

## Modernization and Women in China: Inclusion and Exclusion Perspective

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### **1. Background: Personal anxiety during social transformation period**

Chinese society is in the transition from totalitarian society to individualized society, during which, the trend of "individualization" is being strengthened and the traditional "totalitarian society" is being broken through and surpassed. In the traditional "totalitarian society", individual's interests are safeguarded by the social security system, mainly the social welfare policies. While in the "individualized society", the individuals are becoming lonely and atomizing, and the personal identity is shaped by the rights that ensuring individual value and personal dignity instead of being defined within "collectivity". Because of its emphasis on personal talents and achievements, the "individualized society" is speeding up the stratification of society and legitimize the social inequalities. At the same time, in the "individualized society", individuals are likely getting less involved in the collective activities because of the fast-paced life-style, furthermore, the faster social mobility weakens the kinship ties, and the spatial subdivision of workplace and living place constrains the deep social relationships. Thus, the traditional bonds of kinships and neighborhoods are becoming loose, individuals are stepping out of the traditional "acquaintance society" and entering a "strangers society" instead, which results in more individual freedom and personal space.

Yet along with the freedom and space some risks have been emerging. Firstly, the transition from the "acquaintance society" to the "strangers society" arouses a widespread social anxiety and leads to alienation among individuals and increases interpersonal conflicts as well, which brings about the social otherness, diversity and uncertainty, which reinforces the individuals' anxieties and social contradictions. Secondly, during the transition of society, the traditional "totalitarian" social order is being destroyed, and an "individualized" social order is under construction, in between which, Chinese women feel besieged. On the one hand, Chinese women have to deal with the "individual anxiety" by realizing "personal identity" through personal competence and achievements. On the other hand, the deep-rooted cultural traditions that value men over women are still in force, which forces women to struggle to balance the "two identities"--individual identity and the identity endued by the traditional gender culture, which in turn brings more anxiety and confusion to woman. Unfortunately, during the period of China's social transition, the society is more aware about the situation of the vulnerable groups in common sense, neglecting the fact that female group is the largest disadvantaged group.

### **2. Modern Chinese woman developing status**

#### **2.1. Gender ratio change of population**

A big population growth came after new China was founded, which kept the population growth rate at about 20‰ annually. At the end of 1950s the population growth decreased sharply due to the seriously natural disasters and some misguided policies which led to a nationally great famine, which led to a less than 5‰ growth rate of population. After the famine, the population growth rebounded explosively to a rate of 33.5‰ in 1963 and the following years saw a gradual decrease in the population growth rate. During the latter part of 1970s and the early 1980s, there was a baby boom

which increased the population growth rate. Since the middle of 1980s, the nationally birth control policy began to take effect and the population growth kept decreasing. In 2009, China's population growth rate decreased to below 5% for the first time and since then it has been maintaining at a rate about 4.5%. (Fig. 1)



Fig. 2 shows the gender share since 1949. Chinese female population share has been improving since 1949. There are some fluctuations on the female population growth trajectory, the birth control policy practiced since 1970s contributed a lot to that. The trend growth rate of female population has kept rising stably since 21st century, mainly due to the changing views of genders, the rectifying of the birth policy and more importantly, due to the continuous improvement of people's life and social situation. There are some other factors that contribute to the growth of female share of the population, one of which is the different life expectancies between males and females. According to the data of *Census of China, 2010*, Chinese males' life expectancy is 72.38 years averagely, while Chinese females' life expectancy is 77.37 years averagely, which is 5 years higher than that of Chinese males.

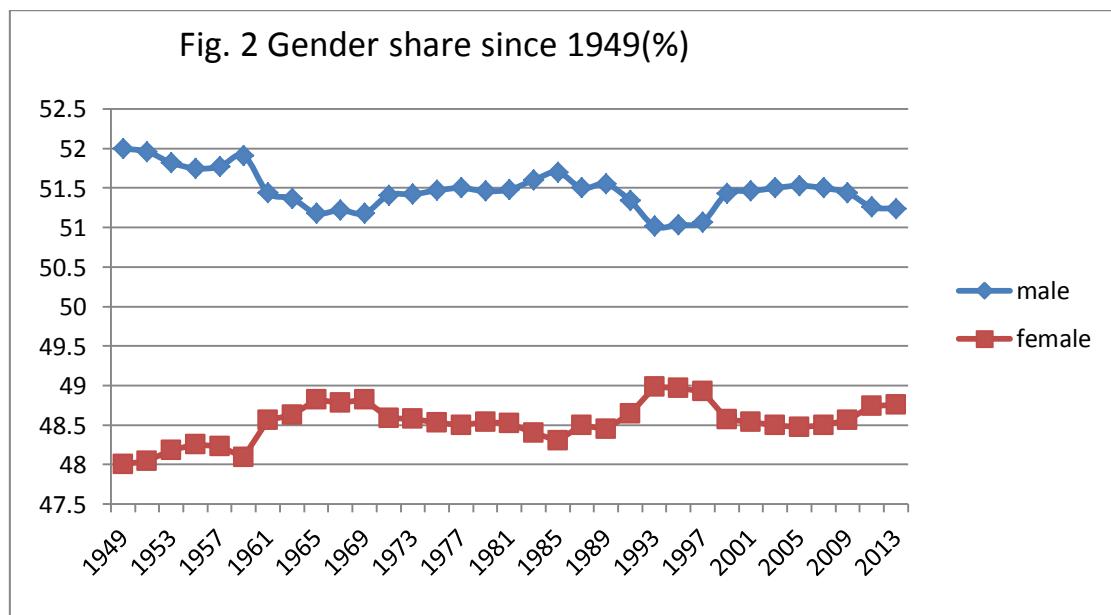
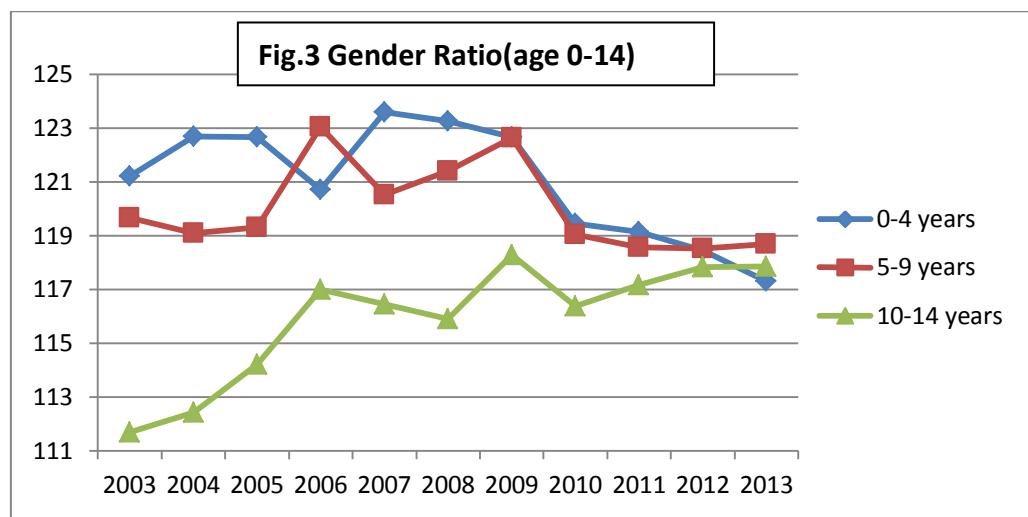
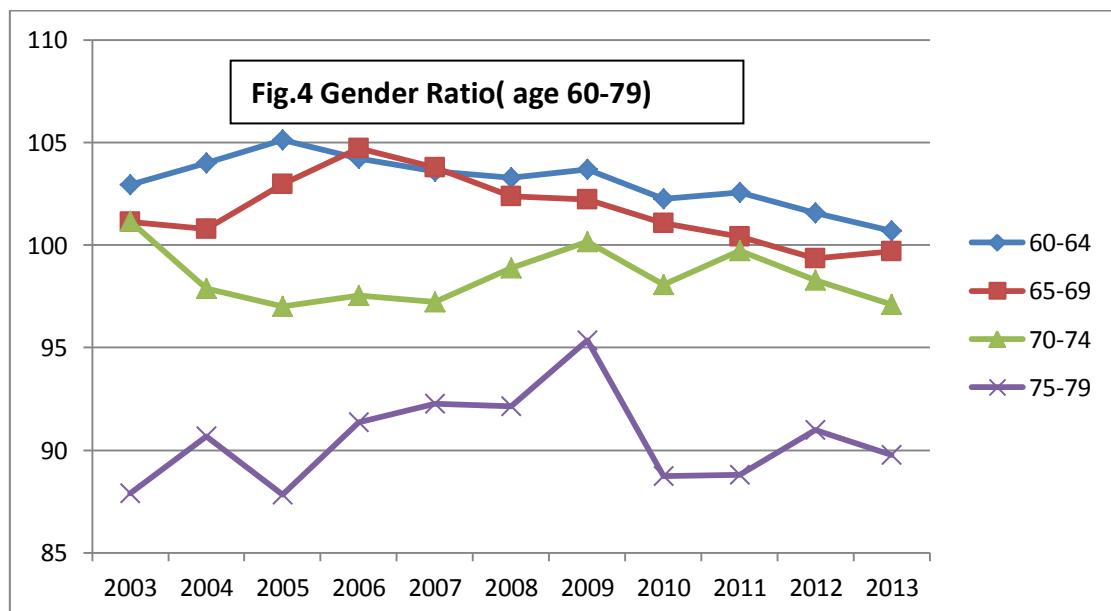


