantly influences their training process.

## **4. Gender Differences in Graduate Employment Choices in Higher Education**

### **4.1. Gender Differences in Employment Opportunities**

Since the expansion of universities in 1999, the proportion of females receiving higher education has been increasing. The proportion of women in higher education has been increasing, and the gender structure of students who access higher education tends to be balanced. However, due to gender discrimination and gender stereotypes in recruitment by employers and lax enforcement by human resources and social security departments, the employment process of female university students has been difficult. Their employment rights have not been respected. With that being said, there is still an unbalance between equal rights and employment opportunities for males and females.

In 2013, the proportion of female students in the university reached 51.4%, and the proportion of female graduate students reached 49.0%. Moreover, the proportion of female university students with good academic performance is 9.7% higher than male university students. In addition, the proportion of excellent comprehensive evaluations is 5.0% higher than that of male students [9]. According to the data shown above, the ratio of female students getting employment opportunities related to their major should be higher than males based on their academic performance in universities. However, since many jobs in their majors especially majors in engineering require "male only" or "male first", this kind of gender discrimination has significantly reduced the chances for female students to submit their resumes.

In addition, even if they submit their resumes to gender-neutral recruiters, female students are far less likely to be employed than male students. Such a situation has led to a significant decrease in the expectation of female college students to find a job that matches their major. A survey of recent college graduates found that the proportion of female college students who said they "must find a suitable job" was only 26.7%, while the proportion of female college students who said they "strive to find a suitable job" was 47.7%.

## 4.2. Gender Differences in Employment Options

In the case of the "male or male preference" of many employers and many employers even do not give women the opportunity of written examination and interview, many female college students feel unfair, lose confidence, and even have depression or suicidal tendencies. The survey "Research on Equal Employment Supervision Mechanism against Gender Discrimination in Recruitment" found that 40.1% of female college students "felt unfair", 24.6 percent had suffered a loss of confidence, and 21.8% of female college students began to hate their gender and wish they were male [10]

Under the influence of gender discrimination in recruitment, female university students have no choice but to lower the standard of job selection to avoid unemployment. And also, in the survey "Research on Equal Employment Supervision Mechanism against Gender Discrimination in Recruitment", it is found that 21.2% of female students said they would "lower their job requirements for employment". Even so, 28.5% of female college students are still unable to find a job on the eve of graduation. This is 2.2 times as many students who have the same problem [10].

According to the survey on the Social Status of Chinese Women, 65.9% of female university students born in the 1980s have been employed and are officially employed by the state. This is 19.6 % lower than males who have the same situation. From the perspective of educational background, in the junior college graduates of female students who were born in 1980, the proportion of formal employment is less than half, nearly 35% lower than males who have the same situation [11]. Therefore, the gender gap is very wide. These data show that even as access to higher education becomes equal, there is still a great deal of inequality in job hunting.

## 4.3. Different Factors Affecting Employment Choice by Gender

Generally speaking, a multi-dimensional complex system, primarily composed of human capital, social capital, and professional values, influences job choice. Human capital encompasses knowledge and skills, psychological and physiological traits, and other elements. Social capital includes family support, financial assistance, and the school's reputation in the community. Occupational values include compensation, opportunities for advancement, and welfare [12].

The number of students enrolled in Chinese colleges and universities is steadily growing, directly bridging the gap between elite and public education. College students can be completely employed at the elite education level, but not in the popular education stage. Accept this shift in the educational paradigm. The majority of female college students have relatively high anticipation of employment, and they exclusively think about their future working situation, according to the findings from the questionnaire study. Only 18.2 percent of female students who planned to work in small towns opted to live in a small town as their preferred place to live. Their preferred work units were national firms, which made up 34.6%, and international enterprises, which made up 20.8% [13]. In contrast, male graduates are less demanding. They are more willing to try something different than to be extremely demanding in their first job.

Second, female students are less inclined to launch their firms than male students are. Only 8.6% of them, according to the poll, decide to launch their firms. 71.6% of female students prioritize money and welfare while seeking work and selecting a career [13]. Because they are concerned about issues like the lack of start-up capital, the lack of suitable start-up projects, the lack of social and practical experience, and the issues from the family and society that might occur if they start their own business, they decide to find a job with a stable income. Male college students, on the other hand, are more enthusiastic about entrepreneurship and have a strong feeling of self-employment. They are willing to challenge themselves and start a business in their graduation season.



## 5. Conclusions

Since the expansion of universities, the proportion of females receiving higher education has been increasing. According to the proportion of females and males that receiving higher education, it seems that the higher education in China achieves gender equity. However, the fact is that due to several perspectives, such as the gender differences in access to higher education and gender stereotypes, the allocation of resources is still disproportionately devoted to males. This gender inequity is formed by the traditional stereotypes from society, family's expectations and individual expectations as well. Overall, there is still a long journey for Chinese government to achieve gender equity in the distribution of educational resources in higher education. Not only the allocation of educational resources in the university should be equal, but also after graduated from university, more policies should be published to defending women's rights in the workplace.

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