

## PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

### 1. Discriminatory family code

China's Marriage Law was amended in 2001.<sup>1</sup> The **legal age of marriage** is 20 years for women and 22 years for men, and the law stipulates that all marriages should be based on mutual consent and equality.<sup>2</sup> Still, traditions of arranged and patrilocal marriages – meaning that the couple usually lives near or with the husband's family - remain common in much of rural China.<sup>3</sup> United Nations figures from 2010 estimate that 2.1% of Chinese girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced or widowed: as compared with 0.6% of boys.<sup>4</sup>

Under the amended Marriage Act, **parental authority** is shared equally.<sup>5</sup> In the event of divorce, the parent who is not awarded custody has a legal right to maintain contact with his or her children, as well as a legal responsibility to provide financial support to their ex-spouse and children, if such support is needed.<sup>6</sup> It would appear that custody decisions by the court are made in the best interests of the child, and the US State Department has reported that determinations are made based on the following guidelines: children under age 2 should live with their mothers; children of 2 to 9 years of age should live with the parent with the most stable living arrangement; and children of 10 years of age and over should be consulted when determining custody.<sup>7</sup>

Today, women in China are guaranteed equal **inheritance** rights under the Inheritance Law.<sup>8</sup> However, research by the Asian Development Bank has found that there is still a significant gap between legislation and reality in northern rural China, where daughters often lose their statutory rights to inherit to their brothers.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the FAO reports that in practice, a daughter who marries out of the native village is regarded as a non-member of the household and thus deprived of the right to inherit the land-use rights left by her deceased parents.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, amended April 2001, cited CEDAW (2004), p.6

<sup>2</sup> The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, amended April 2001, Articles 2, 3, 5 and 6

<sup>3</sup> ADB (2006), p.4

<sup>4</sup> UN (2012)

<sup>5</sup> CEDAW (2004), p.62

<sup>6</sup> The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, amended April 2001, Articles 38 and 42 cited in CEDAW (2004), p.62

<sup>7</sup> US State Department (2013)

<sup>8</sup> Law of Succession of the People's Republic of China, adopted 1 October 1985; Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women, 1992

<sup>9</sup> ADB (2006), pp. 4, 41

<sup>10</sup> FAO (2006)

## **More**

Widely practiced among certain sections of pre-communist society, bigamy and **polygamy** became illegal in China shortly after the 1949 revolution with the promulgation of the 1950 Marriage Act.<sup>11</sup> However, according to the 2004 report of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), these practices continued and even began to grow in popularity, prompting the Government to revise the Marriage Law in 2001 to strengthen sanctions against polygamy and concubinage.<sup>12</sup> No official figures are available on how many women are living in polygamous relationships today.

## **2. Restricted physical integrity**

Amendments to the Marriage Law in 2001 and the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights in 2005 incorporated provisions that prohibit **domestic violence**,<sup>13</sup> and in 2008 the Institute of Applied Laws under the Supreme People's Court issued a trial Guidance on Marital Cases Involving Domestic Violence, providing for protection orders.<sup>14</sup> The Government also reports that 28 out of the country's 31 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) have promulgated local anti-domestic violence laws and regulations.<sup>15</sup> However, some experts complain that the stipulations are too general, fail to define domestic violence, and are difficult to implement. For example, the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests 1992 prohibits domestic violence but does not prescribe a punishment for offenders.<sup>16</sup> The US State Department also reports that the standard of evidence requires that, in order to be convicted, the abuser must confess to the crime, even if the judge is certain that domestic violence has occurred.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in 2013 the Chinese Supreme People's Court conducted a review of the anti-domestic violence legislation, finding that the lack of a clear guidance on the conditions under which investigations and prosecutions should be initiated resulted in extremely few investigations and prosecutions, as well as unreasonably light punishments for those cases that do come before the courts.<sup>18</sup>

In an effort to strengthen sanctions against domestic violence, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) has been advocating for the promulgation of a dedicated anti-domestic violence law, submitting a first draft to the National People's Congress in 2011. In 2013, the bill was submitted for the fifth time, although there is still no indication of when the law would be passed.<sup>19</sup> Public support has also increased in the fight against domestic violence. A recent survey found that more than 85% of respondents believed that further anti-domestic violence legislation was needed.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> CEDAW (2004), p.60

<sup>12</sup> CEDAW (2004), pp.60-61

<sup>13</sup> The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, amended April 2001, Article 43 cited in CEDAW (2004)

