

THE DILEMMA OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION IN VILLAGE ELECTION IN
CHINA

BY

HUANG YINING

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Miss HUANG Yining

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Dr. SHIM Jaemin
Chief Adviser

Dr. KANG Yi
Second Examiner

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Abstract

Rural women, as a vulnerable group of both urban-rural people and male-female, have not received enough attention for their political participation. Although the village elections in China are democratic activities in which villagers can participate directly, the participation rate of rural women is significantly lower than that of men. The research on the factors hindering women's participation in politics is of great significance to improving gender equality and the level of grassroots democracy in China. Based on the research on existing literature, surveys and database, this paper argues that the reasons for the low participation rate of rural women in politics are mainly cultural factors and social structural factors, due to the uniqueness of rural China. Cultural factors mainly refer to the profound influence of feudal thoughts in Confucianism on the countryside. Branches under the social structure, such as economic power, education level, amount of free time and civic skill, also hinder rural women from getting close to public affairs. Meanwhile, these factors are interrelated and interact with each other, which requires more research into the disadvantages of rural women in politics in the future.

Introduction

Description of Situation and Significance of Study

Since the Organic Law was promulgated in 1989, scholars have paid great attention to the village election system in China because the electoral system in villages is the embodiment of grassroots democracy and the dawn of democratic progress in the

future of China (O'Brien & Han, 2009). Meanwhile, with the reform and opening up, scholars put more effort into the research on gender equality in China in the past three decades. However, the political participation of rural women in grass-roots democracy has not been deeply concerned and studied. Studies on village elections in China are usually conducted from a non-gender perspective, while studies on Chinese women usually focus on the whole Chinese women and mainly the urban population. As a group of Chinese women and rural communities, the interest of women in rural areas is neglected to some extent. Although the status of Chinese women as a whole, the situation of rural women's political participation is still not optimistic, which is summed up in **Table 1**. As of 2020, for example, 24.2 % of village committee members were women, still short of the 30 % target China set in 2011 (National Women Federation & National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The inequality of women's political participation is not only reflected in the relatively small number of women's seats on the village committee but also the imbalance of political participation performance between women and men as a whole. The result of the questionnaire for women in rural China conducted by Huang (2018) in six provinces showed that more than half of rural Chinese women have never attended a village meeting, four times more than women who regularly attend. In addition, further research on women's political participation in rural China not only promotes gender equality but also encourages the modernization of rural areas because the number of rural males who choose to work in cities is increasing thus women are becoming more important in rural economic development and political decision-making (Huang, 2018). Therefore,

an in-depth analysis of the political challenges faced by Chinese rural women is of great significance.

Table 1: Political participation proportion of females and males in rural China

	<i>Female %</i>	<i>Male %</i>
<i>Vote in election</i>	97%	99%
<i>Attend village meeting</i>	48%	82%
<i>Know the head of the village committee well</i>	12%	78%
<i>Participate in decision-making</i>	45%	76%

Sources: Wang & Dai (2013); Huang (2018).

Research Questions

To better understand the current challenges faced by rural women in the process of participating in elections and thus propose more targeted solutions, this paper will focus on how to explain the gender differences in political participation in rural elections. In other words, this paper will explore the reasons for the low participation rate of women in rural elections.

Method and Hypothesis

The data used in this paper mainly comes from previous questionnaires and interviews, including those conducted by other scholars or the official statistics office.

This paper cited the interviews carried out in Chinese villages including the survey of rural women's political participation in six provinces with 970 samples conducted by

Huang (2018), the fieldwork focusing on rural women in Rudong county conducted by Wang and Dai (2013). After establishing preliminary arguments and positions, this paper uses the survey data of some literature related to the sub-topic, such as the economic ability and education level of rural women, including the field survey about the situation of villagers' employment in Guangdong province carried out by Hare (1999) and the meta-regression analysis focusing on the gender difference in education done by Zeng, Pang, Zhang, Medina, and Rozelle (2014). Moreover, this paper uses the data from published papers from the Asian Barometer Survey and the World Value Survey to strengthen the argument about Confucianism. Finally, the statistics retrieved from reports published by the National Bureau of Statistics of China are also significant for analysis in this paper.

Building on the existing literature, rural women's low political participation in grassroots democracy is mainly caused by cultural factors especially Confucianism and social factors such as the economic power of women, education, their free time, and civic skills. Therefore, the paper will assess the influence of these factors in rural areas and how they affect women through the existing data.