Fig. 3 shows the gender ratio of the age group of 0-14 years. According to the sample data of *Census*

of China, 2010, it shows a decreasing trend of the gender ratio of the age group of 0-9 years on the whole, in which, 0-4 years group shows a more sharp decrease, indicating that in the newly born population the gender ratio gap is becoming smaller. The fact is that Chinese parents, even parents from remote rural areas, are not so crazy about having a male heir, which is partly because of the pragmatic considerations that in practical life daughters take up more responsibilities to look after their elderly parents than sons, partly because of the economic development and the modernization, which make families earn their living more easily without sons' help, and partly because of the changing social environment that offers more opportunities and freedom to girls.

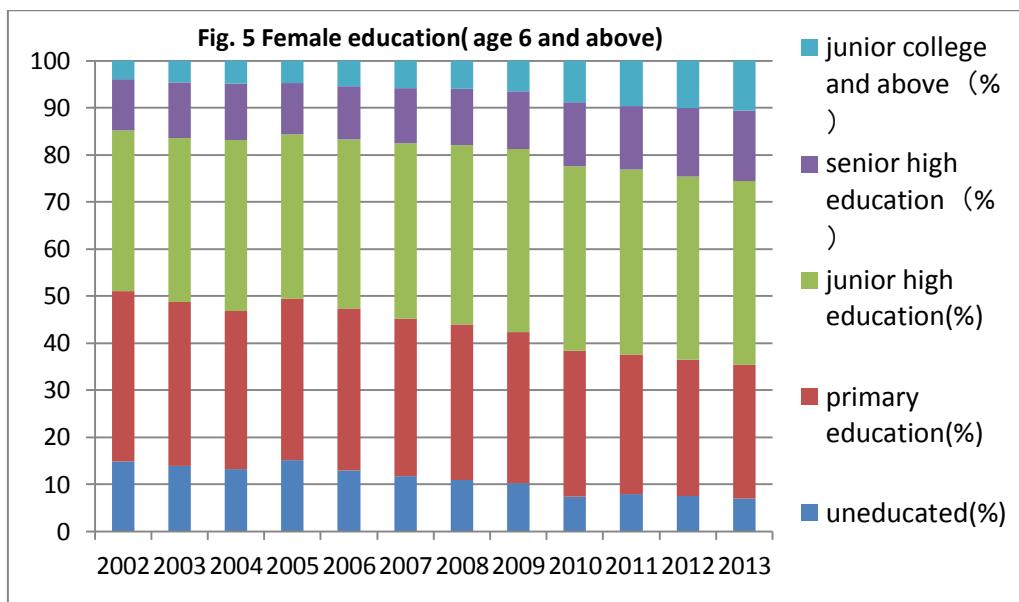


The gender ratio of elderly population in China is a different story. Fig. 4 shows declining trend lines of different age groups of 60 and above, which indicates that the gender ratio decreases with aging. When it comes to age group of 65 and above, the gender ratio goes into reverse, which means that with every 100 women there are less than 100 men, and the trend lines are keeping declining. The different life expectancies of men and women are surely the main factors. One fact is that as a whole, Chinese elderly women are more active and involved in social life than Chinese elderly men which may contribute a lot to their longer life expectancy.

