Renegotiating Gender and Power: Women's Organizations and Networks in Politics

– The China Women Mayors' Association

Qi Wang*

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Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies
Lund University, Sweden

www.ace.lu.se

*Research Fellow at the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University 2002-2003.
Currently lecturer at the Department of East Asian Studies, University of Aarhus, Denmark,
ostqw@hum.au.dk.

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Abstract

This paper studies the process of organizing by women in politics in post-Mao China. Since the midst 1980s and earlier 1990s women's organizations and networks have proliferated at various levels within the Chinese cadre force. Along with the rise of popular women's organizations in civil society, the wave of organizing by women in politics has gained momentum.

The paper focuses on the Women Mayors' Association, a nation-wide organization for women officials of mayoral rank founded in 1991, and examines the significance of women's organizing in relation to women's identity and roles in politics, gender relations in politics as well as feminist gender politics.

In the paper, the formation and activities of the Women Mayors' Association is examined within the context of the post-Mao discourses of gender difference, national modernity and population quality. The paper analyzes: 1). How women's role in politics became an intensively contested site in the post-Mao reconceptualization of gender and human quality and how women mayors organized themselves to deal with the new challenges they are facing as women; 2). How organizing has generated empowerment effects, enabling women mayors to express gender identity, articulate/discuss gender-specific interest and concerns, renegotiate gender relations and resource allocation in politics; 3). How organizing has borne consequences for the prospect of feminist gender politics.

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Introduction

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s women's organizations and networks in politics have emerged and proliferated in China (Wang, 2002; Feng, 1997). By 1997, the number of women's organizations registered by the Ministry of Civil Affairs has exceeded 3500. Among these are organizations of women lawyers, police, judges, entrepreneurs, journalists, and academics (Feng, 1997; Howell, 1996; 1998). In the political arena, there is a tennis team of women ministers (Zhang, 1995) and an organization of women mayors. Besides, almost every provinces and major cities have installed a Women Cadres Society at different rank levels (Ma, interview).[1] Along with the rise of women's popular organizations in civil society (Hsiung et al, 2001a; Perry, 2001; Milwertz, 2002), the wave of organizing and networking by women in politics has gained momentum.[2]

This paper examines the formation, function and significance of these women's organizations in politics by focusing on the Women Mayors' Association. The primary theoretic concern of this paper is Chinese women's role in politics in the post-Mao economic and political transformation, especially in the backdrop of changing gender relations in Chinese society and within the context changing political discourses. Two trends of development form a departure point of this paper.

The first is the 're-creation of gender order' (Watson, 1993) in post-Mao China. As a result of either serious feminist theorization (Barlow, 1994; Li Xiaojiang, 1988, 1994) or marketization and consumer culture (Yang, 1999; Hooper, 1994, 1998; Johnsson, 1998; Croll, 1995; Dai, 1999), the discourse of gender difference has replaced the notion of gender 'sameness' that prevailed in the socialist period. Women, in the post-Mao political discourses, are no longer defined as the "same" of but rather "different" from men. The second concerns the rise of the modernization, modern human quality discourse and the implication of this discourse in interpreting social reality, gender relations and gender-based inequality. Women's underprivileged status in society, according to the discourse, is a reflection of their 'low quality' (Howell, 2002) and only quality improvement can facilitate a change of women's *status quo*. The discourses outline a new ideological and cultural paradigm, within which women's role in politics is contested, redefined, and reinterpreted (Wang, 1999).

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[1] The term "cadre" is a general appellation for state officials and often implies leader and leadership. For more about the term, see David S.G. Goodman, The Localism of Local Leadership Cadres in Reform Shanxi, Journal of Contemporary China, 2000, 9 (24): 159-183.

[2] The term "women in politics" in this paper refers loosely to women in responsible positions.

The paper explores how women in politics respond to the change of their condition, as described above, what challenges they face, what opportunities they can grab, and whether organizations and networks by women in politics constitute a means of respond and renegotiation. The inquiry draws partially on the theory about totality transformation and particular transformation. In an anthology on women and post-communism Funk outlines a striking contrast between the development of post-communist women's activities and the second wave of the U.S. women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s. In the United Stats 'the totality changed through the transformation of the particular (women, blacks, gays, etc.)', whereas 'in Eastern and Central Europe and the former USSR, it was the transformation of the totality that created the possibility for a transformation by the particular' (Funk, 1993:1). To a large extent, the post-Mao reform in China also constitutes such a process in which the transformation of the totality propelled the transformation by the particular (such as women). How the totality transformation posed new constrains and at the same time opened up new options for women in politics remains a central focus of this paper.