Literature Review

O'Brien and Han (2009) introduced the operation mode of village elections in China in detail and critically analyzed its current achievements and defects. Village committees and village party branches are basically in charge of the village's management affairs. The purpose of village elections in China is to elect members of

village committees, while members of party branches are appointed directly by superiors. In recent years, progress in rural elections is mainly reflected in the improvement of election criteria and fair vote counting. The drawbacks are also obvious: there is still corruption, such as vote-buying, and the actions of village committees are still largely controlled by village party branches and township governments.

Scholars have different definitions of the concept of political participation because they differ on the purpose of political participation (**Table 2**). Since the research question focuses on the challenges faced by rural women in China, this paper limits the definition of political participation to the events involved in village elections which are voting in elections, running village committees, and participating in decision-making related meetings and activities.

Table 2: Different definitions of political participation

	<i>Purpose of political participation</i>	<i>Definition of political participation</i>
<i>Huntington (1987); Whiteley (2012)</i>	The purpose of political participation is to influence the behaviour or decision-making of the government.	voting, lobbying, participation in politically related meetings and other behaviours that can influence people or things in the government could

		be defined as political participation.
<i>Booth & Seligson (1978); Howell (2006)</i>	The result of political participation should involve the distribution of some public goods, so the definition of political participation should be broad.	Political participation should be defined not just within decision-making institutions, but in other areas that may affect politics, such as society and the economy.

At present, there are few articles about the role of women in villages elections in China, but they share some common views about the political status of women. Firstly, the gap in political participation between men and women in rural China is obvious (Guo, Zheng & Yang, 2009; Howell, 2006; Huang, 2018; Jacka & Sargeson, 2015; Song, 2018; Wang & Dai, 2013). This is reflected not only in the difference in voter turnout but also in the low proportion of women in village committees, which was not increased significantly in the past decade. Secondly, scholars have not paid enough attention to the issue of rural women's political participation. (Guo, Zheng & Yang, 2009; Howell, 2006; Huang, 2018; Wang & Dai, 2013). The political participation of women in China has been studied by more scholars, but rural women as an independent group have not received enough attention. Thirdly, the reasons for the differences between rural men and women in political participation are influenced by many factors, and there is a very complex mechanism behind it (Howell, 2006;

Huang, 2018; Wang & Dai, 2013). Therefore, scholars usually do the research from one perspective. For example, Guo, Zheng and Yang (2009) focused on exploring whether economic development is positively correlated with rural women's political participation and they concluded that there are no necessary relations between the development of the economy and the enthusiasm of rural women to participate in politics. Jacka and Sargeson (2015) investigated whether female village officials are more willing to help women through social investigations in two provinces of China and they concluded that female officials do not substantively represent and improve the interests of rural women more substantively than male leaders. Huang (2018) analyze the factors affecting rural women's participation in politics from the perspective of neo-institutionalism which is an emerging theory of political sciences, including formal institutions such as law and rules, and informal institutions such as moral ethics and religion (Marsh, 2002).

Paxton and Hughes (2017) put forward four perspectives affecting the political participation of women, including culture, social structure, politics and international relations. Culture often determines one's attitude towards politics. Even within China, which has a vast territory, there are still great cultural differences between rural areas and urban areas. For example, cultural attitudes in rural areas tend to be traditional. From a structural point of view, family, education, economy and other societal aspects also tend to influence women's political participation (Paxton & Hughes, 2017). It is significant to explore this aspect because the social structure in rural China is unique compared to urban areas. In terms of politics and international influence, rural and

urban China generally share the same environment. Political aspects mainly include political parties and regimes. In both urban and rural China, the dominant party is the Communist Party of China and no matter at the city, county or village level, there are secretaries of the party committee to supervise and lead. In rural China, leadership roles are mainly held by village party branches and village committees. In regard to international relations, although some international organizations will supervise and encourage China to promote gender equality, the gender issue is a universal problem, and almost all countries are still working towards the goal of gender equality in politics. Additionally, international factors mainly refer to the women's movement or the international regulation designed to protect the rights of women. The international factors often have an impact on China as a whole so that the urban and rural areas in China are not so different from each other concerning the international community. Therefore, this paper will mainly assess problems from the perspective of cultural and social structure.

In general, although the number of studies on the participation of rural women in China is not abundant, the previous papers of scholars provide a useful research background for this paper.