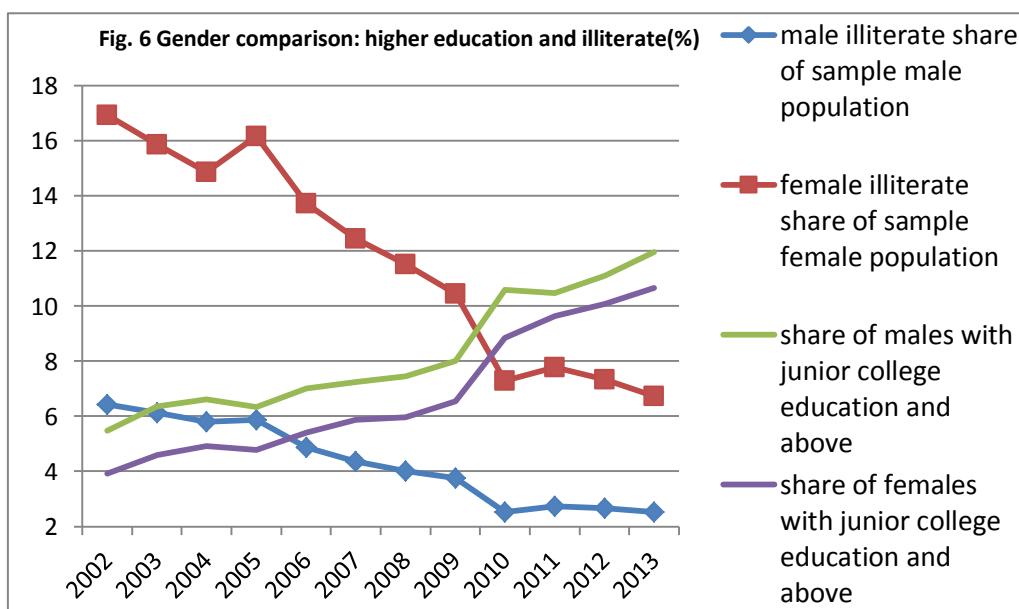


## 2.2. Education

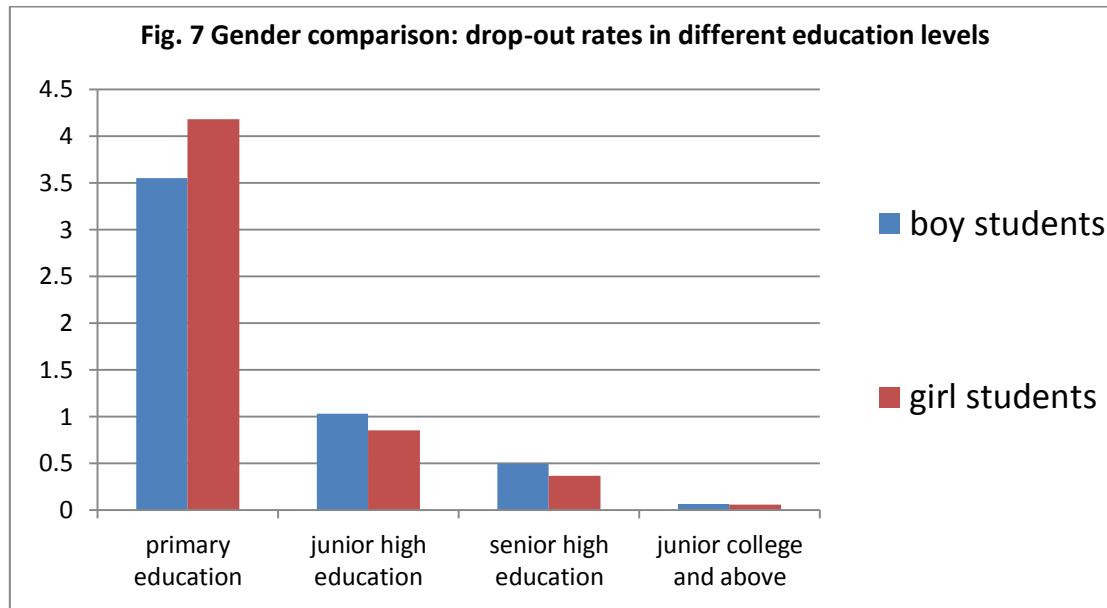
Since new China was founded in 1949, Chinese females' education has been greatly improved. The *Compulsory Education Law of PRC* enforced in 1986 ensured girls above 6 years old to be educated equally as boys of the same ages, which improved the national education level as a whole year by year, and the Chinese females become bigger benefiters. Fig. 5 reveals Chinese females' education condition in recent 10 years, which implies that the majority females have received primary education or junior high education, which takes a share about 70% out of the sample female population. On the other hand, the share of females with higher education has been enlarging.



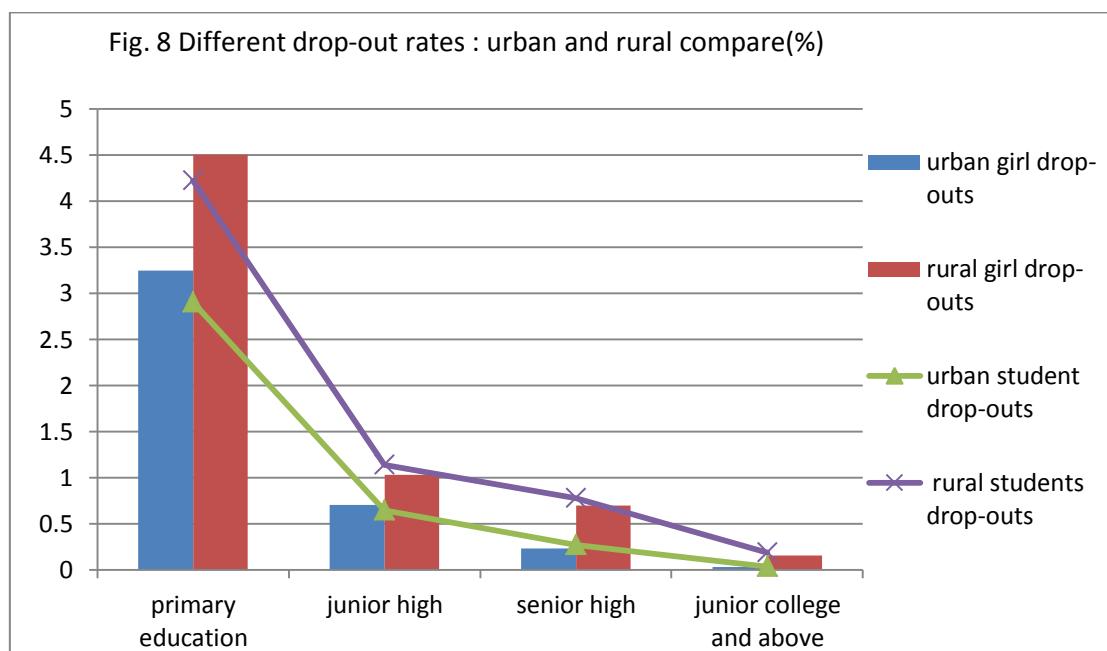
Among the sample population of age 15 and above, female illiterate rate is higher than that of the sample male population and has been declining more sharply in recent years. The growth trends of male and female sample population who have received higher education show the same rising way, which indicates that among the newly increased population with higher education the gender difference is not obvious. (Fig. 6)



There are drop-outs at various levels of education. Fig. 7 indicates that more girl students become drop-outs than boy students at primary education level, while fewer girl students at the other education levels.