<sup>14</sup> Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal (2012), p.5

<sup>15</sup> CEDAW (2013), p.25

<sup>16</sup> Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal (2012), p.2

<sup>17</sup> People's Daily (n.d)

<sup>18</sup> HRW (2013)

<sup>19</sup> All China Women's Federation (ACWF) (2013)

<sup>20</sup> ACWF (2012)

In order to prevent domestic violence and assist victims, the Government reported to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2012 that more than 10,000 police stations and community policing offices have been established, as well as helplines and emergency accommodation.<sup>21</sup> According to the All China Women's Federation's (ACWF) statistics, nationwide in 2008 there were 400 shelters and 350 examination centres for victims of domestic violence.<sup>22</sup> However in practice, the US State Department reports that many of these services have inadequate facilities, require extensive documentation, or were generally unused.<sup>23</sup>

There are no official figures on the rates of domestic violence in China. According to a survey conducted from 199-2000, 15% of women reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>24</sup> In addition, according to a different survey, only 7% of rural women who said that they had experienced domestic violence reported going to the police for help;<sup>25</sup> and rural women were twice as likely to suffer physical assaults as women living in urban areas.<sup>26</sup> There is also some evidence that these figures may not represent the full extent of the problem. According to a 2013 UN survey, the proportion of men who reported ever having perpetrated physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime was 51.5%, while 38.7% of women surveyed said they had experienced intimate partner violence.<sup>27</sup> Overall, the survey found that physical violence is more common than sexual violence in China.<sup>28</sup>

**Rape** is a criminal offence in China,<sup>29</sup> although there is no specific crime of marital rape.<sup>30</sup> The Government does not publish official statistics on rape or sexual assault, making the scale of sexual violence difficult to determine.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, it appears that rape remains a problem in China, with migrant women being particularly vulnerable.<sup>32</sup> In its report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Government of China reported that in 2009, 26,404 cases of rape were solved by the police. However, this may represent only a fraction of the actual cases. A 2013 comprehensive UN survey reports that 22.2% of men surveyed admitted to committing rape in their lifetimes; with 8.1% admitting to have committed rape of a non-partner<sup>33</sup>, and 2.2% to gang rape of a non-partner.<sup>34</sup> The most common motivation given by respondents for having committed rape was sexual entitlement.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> CEDAW (2013), p.24

<sup>22</sup> US State Department (2013)

<sup>23</sup> US State Department (2013)

<sup>24</sup> OECD (2014), Gender, Institutions and Development Database, <http://stats.oecd.org>

<sup>25</sup> US State Department (2011)

<sup>26</sup> ACWF (2013c)

<sup>27</sup> UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, UNV (2013), p.29

<sup>28</sup> UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, UNV (2013), p.30

<sup>29</sup> US State Department (2013)

<sup>30</sup> UN Women (2011), Annex 4

<sup>31</sup> CEDAW (2013)

<sup>32</sup> US State Department (2013)

<sup>33</sup> UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, UNV (2013), p.40

<sup>34</sup> UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, UNV (2013), p.45

<sup>35</sup> UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, UNV (2013), p.45

Amendments to the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights in 2005 included provisions banning **sexual harassment**, making the wrongdoer subject to administrative penalties as well as civil claims.<sup>36</sup> Since then, the number of complaints of sexual harassment has increased significantly, according to the US Department of State.<sup>37</sup> However, the problem appears to go largely unaddressed by the courts. For example, the ILO cites a survey conducted by Women's Watch-China, showing that 23.9% of employees who responded had heard of, or seen, colleagues suffer sexual harassment, and 19.8% had been sexually harassed themselves.<sup>38</sup> Although the same survey found that fewer than 20% of victims called the police or took civil action. There are no official figures on the numbers of perpetrators successfully prosecuted.

There is no evidence to suggest that **female genital mutilation** (FGM) is practised in China.

### ***More***

**Trafficking** of women and children for sexual exploitation has been reported as a significant problem in China. Due to the lack of official figures, it is difficult to ascertain how many trafficking cases the government has actually investigated and prosecuted. However, trafficking organizations estimate that China is a significant destination country for victims from outside the country; as well as a source of internal trafficking trade from rural to urban centres.<sup>39</sup> The US State Department reports that the skewed overall sex ratio of boys to girls of marriageable age in China, linked to the Chinese government's birth limitation policy and a cultural preference for sons, has served as a key source of demand for the trafficking of foreign women as brides and for forced prostitution: citing the example of girls from the Tibet Autonomous Region reportedly trafficked to other parts of China for domestic servitude and forced marriage.<sup>40</sup> China has written anti-trafficking language and provisions into seven different national laws that aim to combat abduction and forced prostitution of women and young girls. However, the wide scope of the problem makes it difficult to implement and enforce these provisions.<sup>41</sup> Overall the US State Department's 2013 Trafficking in Persons Report has deemed China to have made insufficient efforts to fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, and has categorized it as a Tier 3 country (the lowest designation).<sup>42</sup> Although the Government reported to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that it had put in place numerous anti-trafficking policies and victims' services<sup>43</sup>, law enforcement and judicial officials reportedly continue to punish forced prostitution victims and expel foreign victims in violation of immigration law.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> ILO (2013), p.48