Finding and Analysis

Cultural Factors

In the field of gender and politics, the factors that could influence women's political participation are usually divided into two parts. One type of factor is the one that can

affect the political participation ability of women, mainly referring to the conditions that can increase the size of the female population who are willing and able to participate in politics. Another type of factor is related to political institutions, such as electoral systems, laws or the political environment, that may make women more likely to be elected. Cultural factors could contribute to increasing the willingness of women. The culture is the strongest predictor of female political participation and held steady across many models and studies (Paxton & Hughes, 2017). Culture reflects and shapes the image of women while some forms of cultures are still very powerful in opposing participation in the politics of women. Culture can influence not only people's attitudes toward female political leaders but also women's own political ambitions and enthusiasm. For example, The World Values Survey (World Values Survey Association, 2015) conducted a survey about individuals' attitudes towards women in various countries (**Table 3**). In this survey, higher scores were associated with the greater agreement with the gender inequality claims. Among them, the score for Sweden is the lowest overall which means that people in Sweden strongly disagree with the idea of gender inequality, for example, Sweden scored 1.69 for the argument of men are better than women to be leaders, while Ghana score 3.10 for the same argument. The reason why Sweden scored lower than almost all other countries is its tradition of egalitarianism. This type of culture has influenced societal viewpoints towards women in Sweden, leading to more equal opportunities for women and more motivation for women to participate in politics.

Table 3: Individual attitudes towards women in various countries

	<i>Men are better leaders</i>	<i>Men deserve better jobs</i>	<i>Men and women should have equal rights</i>
<i>Bulgaria</i>	2.48	2.01	2.31
<i>Ukraine</i>	2.60	2.11	2.65
<i>South Africa</i>	2.50	2.21	2.91
<i>Ghana</i>	3.10	2.45	2.51
<i>China</i>	2.61	2.17	1.96
<i>Japan</i>	2.44	1.72	2.73
<i>United States</i>	2.14	1.81	2.42
<i>Sweden</i>	1.69	1.98	1.16

Source: World Value Survey Association (2015)

In China, Confucianism has gained an orthodox position in the field of ideology and culture. Although Confucianism became popular thousands of years ago, many of its core concepts are still practised by many Chinese today, whether good or feudal.

Since Confucianism was developed during the period of the feudal dynasty, many of its core ideas, known as feudal ethics, are different from the modern concept of equality. For example, Confucianism has a clear definition of class, such as emperor and minister; father and son; male and female. Due to the profound influence of Confucianism on Chinese culture, this paper takes Confucianism as a representative

to analyze how Chinese traditional culture hinders women's active participation in politics.

In Confucianism conceptions, etiquette norms and class systems are very important.

Among them, women occupy a lower position than men in any class (Paxton & Hughes, 2017). In other words, women cannot have the same status as men. The core

ideas about women in Confucian thought can be summarized as follows. Firstly, women should be submissive or led. Secondly, women who are not talented can be called virtuous. That is to say, education should be dominated by men. Thirdly, the most important thing for men is strength, while the most important thing for women is tenderness. Fourthly, women are passive by nature and need other people's orders and instructions to do anything. It is not hard to see that the view of women in

Confucianism is harmful to the contemporary development of women's rights.

Confucian thought believed that women should be obedient, and soft and should not receive too much education, so it fundamentally denied a woman the possibility of political participation.

The influence of Confucianism on the cultural values of the whole China is obvious.

Meanwhile, some feudal views of Confucianism are more influential and prevalent in the villages than in urban areas. **Table 4** shows a working paper published by The Asian Barometer Survey that focuses on Confucianism and democracy and studies the impact of Confucian values on several Asian countries (Chang & Chu, 2002). In the analysis of data, the paper divides China into two categories: "All China" and "Urban China". In other words, the data could demonstrate whether Confucianism has more

influence on rural areas than on urban areas. The table shows the scores of answers to "agree or disagree questions", 1 point for "highly disagree" and 4 points for "highly agree", which means that the higher the score is, the more people agree with the statements in the questionnaire. The questionnaire listed several core Confucian ideas, such as that daughters-in-law should obey their husband's mother and that it is better to have a boy than a girl. Compared with "Urban China", the sample average of "All China" was about 0.3 points higher for each statement. Chu, Chang and Huang (2004) also pointed out that people in rural areas of China are more insistent on the traditionalism of Confucianism and generally agree that it is shameful for a man to be led by a woman. These pieces of evidence show that in rural areas, these backward ideas are more popular and have a greater impact on people's values.