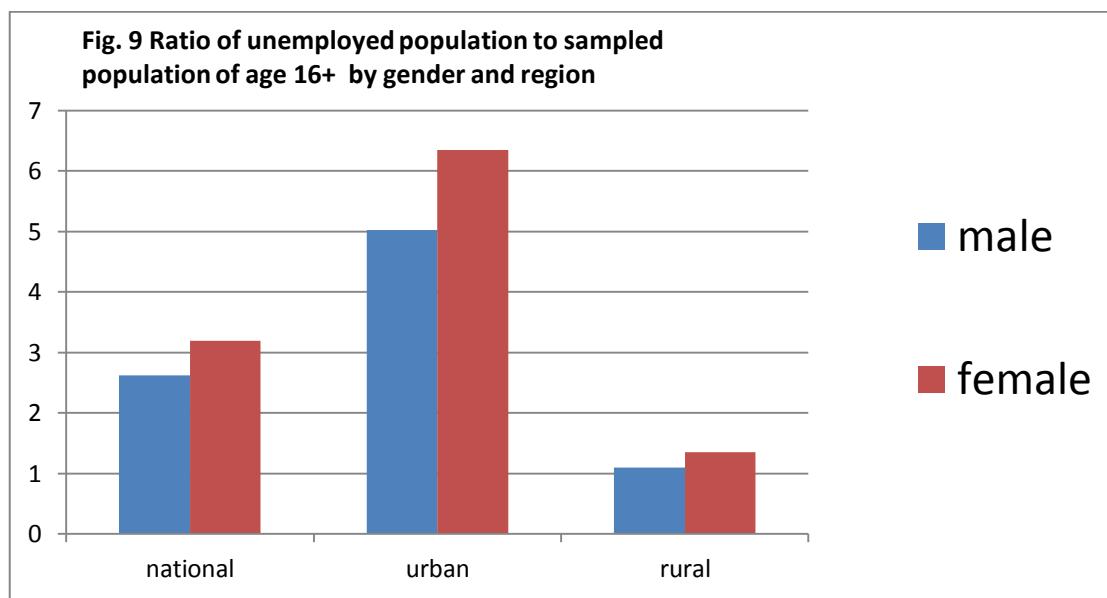
The statistics show that among rural students, there are more drop-outs at different education levels, both in respect of the drop-outs as a whole and the girl drop-outs. The main reasons include the rural poverty, the deep-rooted traditional ideas about gender and the unbalanced allocation of education resources between rural and urban areas. (Fig. 8)



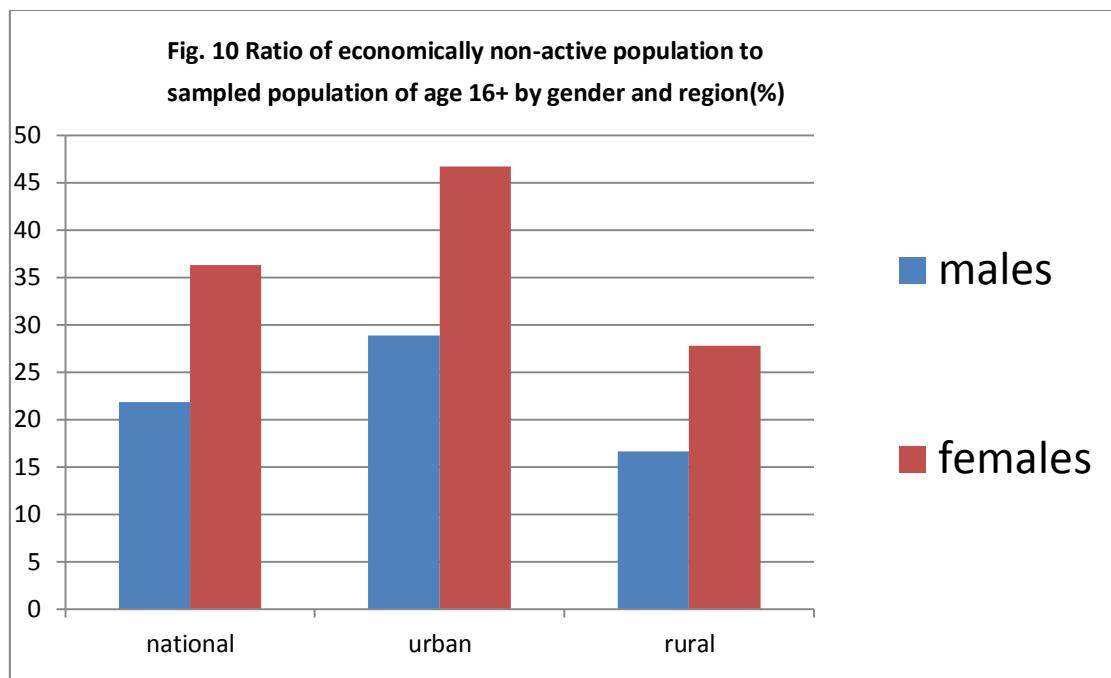
### 2.3. Job and employment

When a woman is trying to find a job, she may easily experience the discrimination against the females. A woman with a higher education background may have to suffer more discrimination than those with less education. This pervading factor is confirmed by a research carried out by a research group from The People's University of China, which finds out that a male graduate has 42% more chances than a female graduate to be interviewed with an exactly same resume only of different gender. The same research summarizes the reasons. First of all, girl graduates may have to deal with the issues of marriage and reproduction soon after their graduation, while China's Labor Law requires the employers give their female employees paid maternity leave and paid lactation leave. Out of the instinct of interests-maximization, the employers understandably tend to employ males who don't need such paid leaves. Secondly, the majority employers tend to regard female job hunters as physically weaker ones who may not endure the intensity and hardship in work and are not adapted to business travels. Thirdly, most of the employers assume that the females may pay more attention to their families than to their work which may draw down their sense of responsibility and ambition, in this regard, a male job hunter is certainly a better choice.

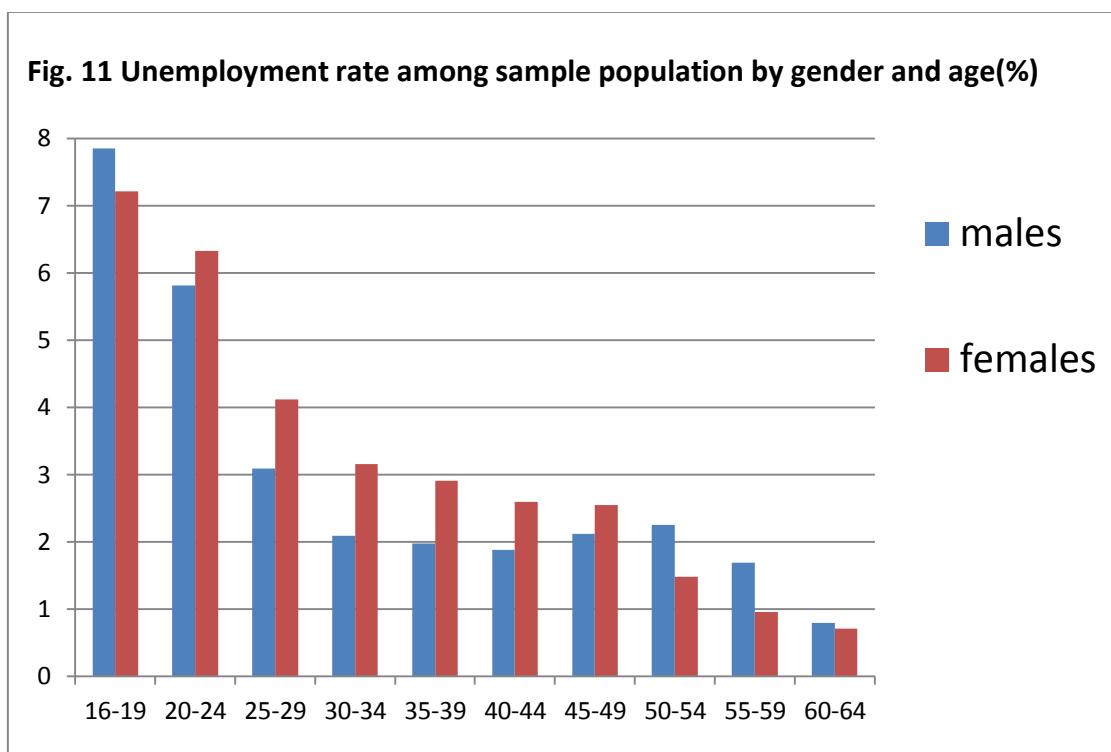
The unemployment ratio may reflect more facts about females' situation in job and employment. Fig. 9 shows that the female unemployment ratio is higher than that of the male, of which, the urban female unemployment ratio is further higher.