<sup>37</sup> US State Department (2013)

<sup>38</sup> ILO (2013), p.14

<sup>39</sup> US State Department (2013b), p.130

<sup>40</sup> US State Department (2013b), p.129

<sup>41</sup> CEDAW (2004), pp. 18-23; ADB (2006), pp. 35-37

<sup>42</sup> CEDAW (2004), pp. 18-23; ADB (2006), pp. 35-37

<sup>43</sup> CEDAW (2013), p.26

<sup>44</sup> US State Department (2013b), p.130

**Abortion** is available on request in China.<sup>45</sup> The US State Department cites a National Population and Family Planning Commission reported that 13 million women annually underwent abortions caused by unplanned pregnancies.<sup>46</sup> Women and men have equal rights to use and access information about contraception, and the State has a legal responsibility to provide family planning services. As such, there is a comprehensive network of family planning and reproductive health clinics across the country.<sup>47</sup> In 2012 the Government reported that 85% of women of childbearing age used some form of contraception.<sup>48</sup> However, under the one-child policy, couples do not have the right to choose the number of children they wish to have. The 2002 National Population and Family-planning Law (which replaced earlier legislation) stipulates that couples may only have a second child if they reach certain criteria (e.g. if both parents are themselves only children), although the way the law is applied varies significantly.<sup>49</sup> According to the US Department of State, in urban areas it is strictly enforced, whereas in rural areas, implementation is more relaxed, with couples generally permitted to have a second child if the first is a girl.<sup>50</sup> Couples who had an unapproved child faced disciplinary measures such as social compensation fees (which can be as much as 10 times the person's annual disposable income), job loss or demotion, loss of promotion opportunity, expulsion from the Communist Party (membership is an unofficial requirement for certain jobs), and other administrative punishments, including in some cases the destruction of private property.<sup>51</sup> In some provinces, regulations requiring women who violate family-planning policy to terminate their pregnancies or undergo unspecified "remedial measures" to deal with unauthorized pregnancies still exist.<sup>52</sup> It is also reported that intense pressure to meet birth-limitation targets set by government regulations resulted in instances of local family-planning officials' using coercion, such as mandatory use of birth control and forced sterilization.<sup>53</sup> These one-child policies, combined with a social preference for sons, are also reported to result in sex-selective abortions, where women may be forced by their family or community to have an abortion when it is discovered that they are carrying a female foetus.<sup>54</sup> In almost all provinces, it is illegal for an unmarried woman to give birth, and doing so can result in a fine.<sup>55</sup>

### 3. Son bias

China has an abnormally high ratio of men to women in its population.<sup>56</sup> The **sex ratio** at birth is 1.12 male-to-female; which increases to 1.17 male(s)/female for children 0-14 years.<sup>57</sup> The sex-ratio for the working age population (15-64) is 1.06. This is primarily the result of a

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<sup>45</sup> UN Women (2011), Annex 4

<sup>46</sup> US State Department (2013)

<sup>47</sup> CEDAW (2013), p.46

<sup>48</sup> CEDAW (2013), p.46

<sup>49</sup> US State Department (2011)

<sup>50</sup> US State Department (2013)

<sup>51</sup> US State Department (2011)

<sup>52</sup> US State Department (2013)

<sup>53</sup> US State Department (2013)

<sup>54</sup> CESCR (2005), paragraph 36

<sup>55</sup> US State Department (2013)

<sup>56</sup> World Bank (2012), p.77

<sup>57</sup> CIA (2013)

combination of the one-child policy and skewed economic growth, which has been linked to a social preference for sons that in turn has resulted in female sex-selective abortions, female infanticide or general neglect of girls in early childhood.<sup>58</sup> While these practices are more prevalent in rural areas, they are also increasing in urban centres.<sup>59</sup> A United Nations multi-agency publication reports that, in one survey in rural China, 36% of married women acknowledged undergoing sex-selective abortions.<sup>60</sup> While there is some evidence of a gradual shift in attitudes<sup>61</sup>, women in China continue to face enormous pressure to give birth to sons, particularly in rural areas.