Table 4: Impact of Confucianism in China

	<i>All China</i>	<i>Urban China</i>
<i>A wife should obey her mother-in-law</i>	2.58	2.40
<i>If you can have only one child, it is better to have a boy than a girl</i>	2.31	2.04

Source: Chang & Chu (2002)

The popularity of such feudal views in Confucianism will bring great obstacles to political freedom and equality (Chang & Chu, 2002). Confucianism undermines rural women's performance in politics by creating a cultural and hostile environment (Paxton & Hughes, 2017). This paragraph will analyze how culture causes the low

participation rate of women in politics based on the four main points of Confucianism on women mentioned above. Firstly, women are supposed to obey or be passive. This ideology on the one hand can make the women believe that they are incapable to participate in politics and not putting the election in their lives plan, especially in rural China where there are few job opportunities, and many women have no individual income. On the other hand, it also makes the rural men not trust and vote for female candidates, because men from this point of view are not willing to be led by women and they might feel that women cannot perform very well in the role of political leaders. Secondly, a woman's lack of education is appreciated. There are still a large number of outdated views in China's rural areas, which hold that it is meaningless for women to get an education while the most important virtue for women is to take more care of their husbands and children and to stay at home and go nowhere (Zeng, Pang, Zhang, Medina, and Rozelle, 2014). Without the assistance of education, it is undoubtedly more difficult for women to participate in politics. This point will be explained further in the analysis of social structural factors. Lastly, men value strength while women value tenderness. In this view, women's political ambitions are frayed, and more women would give up without even trying to compete with men.

In conclusion, Confucianism plays an unshakable role in shaping Chinese cognitive values and has laid the foundation for many traditional Chinese thoughts and cultures. There are still some popular views, such as treating people with courtesy, and some feudal class concepts that are contrary to the modern view of human rights. For example, there is a rigid hierarchy between the classes that cannot be overstepped.

Although a series of laws are established to protect women's rights, Chinese people have a deep-rooted idea of male superiority over women because of the deep influence of Confucianism (Xie, 1994). In this cultural hostile environment, women are less likely to actively participate in politics, let alone become leaders. Therefore, Confucianism, which severely oppressed the political representation of women, could be a big challenge faced by women in villages.

Social Structural Factors

It can be seen from the previous section that Chinese traditional culture represented by Confucianism is one of the reasons for the low rate of women's political participation in village elections. Meanwhile, it is also meaningful to analyze the influence of social structural factors on rural China. Compared with culture, which mainly explains why women are unwilling to participate in politics based on their own ideas and thoughts, social structure explains why women are unable to participate in politics. Paxton and Hughes (2017) also pointed out that if a social structure treats men and women more equal, women will be more competitive in politics and have more confidence and ability to participate in political campaigns. Economy, education, discretionary time and civic skills are all parts of the social structure and can also be regarded as a way to influence women to run for public affairs.

Economic Power

When it comes to politics, the economy is bound to be mentioned. Economic power means that an individual has his or her own independent economic sources and income, and is able to produce, buy, create and well control surplus so as to create influence with his or her economy. Economic power inequality between men and women is widespread in society. For a long time, the status of women in labour is often neglected. For example, while men work outside the home for a paid job, women serve as wives and mothers without substantial income. However, in early civilizations, women were the main labour force that united societies and fostered cultures (Blumberg, 1984). Nowadays, although more women have their own jobs, and hold that housework and child-caring are no longer exclusively responsibilities of women, their efforts are still often overlooked in rural areas. Admittedly, having economic power does not mean having political power, while generally speaking, having the economic ability is the basis for participating in politics. According to the power hierarchy theory put up by Blumberg (1984), it is necessary to master lower-level capabilities before reaching higher-level capabilities and political power is at the top of this class so that political power is possible only if a person has enough economic power, which is at the lower level. The need for hierarchy came up by Maslow makes the same point that self-actualization, such as becoming a political leader, will not be considered if the security need, such as property and employment, has not been achieved. Therefore, one must have enough economic power to participate in politics. This section will assess the economic disadvantage of rural

women and explain why economic power is important for women to attend village elections.

The particularity of gender economic power inequality in villages is reflected in the following aspects. Firstly, due to the lack of infrastructure and economic development in rural areas, there are few local employment opportunities, resulting in the inability of women to be employed with wages. According to the China General Social Survey (CGSS) in 2017, rural women's annual income is about 16,000 yuan, while rural men's is 33,000 yuan, about twice that of women. In addition, urban women's annual income is about 46,000 yuan, far more than the annual income of rural women (Philanthropy and NGO Support Center, 2021). Hare (1999) conducted a field survey in rural areas of Guangdong Province and found that almost all women over 30 years old had no wage employment, while men were over 50 years old. The data shows the disadvantage of women in income, which makes women possess unequal economic power. Secondly, during recent decades, a large part of the rural labour forces have been migrating to urban industries, but the number of female migrant workers is only half of that of male migrant workers, which means that the responsibility of agricultural production in villages has been shifted to women. Chen (2004) also pointed out in his study that in all forms of work in rural areas, only 12% of women are engaged in wage work, while about 60% are engaged in farm work. This burden deprives women of the time and energy available for paid work. They are employed by their families as free labour for agricultural employment. As a result, they even cannot enter the labour market. Moreover, the income from agricultural production is

not owned by rural women, and the income generated by farm work is usually managed by the male elders of the family, such as the husband or father-in-law.