The same is true to the economically non-active population. Fig. 10 displays that nationally, the female economically non-active population ratio is higher than of the male, and the ratio of urban is much higher than that of rural areas.

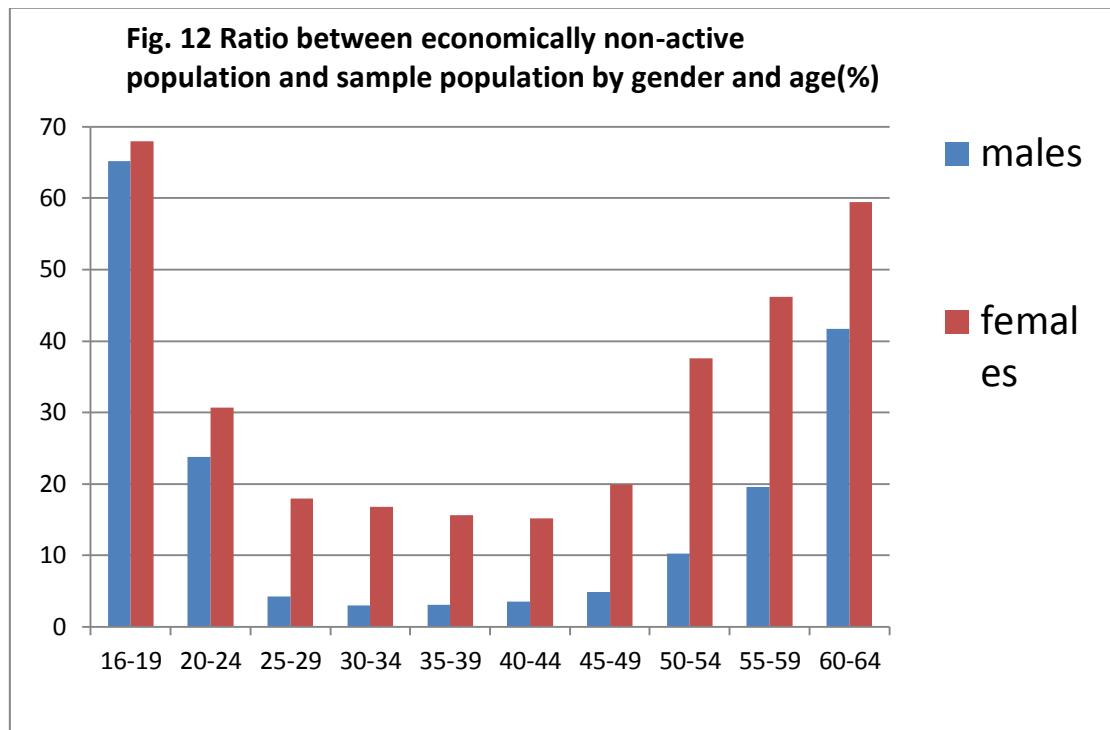


One interesting fact is that female unemployment rate decreases by the increase of age, which is different from that of the males. And another fact is that the unemployment rates of young girls below the age of 20 and the elder women over 50 are lower than that of the males of the same age group. (Fig. 11)

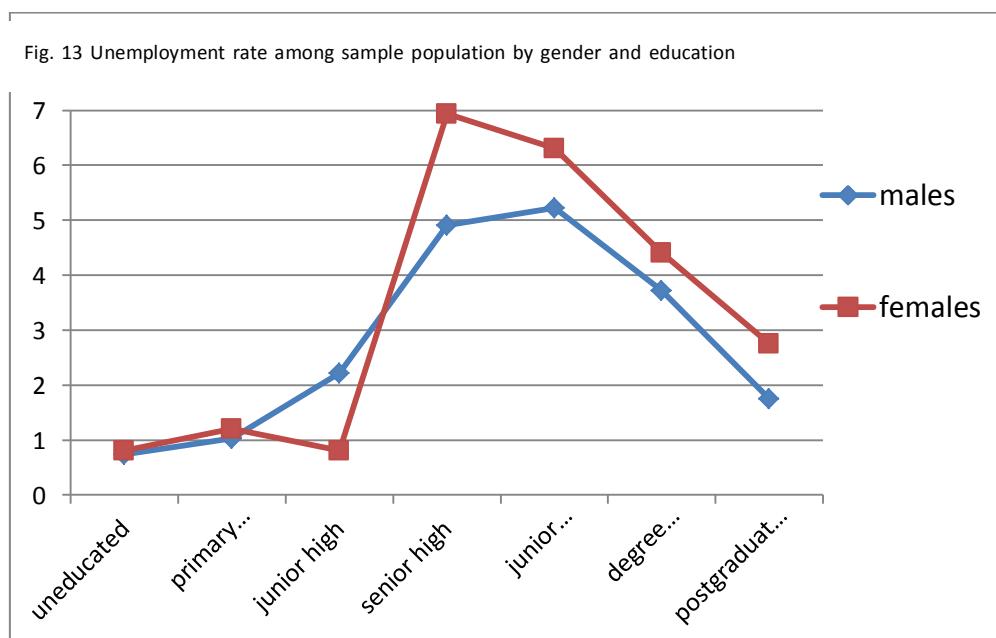


Of the economically non-active population, the ratio of females is (much) higher than that of males for all age groups, of which, the gender difference is not so obvious in the population between 16 to 24,

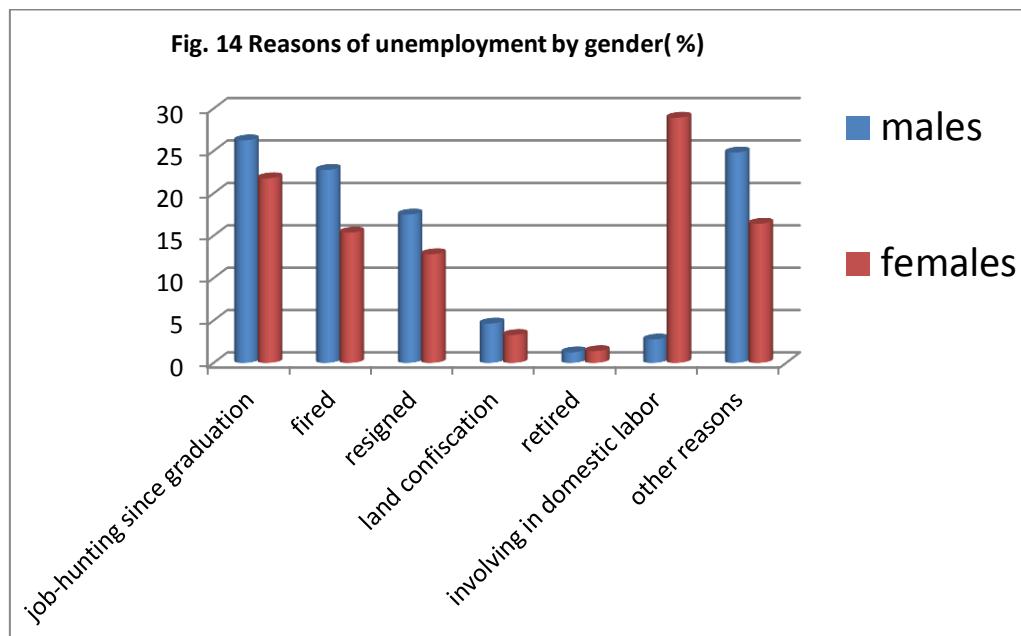
mainly because a majority of them are students at school. Of the age group between 25 to 54, the gender difference jumps to a high level, which indicates that economically males are in a dominant position. While of the age group of 55 to 64, the gender difference narrows a lot, but the female ratio is still much higher than that of the male, which indicates that elder women are less active and involved in economic activities after retirement than elder men. (Fig. 12)