The abnormally high sex ratio data across age groups, the highest in South East Asia,<sup>62</sup> indicates that China is a country of still very high concern in relation to **missing women**, exacerbated by the one-child policy, although it has been improving. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports that as of 2007, China had approximately 42.6 million missing women and numbers increased in absolute terms;<sup>63</sup> with over one million missing in 2008 alone.<sup>64</sup>

### **More**

The Chinese government has taken measures to try and address this imbalance and reduce son bias. These include provisions in the 2002 National Population and Family-planning Law banning the use of ultrasounds to determine the sex of a foetus, and sex-selective abortions, as well as mistreatment and abandonment of female infants, and discrimination against women who give birth to girls.<sup>65</sup> The Government also reports that it has instituted national and local-level campaigns to encourage people to change their attitudes regarding the benefits of male over female offspring, and providing financial assistance to couples who only have girl children.<sup>66</sup> However, the US Department of State notes that the bans on misusing ultrasounds to determine the sex of a foetus, and on sex-selective abortion, only carry administrative (rather than criminal) penalties;<sup>67</sup> and a recent evaluation indicated that in some counties the campaign was introduced without local support and contradicted existing social policies such as those relating to land and inheritance rights.<sup>68</sup>

According to UNICEF, net primary school enrolment rates are 100% for boys and girls in China<sup>69</sup>, while secondary school enrolment rates are slightly higher for girls than for boys.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO (2011), p.2; World Bank (2012), p.15

<sup>59</sup> OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO (2011), p.3

<sup>60</sup> OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO (2011), p.2

<sup>61</sup> OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO (2011), p.9

<sup>62</sup> UNDP (2010), p.34

<sup>63</sup> UNDP (2010), p.34

<sup>64</sup> World Bank, p. 78

<sup>65</sup> CEDAW (2013), p.22

<sup>66</sup> CEDAW (2013), p.22

<sup>67</sup> US State Department (2011)

<sup>68</sup> OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO (2011), p.4

<sup>69</sup> UNICEF (2012)

<sup>70</sup> UNICEF (n.d)

#### 4. Restricted resources and assets

While property such as houses can be owned by title deed, land itself in China is not owned by private individuals but rather belongs to the State or collectives who allocate land use rights.<sup>71</sup> Women in China were given legal access to **land** only in 1950. Subsequently, the Marriage Law gave women the right to land within the household unit and the Agrarian Reform Law granted men and women equal right to land in general, while the 1992 Law on Protecting Women's Rights and Interests of the People's Republic of China provides specific protection for contracted land rights.<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately, the effectiveness of these laws has been weakened by the fact that none of these provisions offer a direct cause of action to enforce women's rural land rights.<sup>73</sup> Observers have also noted that ambiguities in the **property** and marriage laws have allowed village leaders to reassert traditional social norms and deny constitutional equal rights guarantees for women.<sup>74</sup> UNDP reports that in rural China, women constitute an estimated 70% of those without access to their own land under the family land use allotment system.<sup>75</sup> Customary practices, which consider sons the natural heirs of land, are still prevalent in much of rural China.<sup>76</sup> Rural patrilocal residential patterns, whereby a married woman is expected to live in her husband's house, also remain the norm in China, leaving a woman who marries and moves away vulnerable to being dispossessed of her pre-existing property.<sup>77</sup> China enacted the 2003 Rural Land Contract Law in part to remedy this, by legally guaranteeing a woman's share of land in her natal village upon marriage or in her marital village upon divorce or widowhood.<sup>78</sup> However, in practice, this law is not always enforced in rural areas, where local collectives charged with administering land contracts generally apply the custom that if a woman marries outside of her village, the land that had been allocated to her will be redistributed to other members of the village<sup>79</sup>, or assigned to her parents or brothers through an informal intra-household transaction.<sup>80</sup> A wife's right to the acquired marital property is also insecure, especially upon divorce. In 2011, the Supreme Court's issued an interpretation of the Marriage Law stipulating that property bought before marriage reverted to the buyer on divorce, where the family home had previously been considered joint property.<sup>81</sup> It has been reported that this change will favour men's property rights and leave women especially vulnerable, since men traditionally provide the family home.<sup>82</sup>

In urban areas the challenge to women's enjoyment of equal access to property is different. Most houses or apartments tend to be registered under the head of the household, who is typically the male, even though specific provisions exists for joint registration of property