Therefore, women still do not have much discretionary income. Thirdly, as mentioned in the cultural section about the influence of feudal values on rural areas, women are still the ones who have to do most of the housework and childcare work, which is also a form of unpaid labour. Traditional gender perceptions reduce women's likelihood and willingness to seek jobs, thus reducing their earnings (Philanthropy and NGO Support Center, 2021). Therefore, family care is also an important reason why rural women do not have enough economic capacity.

Inequality in economic capacity exists in almost every society, and the gap between men and women is even more obvious in rural China because of the special development and industrial situation mentioned in the previous paragraph. Economic power is necessary for rural elections, especially for those who want to be elected to village committees and have the power to govern the villages. In the early days, there were almost no election campaigns in China's rural elections. With the continuous development of this system, election campaigns and activities began to emerge, which also became an important way for candidates to solicit votes. The survey conducted by Song (2000) in Fujian province showed that almost all candidates would carry out a least one election promotion activity during the election period, such as speech and meetings. Although campaigns for rural elections in China are carried out in a relatively simple form, spending is essential (Zhao, 2018). If women do not have strong economic power or surplus, they will not be motivated to be a candidate, and

even if they do, they will not be able to be competitive in elections. Moreover, the salary of village officials in China is very low. In some poor villages, a village official's salary is even not enough to support his or her family's daily expenses, for example, in Beijing, the annual salary of village committee members is 10,000 to 20,000 yuan (Zhu, 2007). Therefore, people usually do not participate in elections for the purpose of making money. When economic power is not strong enough, women do not have the motivation to participate in rural governance. Rural women have relatively poor economic power than men thus women are less likely to participate in politics which leads to the low rate of female participation in politics.

In general, women and men have very unequal economic power in rural China. Due to the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas, the influence of feudal views and the increasing number of men working in cities leading to the shift of the burden of agricultural employment to women, it is difficult for rural women to get enough economic power and support to participate in elections. Participating in politics and influencing the decision-making process will not be considered until one's basic life needs are met. Therefore, the lack of sufficient economic power could also be one of the reasons for the low participation rate of women in politics.

Education

A large number of works of literature have mentioned the importance of education level for getting involved in politics, arguing that education is essential for effective political participation. (Schlozman, Burns & Verba, 1994; Tong, 2003; Wang & Dai,

2013). Recently, there are a global trend of encouraging female education and promoting equality of education between males and females (Paxton & Hughes, 2017). However, the situation in developing countries is still not optimistic, including China. There is already a difference in education levels between rural and urban areas in China, and the difference between male and female education levels in rural areas is even more obvious, which makes the educational gap between rural women and urban women unignorable. Therefore, this part will present some pieces of evidence of poor education for rural women and analyze how the low education level of rural women affects their political participation.

Although China implements nine-year compulsory education throughout the country, some women in rural China are still at a disadvantage in education, with many families unwilling to fund their daughters' education beyond primary school. In villages, girls usually face great sibling competition because rural families prefer to invest in the education of boys rather than girls, resulting in unequal educational resources for women (Huang, Huang, Lin & Yang, 2021). The results of the field interviews carried out by Wang and Dai (2013) in Rudong county show that both men and women in rural China think that the education of girls is less important than the one of boys. There is a feudal concept in rural China that married daughters are just like water poured out, which means that married daughters cannot take care of them when they are old, so it is worthless to raise daughters with unnecessary expenses. Moreover, as mentioned in the cultural factors section, one of the core views of Confucianism on women's status is that a woman without talent is virtuous, which

further aggravates the educational dilemma of rural women. Zeng, Pang, Zhang, Medina, and Rozelle (2014) carried out research on gender inequality in education in China. Based on an analysis of 167 studies on the gender gap in education over the past three decades, they concluded that most urban girls have seen little educational inequality in recent years, but girls in rural areas still need to face this problem. Additionally, Wang and Dai (2013) point out that, from the data collected in Rudong County, only about 4% of rural women have completed their senior high school education, compared to 21% of men. Among women in rural politics, 68 % of them have a high school degree or above. This indicates that highly educated women are more likely to participate in local governance. In addition to the education they receive at school, home education also has a great impact on rural women. Many rural families mainly aim at educating their daughters on how to be good mothers and wives, rather than cultivating their independent and persevering personalities. As a result, girls do not develop the quality suitable for political participation in their growth and do not care about public affairs at all (Li, 2002).