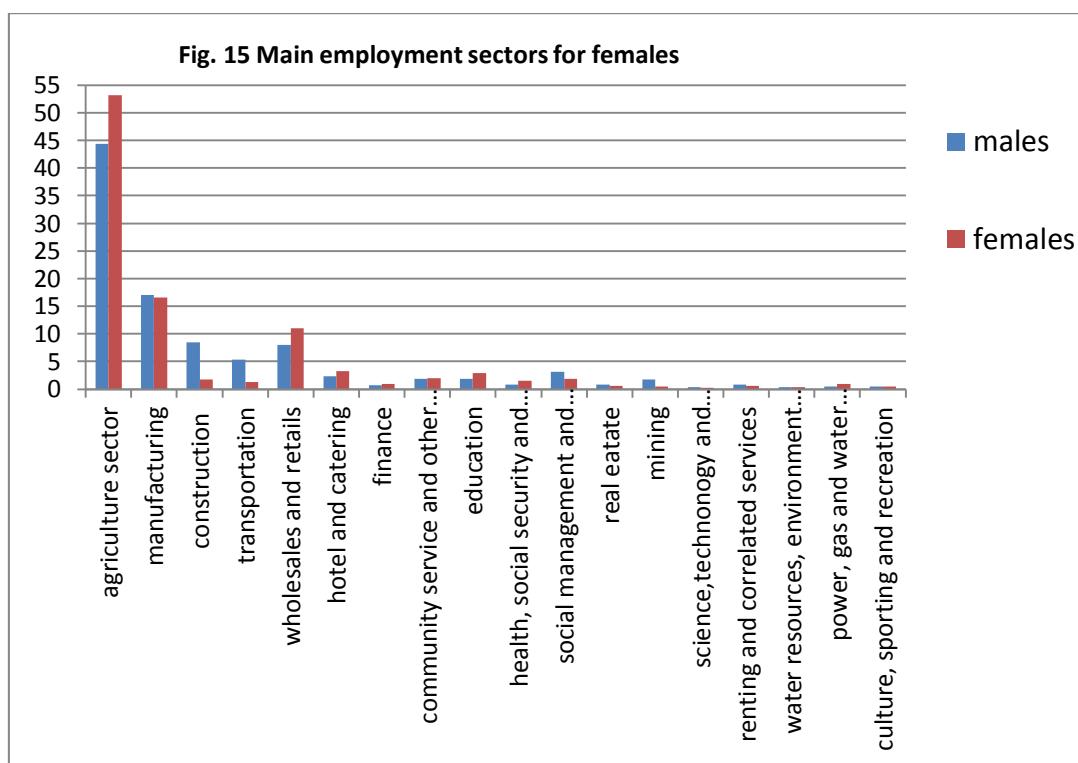
Female unemployment rate varies with education levels. Fig. 13 shows that less educated women have a lower unemployment rate, while women with higher education have higher unemployment rate. This has partly been confirmed by the mentioned research by The People's University of China.



Of the reasons of female unemployment, the first three reasons are involving in domestic labor, job-hunting since graduation and being fired, accounting for 28.927%, 21.783% and 15.374% respectively.

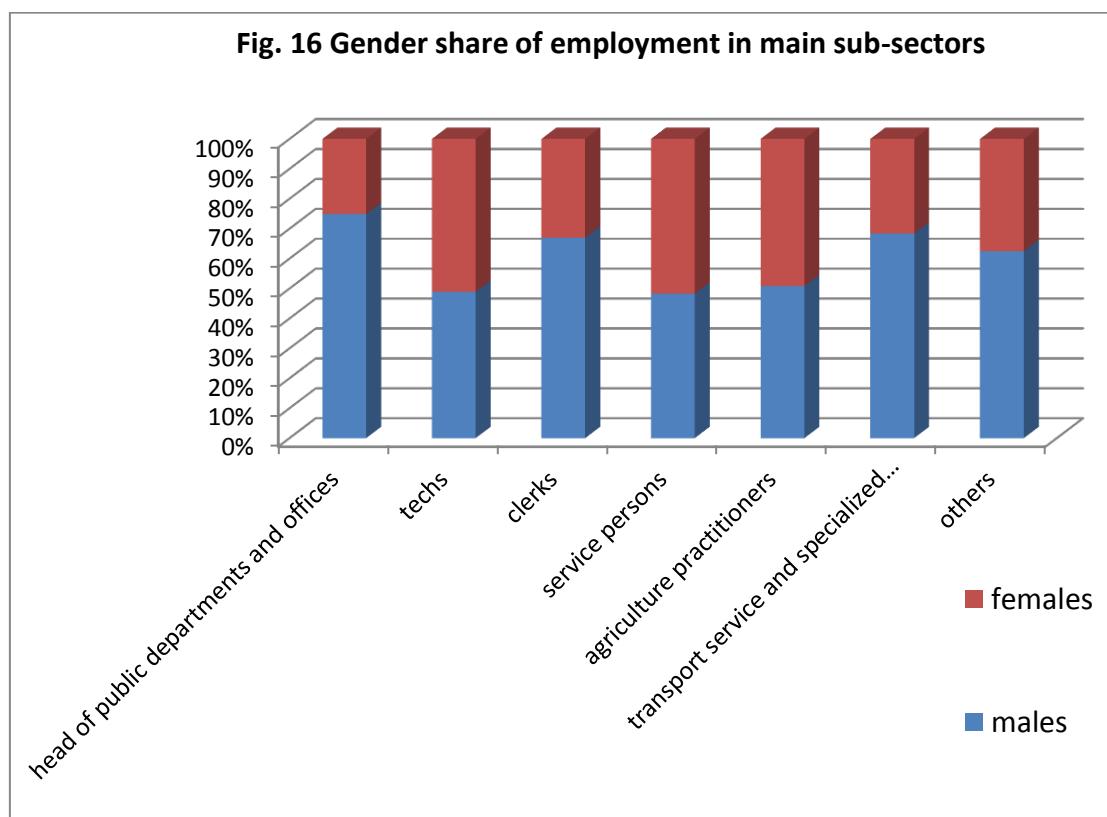


The statistics imply that female employment concentrates in three sectors, they are agriculture and related sectors, manufacturing and wholesales and retails sector respectively, which account for 53.22%, 16.59% and 10.991% respectively.



