

Changes in Gender Ideology -The Analysis on “Iron Girl” and “Four Times Unsuccessful Housewifization”

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Research Background

Since May Fourth movement gave rise to discourses on women's liberation, the discussions on ways of liberating women has never been stopped. Although the rise of the feminist movement in the May Fourth era had great influence on the acceptance of gender equality by the public. Yet whether the idea of gender equality indeed improved women's lives remains an open question. Especially the ongoing debate on “whether women should go home” attracts many scholars' attention.

There are two typical understanding of ways to liberate women. First is based on socialist Marxism theory: women are equal to men in all standards, women can do everything that men can do. Women should come out of private sphere and join social production to gain economic independence, so that they can fight for their rights to achieve gender equality. Another is originated from Feminism theory: women and men are different, such kind of difference should be accepted and women's liberation need to be built upon the base of such recognition. Such kind of dichotomous understandings both existed in the social development in China since 1950. First is the creation of “Iron Girl” during 1950 to 1980. Under the slogan of “everyone needs to work”, the labor distribution mechanism was built in planned economy period. Over 61% of female labor were assigned to work in State-owned company, especially in industrial business. Government encourages women to work in heavy industry and heavy physical labor department. However, with the development of marketization in China after 1980, gender ideology gradually changes, housewives emerged as a new phenomenon in Chinese society. How to understand this dramatic change in gender ideology? How does this change reflect the institutional, structural, and cultural changes in China? How does it influence the changes in family in China?

Research Method

This paper aims to discuss the impact of different social mechanisms on gender inequality by analyzing the modernization process in China in both planned economy period and market transition period. The main content of this paper will be constructed by discussing the construction of “Iron Girl” image and the “Four-times unsuccessful housewifization” (Women Going Home/Let Women Go Home).

First, through rethinking the “Iron Girl” image, this paper will argue about the cost and result of constructing such image. Second, by examining “four times unsuccessful housewifization” in China. This article analyzes the purpose, result and the gender mechanism behind it. In later parts, by comparing “Iron Girl” and “four times unsuccessful housewifization”, this study discusses how changes in gender ideology in different period influenced by social mechanism, and under the only-child policy, how is it impact on current family structure in China.

Results

Frist, the changes happen in two periods were influenced by social mechanism. In planned economy period, gender ideology is shaped by Mao's policy which based on Marxism theory. However, later in market transition period, gender ideology gradually influenced by western capitalism.

Second, the changes in gender ideology created barriers between the old “Iron Girl” type of women and new “housewives”, how to make policies to protect both of them became a new challenge for Chinese government.

Key words: gender ideology, iron girl, housewife.