A low level of education will seriously lead to insufficient enthusiasm for female participation in politics. Firstly, the limited education will cause the low political efficacy of rural women. Political efficacy refers to an individual's perception of his or her ability to influence government decisions and actions. The higher the political efficacy, the more active the political participation. According to the survey conducted in 6 provinces by Huang (2018), nearly a quarter of women in rural areas did not participate in politics because they thought that their participation was useless,

and another quarter of women thought that they did not understand the election system at all. In contrast, only 7% of women who were asked why they got involved in politics thought their participation would make a difference in public affairs. Therefore, the political efficacy of rural women is minimal. Moreover, Tong (2003) pointed out the positive correlation between education and political efficacy. In his survey, only 9.3 % of women with senior high education said they have elementary political efficacy, while 16.1 % of women with college or above education said they have that efficacy. Meanwhile, education is also positively correlated with political knowledge and political interest (Tong, 2003). These two qualities are closely related to political efficacy, because political knowledge helps citizens understand how they could influence politics, and political interest encourages people to participate in decision-making and public affairs, thus improving political efficacy.

Secondly, education can help rural women overcome psychological barriers, on the contrary, a lack of adequate education will make women reluctant to participate in politics because of those barriers (Paxton & Hughes, 2017; Wang & Dai, 2013). In the interview conducted by Wang and Dai (2013), 75% of women said that they were not willing to become candidates for election because they thought they could not do it well, and 90% of women said that they would not nominate themselves for election at all. Moreover, even if women are elected in rural elections and can play a role in rural governance, their positions are relatively marginal (Guo, Zheng & Yang, 2009; Howell, 2006). Women often tend to do some work related to family planning and women's affairs rather than directly participate in the management of villages. The

evidence shows that a large number of rural women are not confident about participating in politics, believing that they cannot do well, thus discouraging their enthusiasm, and indicates that the low self-confidence of women is closely related to their lower level of education. A good education can help women develop the qualities of initiative, self-confidence and perseverance, be open to new ideas and knowledge, aware of the power of women, and thus have the mindset chance to actively participate in politics.

Generally, the existence of rural elections encourages villagers to be educated, as those with higher levels of education have a better chance of becoming leaders. Similarly, education also plays an important role in determining or even inhibiting a person's willingness to participate in politics. There is a significant gap between male and female education levels in rural China. Therefore, the educational disadvantage of rural women is also one of the reasons for the low political participation rate.

Time

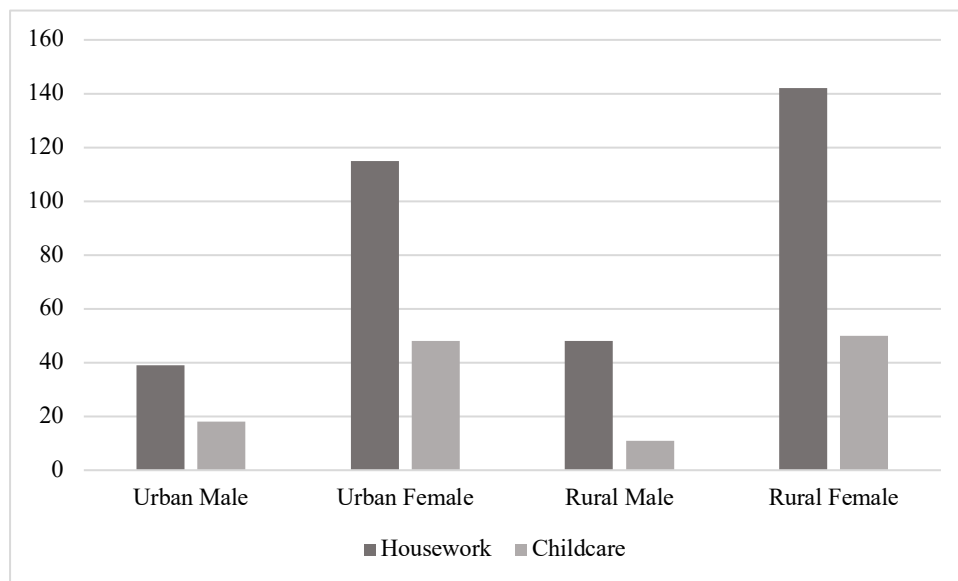
Most political activities require a great investment of time (Schlozman et al., 1994). It is undeniable that the burden of taking care of the family often falls on women, which causes them to lose plenty of free time. As mentioned above, women without jobs are often responsible for farm work, household chores and childcare. However, even women with paid jobs often need to do household work such as cleaning and cooking when they return home after work. This phenomenon is called the second shift which was proposed and promoted by Arlie Hochschild (1989). Although both men and

women experience a second shift, women still tend to do more of the housework. A large number of international surveys on male and female housework allocation were conducted so far. For example, Fox and Lawless (2014) found in the answers of interviewees that 60% of women said they were mainly responsible for taking care of children, while only 6% of men said so, and 43% of women said they did most of the housework, compared with just 7% of men. In rural China, the same phenomenon exists. This part will analyze the disadvantageous situation of rural women in spending discretionary time compared with men and the importance of time investment in Chinese village elections.