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<sup>71</sup> World bank (2013), p.4

<sup>72</sup> Liaw (2008), p.238

<sup>73</sup> Liaw (2008), p.244

<sup>74</sup> Liaw (2008), p.237

<sup>75</sup> UNDP (2010), p.50

<sup>76</sup> ADB (2006), p.4

<sup>77</sup> Liaw (2008), p.237

<sup>78</sup> FAO (n.d)

<sup>79</sup> World Bank (2013), p.4

<sup>80</sup> FAO (2006)

<sup>81</sup> New York Times (2011)

<sup>82</sup> New York Times (2011); US State Department (2013)

titles.<sup>83</sup> As a result, just one third of Chinese women own property compared to more than two thirds of men.<sup>84</sup> Recent changes have sought to remedy this by eliminating the taxes otherwise due on registering a second name on a title deed; however it is too soon to tell whether this reform promotes wider joint ownership by married couples.<sup>85</sup>

There are no legal provisions that discriminate against women in terms of access to **financial services**, including bank loans, although in practice women still face some restrictions due to poverty and lack of assets.<sup>86</sup> An increasing number of credit institutions and organisations target women clients, some by helping unemployed women start their own businesses, others by providing benefits to women farmers.<sup>87</sup> In addition, it was reported that the government has implemented a policy of interest-subsidized, small-sum, guaranteed loans for women in order to clear the capital bottleneck faced by urban and rural women wanting to start a business.<sup>88</sup> The World Bank estimates that 27.4% of women applied for loans in 2011, compared to 31.2% of men; and that 60% of women held accounts at financial institutions, compared to 67.5% of men.<sup>89</sup>

## 5. Restricted civil liberties

There are no legal restrictions on women's **access to public space** or right to choose their place of domicile, according to the 2004 UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) report.<sup>90</sup> Freedom of speech, assembly and association are all restricted in China, although Freedom House reports that despite government restrictions, the non-government sector continues to grow, providing crucial social services as well as increasing citizens' awareness of their rights.<sup>91</sup> Women's rights NGOs are active in providing support to victims of violence against women as well as in other areas, while the All China Women's Federation (ACWF) is the main non-government agency promoting women's rights, although it enjoys the support of the ruling Communist party.<sup>92</sup>

Within the Chinese system, the overall proportion of women in politics is low.<sup>93</sup> There is no **quota** for women at the national or sub-national levels. In most cases it is the party who chooses who is nominated to stand for election to the National Congress. As of March 2013, women comprised 23.4% of almost 3000 seats in the National Congress.<sup>94</sup> Women held few positions of real power outside of Congress. Following the 2008 elections, women currently hold the top position in only three of the country's 27 ministries.<sup>95</sup> At the local level, the government

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<sup>83</sup> World Bank (2013), p.4

<sup>84</sup> World Bank (2013), p.4

<sup>85</sup> World Bank (2013), p.4

<sup>86</sup> ADB (2006), pp. 6, 16-18

<sup>87</sup> CEDAW (2004), pp. 49-50, 55-57

<sup>88</sup> ACWF (2013d)

<sup>89</sup> World Bank (n.d)

<sup>90</sup> CEDAW (2004), p.59

<sup>91</sup> Freedom House (2013)

<sup>92</sup> CEDAW (2013)

<sup>93</sup> CEDAW (2013)

<sup>94</sup> IPU (2013)

<sup>95</sup> CEDAW (2013), p.31

encouraged women's political participation by reserving a seat on most local village committees and the Government reports that the proportion of rural women in villagers committees has increased, from 15.1% in 2004 to 21.5% in 2009.<sup>96</sup>

***More***

Women in China are provided with 90 days of paid **maternity leave** at 100% of their pay, which is financed out of the national social security system.<sup>97</sup> Maternity benefits consist of a maternity allowance, health care and a pay that is fixed at the level of the enterprise's monthly average in the previous year.<sup>98</sup> However local NGOs report that pregnant women, particularly in rural areas, can suffer discrimination as a result of their pregnancies, including employment being illegally terminated during pregnancy or while the woman is on maternity leave.<sup>99</sup>

Women have the same right as men to pass Chinese **citizenship** on to their children.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> CEDAW (2013), p.31

<sup>97</sup> ILO (2013)

<sup>98</sup> UNDP (2010), p.60

<sup>99</sup> CRR (2006), pp.3-5

<sup>100</sup> CEDAW (2012), pp. 33.

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