The inquiry partially draws on the theory of individual coping strategy Chunghee Sarah Soh has developed in her study on changing male-female relations in Korean society (Soh, 1993). Soh distinguishes between 'social structure', e.g. a set of ideal principles and norms of behavior, and 'social organization', e.g. the process of ordering of action and of relations in reference to given social ends, in terms of adjustments resulting from the exercise of choices of members of the society (ibid. 39). According to Soh, Korean women and men "tend to organize their everyday life by compartmentalizing the arena of social action (….) and oscillate between egalitarian and traditional sexist attitudes in accordance with shifting interactional situations, relying on their good nunch'i (tact)" (ibid. 46). Accordingly, it has remained a characteristic individual strategy for women parliamentarians in Korea to exercise tact so as "to behave in ways appropriate to her gender" (ibid. 39). Drawing on Soh's theory, this paper looks into how women in leadership positions in China cope with contradicting gender ideologies (the socialist ideology of gender equality and the essentialist/conservative ideology of gender difference) and struggle to achieve both career success and gender appropriateness.

The Women Mayors' Association was founded in 1991. The rational behind choosing the WMA case include: first, the WMA maintains 480 members (as of 2001), who account for 10.9% of the entire mayor corps in China (as of 1998). With this rather large membership, the WMA case gives a

substantial quantitative basis for analysis. Second, the WMA members are heads of municipalities at middle or high levels, depending on the rank status of their cites. It is thus a case at a reasonable high level. Third, the WMA is a nationwide organization operating across the country, which gives a solid ground for generalization. Fourth, the WMA is not only one of the earliest but also one of the well-functioned women-based organizations in politics. By virtue of its routines and functional regularity, the WMA is able to produce data richness for research and analysis. Information on the WMA was obtained from my fieldwork research in China in 2000-2002, which resulted in interviews, a questionnaire survey and participant observation as well. [3] The paper consists of six sections:

- Section 1 depicts the rise of women mayors as a group in China;
- Section 2 outlines the post-Mao political discourses and the new challenges and options facing women mayors;
- Section 3 describes the origin and formation of the Women Mayors' Association;
- Section 4 analyzes the WMA as a women's space;
- Section 5 analyzes various activities of the WMA as a means of empowerment;
- Section 6 dwells upon the consequences of organizing.

Urban Development and Women Mayors in China

It is generally believed that in China, like else where in the world, the higher level of the power hierarchy the fewer women there would be. This, however, was not the case in China during the early years of the PRC. At that time, as a matter of fact, women were better represented at the national level than at the middle-level of leadership positions. In my earlier study of women's political recruitment, for instance, I identified a total of twenty-eight women among party-government leading positions at the national level as against only seven at the provincial level for the entire period between 1949 and 1966 (Wang,

[3] The interviews were conducted in the period of March-May 2000, October-December 2000 and May-July 2001 with the participation of 73 informants. The questionnaire survey was carried out in summer 2001 in cooperation with the Sociological Institute, Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences, and the Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association. The number of valid answer is 51. The survey will be referred as 'the 2001 WMA survey' in this paper. The participant observation of the Second Economic Theory Class for Women Mayors took place at the China Mayors Tower in Guangzhou between November 27 and December 3, 2000.

1997). If counting further down to the sub-provincial level, than then the number of women was even scantier.

Table 1. Women in sub-national governments by Level (1949-66)

Level	Number
Provincial governors	0
Vice-governors	2
Mayors	0 *
Vice-mayors	1
Prefecture magistrates	0 *
Vice-magistrates	55 (2.6%)

Source: Editing Committee of "Contemporary China" Series (comp) (1994), *Dangdai zhongguofunü* (Women in Contemporary China), Beijing: Dangdaizhongguo chubanshe.
* No data available

When the CCP took power in 1949 it filled the state and regional bureaucracy with its own people (Goodman, 2000). Revolutionaries from the CCP armies, base areas and underground organizations became the major source of leadership supply and remained as such for a considerable long period of time (Lee, 1991; Oksenberg, 1969; Lampton, 1986). As few women were allowed to join the Amy and develop a political career based on military merits, the CCP victory brought far lesser than enough women into the country's vast political and administrative apparatus. While some handful senior party women earned they themselves a prominent position at the national level by virtue of their life-long commitment to the Party, a new cohort of candidates has to go through the screening process and ascend from below (Wang, 1997). That is why there were fewer women at the provincial and municipal level than at the national level of positions during the early years of the PRC.

The V-shape situation changed in the 1970s. 'The high tide of mass campaigns and the manipulated reinvention of revolutionary struggle during the Cultural Revolution swept women even more deeply into the sea of politics' (Howell, 2002:45), especially into the provincial Revolutionary Committees (Wang, 1997).[4] As a result, women became for the first time

[4] These are equivalents to provincial governments.

better represented at the provincial level than at the national level. For a total of 12 years (1966-78), fifty-nine women were identified among provincial party-government leading positions as against only seventeen at the national level (Wang, 1997).