According to figures from the National Bureau of Statistics (2018), men devote significantly less time to housework and childcare than women in the whole of China. To be specific, rural women spend nearly 200 minutes a day on housework and childcare, about 150 hours more than rural men (**Figure 1**). Similar surveys were carried out in 2000, and rural women spent an average of 268 minutes a day on laundry, cooking and other household tasks, while men spent only 95 minutes (**Table 5**). We can see that there has been no significant decrease in the amount of time rural women spend on housework over the past 20 years or so and the distribution of housework time between men and women in a household is still unfair, especially in rural areas. The research conclusion of Lu, Maume and Bellas (2000) also pointed out that in rural China, there was a more serious inequality in housework distribution between men and women. They conclude that urban men spend more time buying food, preparing food and doing laundry than their rural counterparts. A person's free

time in a day can be considered 24 hours minus paid work hours minus unpaid work hours. As mentioned in the economics part, not many rural women have paid jobs, while most men have their own paid jobs. Although men spend less time on housework, is it possible that men and women in rural China have the same amount of free time? That is not the case. In rural areas, men have about 40 minutes more free time than women, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2018) National Time Use Survey Bulletin. Therefore, these pieces of evidence show that women in rural China are at an absolute disadvantage in terms of free time.

Figure 1: Distribution of unpaid labour time by minutes



Source: The National Bureau of Statistics (2018)

Table 5: Distribution of household time among rural workers in 2000 by minute

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>Cooking</i>	23	111

<i>Cleaning</i>	17	73
<i>Other housework</i>	55	84

Source: The National Bureau of Statistics (2004)

Time is one of the main costs of political engagement. In rural areas of China, people who participate in politics can be divided into three groups: those who only vote, those who run for election as candidates, and those who are successfully elected as members of the village committee. First of all, voters actually spend more time than just putting their ballot in the box. There are two main ways to elect members of the village committees: holding an election meeting or setting up a polling station so that villagers can vote freely on the same day. In addition to the necessary time to attend electoral conventions and go to polling stations, early consideration of voting options is essential if villagers would like to achieve effective participation in politics. In order to vote effectively, villagers need to learn about not only the public issues that need to be addressed but also the personality and political goals of the candidates. Secondly, the time investment required to participate in an election as a candidate is more complicated. As mentioned above, in order to encourage villagers to vote for themselves, candidates would basically hold election campaigns, including election speeches and mobilization meetings (O'Brien & Han, 2009). In addition to this public solicitation, it is also common in rural China to solicit votes privately from relatives and friends. Zhao (2018) pointed out that most of the villagers would choose to vote for those who had a good relationship with them or could bring them the most

benefits. Hence, not only do candidates need to spend time promoting their leadership and governance skills, but they also need to spend a great time networking, both before and after the election. Thirdly, the effort during the election is the premise of success as a member of the village committee, and after being elected as a member of the village committee, it is necessary to perform the corresponding leadership responsibilities which would cost much more time. Village committees are mainly responsible for specific public affairs, such as protecting villagers' basic rights and interests, and managing and supervising the construction of public infrastructure.

Meanwhile, women elected to the village committees are usually assigned to do some complicated chores, such as family planning, which requires door-to-door visits and is very time-consuming (Song, 2016; Wang & Dai, 2013). Therefore, in rural elections, different degrees of political participation requires a certain amount of time. The higher the degree of participation, the more time is needed. Villagers who want to participate in public administration, in particular, spend more time.

In conclusion, time is one of the reasons that hinder rural women from participating in politics. Rural women do a large proportion of unpaid work in the home, such as housework and childcare, resulting in less free time for women than for men.

Moreover, in village elections, whether it is just to participate in politics as a voter or to participate in the management of rural affairs, the consumption of time is essential. Huang (2018) pointed out in the study that 41% of the female respondents said they did not have enough time and energy to participate in politics. Therefore, unequal

distribution of household chores leads to insufficient time for women to participate in politics, which is also one of the reasons for the low participation rate of rural women.

Civic Skills

Civic skills are essential for entering the political arena and playing a role in the decision-making process. Civic skill refers to the ability that enables people to effectively use time and energy and other resources to participate in politics, mainly including communication, organization and leadership skills (Schlozman et al., 1994). In village elections in China, specific civic skills can include the ability to understand electoral rules and political issues, organize meetings, speak in public, communicate with villagers and make decisions. This part mainly assesses evidence of the relatively weak and insufficient civic skills of rural women in China and tries to figure out how it leads to the low participation rate of women in village elections.