Comparing the shares of genders in the main sub-sectors, we find out that of the heads of public departments and offices, only 25.13% are females, which indicates that males are still in the overwhelming dominating position. While in the professional and technical areas, females' share are a little bit bigger than that of males, which could be a sign of female development.

**Fig. 16 Gender share of employment in main sub-sectors**

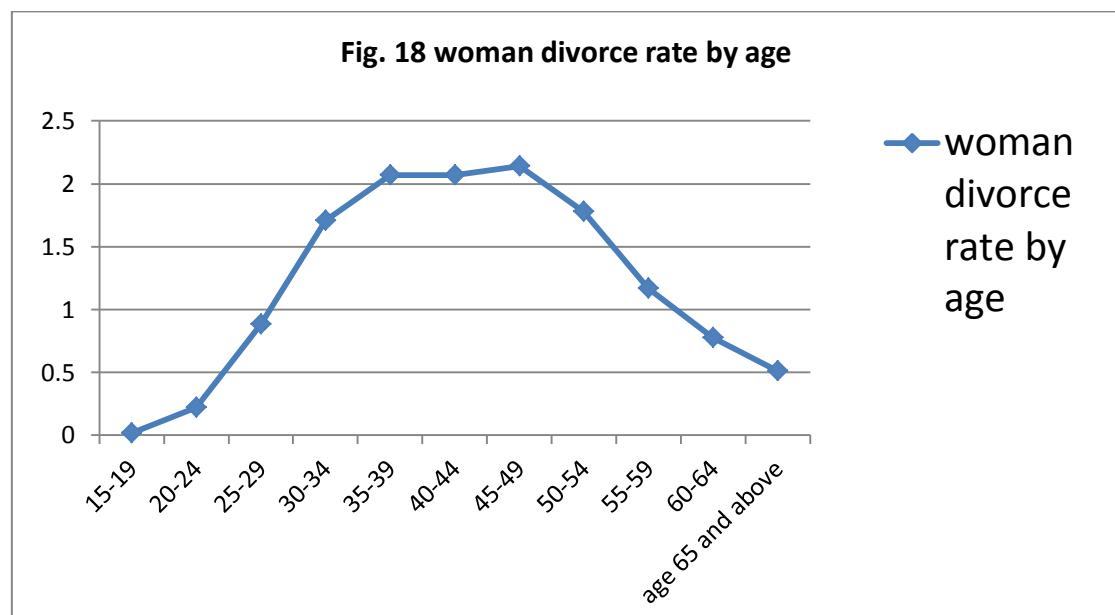
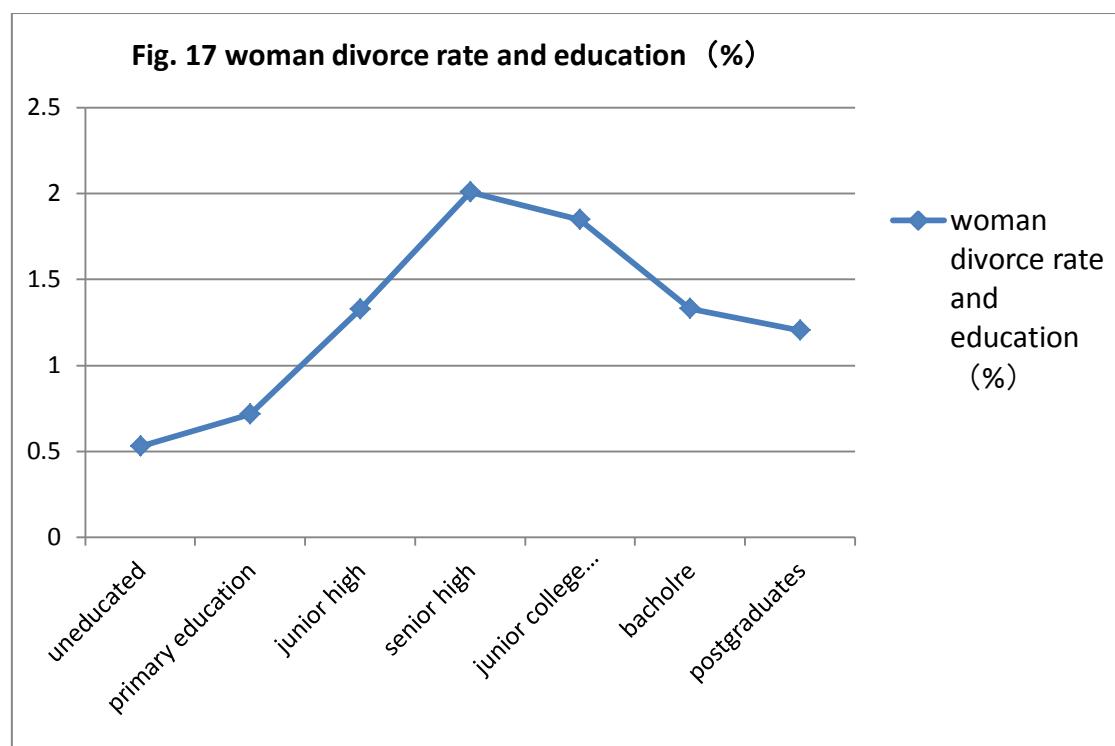