Civic skills are mainly developed through education at home and school, or through experience in the workplace and other types of organizational activities (Paxton & Hughes, 2017). As can be seen from the previous part of the paper, rural women's education level is usually lower than that of men, and the proportion of women who participate in paid jobs is not high. Therefore, rural women have relatively few ways to cultivate and learn civic skills. Schlozman et al. (1994) pointed out that participating in community activities can also improve women's civic skills and thus significantly increase their political participation rate. Community activities refer to activities about entertainment, culture and health organized by interest groups.

However, in most Chinese villages, there are few interest groups because economic

development and infrastructure construction are still the main goals of most villages in China (Wang & Dai, 2013). In addition, compared with some countries with strong religious beliefs, where meeting in the church can also be regarded as a community activity, most of the rural areas in China do not have such facilities as churches but are more small temples for praying, which is not a suitable place to hold activities. Paxton and Hughes (2017) emphasized that although community participation is meaningful to improve civic skills, women with education and paid work background have a more obvious advantage because education and work experience could greatly affect the ability to receive and digest politics related information.

Interview carried out by Wang and Dai (2013) with rural women in Rudong County included an investigation of villagers' civic skills. Before the election, a series of activities usually will be held in the village so that the villagers could know about the voting rules and information about candidates, such as announcing the establishment of an election committee, discussing and publishing the election rules and holding campaigns activities of the candidates. The interview data of Wang and Dai (2013) pointed out that only one-fifth of the female villagers surveyed said they took part in all such election-related activities, while one-fifth of the women said they never took part in these activities at all; 58% of women did not know the candidates' positions and strengths at all, and only 6% said they knew related law and candidates very well. This data shows that most rural women lack an understanding of election rules and political issues and thus participate in politics in a superficial way, while an in-depth understanding of electoral rules and candidates is an important part of civic skills.

Civic skills act a critical part in any form of political participation, and they can be applied to every stage of elections in rural China. First of all, knowing the rules of the election can be said to be the basic threshold to participate in the election. The more knowledgeable people are about electoral rules, the more likely they are to participate in politics because they understand the means and significance of their votes. If rural women do not understand or even do not want to understand the rules of the election, the only way they can participate in politics is to vote without knowing, and they cannot participate in politics further, such as becoming a candidate for village committees. Secondly, communication, organization and leadership skills are essential during and after elections. For example, these skills can be applied to rural decision-making and public opinion gathering. Moreover, good civic skills can make candidates gain more trust from villagers and thus have a greater chance to succeed in leadership roles.

At the end of this section, due to disadvantages in education and job opportunities and lack of community activities in villages, rural women do not have an easy chance to command civic skills, which results in women seldom participating in politics or only engaging in a superficial way. Fortunately, in some areas, the various branches of the All-China Women's Federation have begun to train women specifically for leadership positions in village affairs, enabling them to play a greater role in village affairs management and increasing the number of women studying or working. As a result, rural women are becoming more confident and forward-looking which could be beneficial for their political participation.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper studies the reasons behind the current situation of women's poor participation in village elections in rural China by analyzing the existing data and literature. The result of research confirms that both cultural factors represented by Confucianism and external social structural factors will lead to the low participation of rural women in village elections. Confucianism affects men's attitude toward women and women's attitude toward themselves, which not only dampens women's motivation and enthusiasm for politics but also restrict their access to politics. Moreover, compared with men, women have disadvantages in social structural aspects including economic power, education, time and civic skill which is significant for improving the frequency and performance of political participation so that rural women have fewer opportunities and weaker abilities to actively engage in the process of village elections.

Although this paper presents the possible factors that hinder the political engagement of rural women in China, it still has limitations that can give rise to future research.

Firstly, the factors that impede women's political participation listed are related to some extent, but this paper does not further study and explain the interaction between these factors, for example, women with higher education levels would not be easily influenced by traditional feudal culture, but the feudal culture, in turn, causes the difficulty for rural women to receive education; A high level of education makes it easier for women to find paid jobs, while a good level of education and equal job opportunities make rural women acquire better civic skills. It is meaningful for

scholars to study the complex interaction between these factors and their influence on women. Secondly, this paper uses second-hand data collected from the interview carried out in various regions and different years thus the data consistency of the whole article is not very accurate. The current cases of rural women's political participation in China are still not an academic field that has received enough attention. The researchers and investigators can pay more attention to the political inequality faced by rural women. New and comprehensive surveys would play a significant role in improving women's performance in village elections.

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