#### 2.4. Marriage

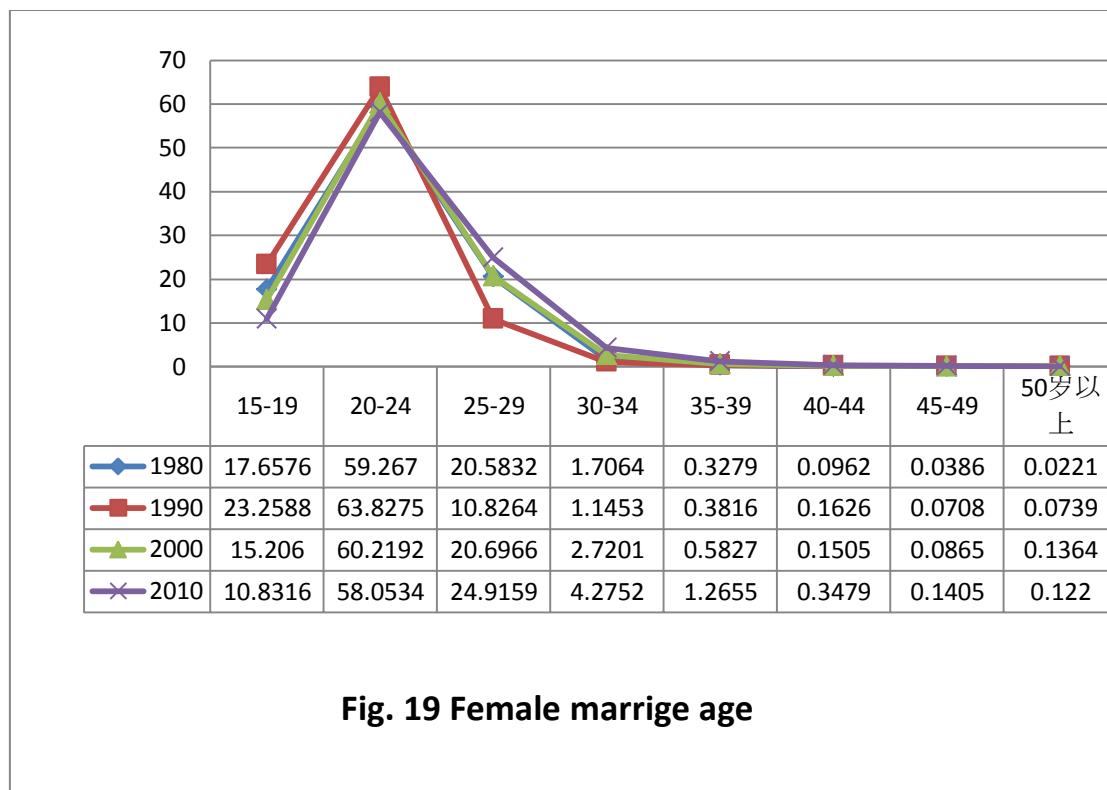
In China the divorce rate has been increasing for ten years successively, and it is keeping increasing by more than 10% annually. According to the report for 2013 by Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC, the divorce rate has reached 2.58% in 2013 with 3.5 million couples divorced, while in the same year, 13.469 million couples got married. By analyzing the sample datas, we may find out some facts related with female divorce.

Fig. 17 shows the different divorce rates of women with different education levels, which implies that the women with senior high and junior college education have the highest divorce rate.

Fig. 18 shows the different divorce rates of various age groups, which indicates that Chinese women have the highest divorce rate between 35 to 50.



Nationally, women are getting married at an elder age. Fig. 19 indicates that fewer women get married before 20 years old, majority women get married between 20-30, and more women get married after 35 years old.



## 2.5 Elderly women

The factors about elderly women's living might help to shape a more complete picture about Chinese women. Table 1 lists the primary sources of livelihood of the elders of 60 years old and above. It shows that 52.59% Chinese elderly women are provided by family members, whereas only 28.24% males of the same age are provided by their families, which means that financially elderly women are more vulnerable than men of the same age.

Table 1 Primary Sources of Livelihood of the elders(60+)						
gender/ sources	Earned income	Pension	Minimum Living allowance	Property income	Maintained By families	Other sources
Females (%)	21.92	19.58	3.69	0.33	52.59	1.90
Males (%)	36.59	28.89	4.11	0.41	28.24	1.76

## 3. Modern Chinese woman in dilemma

Chinese women keep on adjusting themselves to adapt to the social development and changing times, carrying a dual role for society and families. The rapidly expanding economy helps women gaining more freedom financially and improving their social and economical status, which reinforces women's sense of independence. While on the other side, women are constrained by the tradition and old ideas. The conflicts between the modernization and the tradition present women with disturbing dilemmas.

### 3.1. Spiritual dilemma

#### 3.1.1 Anxiety by conflicts between tradition and modernization

In traditional Chinese culture, males are dominators and females are appendages, which implies that a woman has to gain her value and identity by adhering to a man. While modernization encourages woman to gain her identity and value by her talents and achievements. However, the traditions are

playing roles in new appearance, which arouses anxieties in women, especially when it comes to some female virtues imposed by traditions.

### **3.1.2 Torn between self-fulfillment and family commitments**

Bearing and raising children are always considered to be women's biological duties and private affairs, which make it a great burden to women and women always find it very difficult to balance between self-fulfillment and family commitments. In most cases, they have to make a tough choice in between.

### **3.1.3 Constrained by low expectations and personal ambitions**

Subconsciously and universally, females are considered inferior to males, which brings down the expectations on women. In many cases, a woman might be infected by the same virus of thoughts, which undoubtedly constrains her personal ambitions.

### **3.1.4 Inquietude about risks of rights and freedom**

In the long Chinese history, woman was always protected by and dependent on man. Her self-respect, her value and personal identity all derived from man. She didn't have rights or freedom and didn't have to face all the risks alone in turn. Modernization brings to woman full freedom and a lot risks as well. Many a time, woman may have to judge and weigh whether to enjoy the rights and freedom or to give up and return to the tradition.

## **3.2. Ethical dilemma**

### **3.2.1 Crushed by different moral demands on man and woman**

Modernization brings woman more opportunities, yet unfortunately it doesn't change the double standards of morality on males and females. Woman has to tolerate the "immoralities" of man on one hand and endure the discriminatively perception about herself on the other hand.

### **3.2.2 Torturing between carrying on the family line and the birth control policy**

Modern woman enjoys her social and economical freedom, while she cannot shake off the traditional burden of having a son to carry on the family line. The national birth control policy allows one couple one child which limits the chances of woman to fulfill the traditional task. Thus woman, especially rural woman, may have to seek risky ways to deal with the issue or give up regrettfully.

## **3.3. Occupational dilemma**

### **3.3.1 Suffering from the discrimination**

In China, woman is suffering a lot discriminations in employment, promotion, remuneration and working treatment. One fundamental reason is that population reproduction is normally considered a family business or woman's private business. Society imposes the social responsibility fully to families and women. The other important reason is that the existing systems do not righteously calculate the values of the domestic labor, which leads to the ignorance of the contributions and values to the society by women. Last but not least, with the patriarchic effects, double standards are adopted to evaluate the abilities of males and females, inequalities lie in the division of labor between genders, and gender discriminations are common in promotion.

### **3.3.2 Torn between career and family**

Balancing between career and family seems to be a modern mark for woman. When she has to make a choice in between, a Chinese woman usually choose the latter, while mostly, such a choice usually cannot make her feel ease and peaceful.

## **3.4. Marriage dilemma**

In marriage market, women do not have advantages or equal status at all, in spite of the big gap of gender ratio. Women have more constraints than men in regard to marriage. A failed marriage usually means more risks for women than for men, and a divorced man is more likely to begin another marriage than a divorced woman. Thus a Chinese woman are more likely to maintain an unhappy marriage or sacrifice more to her marriage, which is also a traditional routine.

#### **4. The institutional reflections on Chinese woman development**

There are several laws safeguarding females' rights and interests, like Marriage Law, Women and Children Rights Law and Labor Law, etc. Most of the provisions regarding to anti-discrimination against females are too general and not easy to implemented, which make it difficult for females to insist on their rights and interests. An independent anti-discrimination law is necessary.

Besides, proper policies should be carried out to encourage employment of females, for this purpose, the value of domestic labor and reproducing need to be righteously and justly re-evaluated and government may share some costs of the employers in this regard. In summary, the social responsibility of population-reproduction should be reasonably divided among the nation, individuals and employers.

Furthermore, put extra emphasis on girls' education would fundamentally improve females' abilities of anti-discrimination and anti-risks, which is far-reaching significant. Female cadres and leaders of all walks of life could be great help to women development as well.