Women mayors as a group rose in the 1980s. After the ten-year turmoil of the Cultural Revolution ended, urbanization and metropolitan development in China accelerated. In the early stages of the reform period, the official strategy was one of "controlling the growth of the big cities, moderately developing medium-sized cities and actively promoting the growth of small-sized cities" (Chan and Yao, 1999:269). In 1986, rural urbanization was advocated as a means of containing the out-migration of rural peasants to big cities. As a result, the rate of urban growth increased at an alarming pace (ibid.). The total number of cities in China, as shown in the table below, has jumped from 188 in 1976 to 353 in 1986 and then to 668 in 1997.

Table 2. Cities in China

Year	Number
1948	58
1949	136
1952	160
1957	177
1960	199
1961	208
1964	169
1970	176
1976	188
1986	353
1994	622
1997	668

Source: Editing Committee of "Contemporary China" Series (comp) (1990), *Dangdaizhongguo de chengshijianshe* (Urban Development in China), Beijing: Zhongguoshehuikexue chubanshe.
Roger C.K.Chan & Yao Shimou (1999), Urbanization and Sustainable Metropolitan Development in China: Patterns, Problems and Prospects, *GeoJournal* 49, 269-277.

The number of mayors and deputy mayors per city in China varies between 5 and 10 (The Secretariat of the China Mayors' Association, 1998). Thanks to the ongoing public debates on women's political participation and the increasing international input in China's run-up to the UN Fourth World

Conference on Women (FWCW), the sudden decline of women's representation in the early 1980s was identified as a problem which requires political will and government intervention (Wang, 1991). The Program for the Development of Chinese Women (1995-2000), for instance, stipulated 'to have women in government leading posts at all levels' (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 1995), whereas coordinated efforts by the Party, the government and the ACWF have been made long before the FWCW to install an acceptable gender ratio in various levels of leading positions (Du, 2001:15-16). At least one woman-mayor in each city seems to have worked reasonably well.

As a result, the number of women mayors and vice-mayors has been increasing (Wang, 2002; Liu et al, 2001; Rosen, 1995). As of 1989, there were 150 women mayors and deputy mayors (out of nearly three thousand total) for China's 467 cities (Rosen, 1995:325). In 1992, the number grew to 200 and so (Wang, 1992). By 2001, the number of women mayors and vice mayors across the country has reached 480 (The Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, 2001).[5] The 1998 national mayor list includes altogether 5235 individuals. Compared with this figure, then women mayors would account for 10.9% of the entire mayor force in China.[6] They form the biggest cluster of female officials in the PRC history.

Compared with women leaders in the 1970s, women mayors in post-Mao China demonstrate a far better educational background, According to an internal survey conducted by the Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, 100% of the surveyed mayors have had an education at the college level (ibid.). [7]

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[5] According to the figure given by Liu Bohong, the total number of women mayors and vice mayors in China is 463 by 2001. See Liu et al, Zhongguo nüshizhang diaocha (Investigation of Women Mayors in China). Funü yanjiu luncong (Collection of Women's Studies), June 2001: 68-72.

[6] The list was compiled by the Secretariat of the China Mayors' Association for internal use and it is in my private book collection.

[7] It is actually a general tendency seen at all different levels. A survey of 57 women cadres in Shandong province in 1988, for instance, shows that 89% of the survey participants have graduated from colleges. Another survey on 132 bureau-rank women cadres conducted in Shanghai in 1990 shows as high as 92.3 % of university graduates among the surveyed group. According to the survey of 100 women cadres done by the Central Party School of the CCP in 1993, 92% of the survey participants graduated from universities and colleges, while 2% of them hold a master degree. A recent survey of women cadres in Shandong province in 2000 displays an even higher record. Among the 436 survey participants, those who graduated from universities and colleges account for 99.7% of the total. For more about these surveys, see the Recruitment Department of the CCP Shandong Provincial Committee and Shandong Provincial Women's Federation, Research Report on the Growth of Women Cadres, Collection of Women's Studies, June 2001, pp.32-37.

Table 3. Educational Profiles of Women Mayors and Vice-Mayors N=430

Level of Education	%
Master degree (including 4 PhD degrees)	21.2
Bachelor degree	52.3
Other Colleges	26.5
Total	100

Source: The Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, Kaituojinqu zaichuanghuihuang (Opening up and Progressing: Moving towards New Triumphs), work report delivered to the Third National Mayors Conference, June 2001, Beijng.

The high educational profile of women mayors echoes a historical shift taking place after Mao, which substituted the earlier emphasis on class origin and political loyalty with a policy that highlights education, ability, and professional competence (Lee, 1991; Wang, 1997). In the case of women, the shift manifests itself as a typology change. Women leaders of the Cultural Revolution generation belonged to a "worker-peasant" type. A few of them had a formal education, and the majority was recruited from either industry or agriculture, where manual labor was the predominant means of productivity (Wang, 1997; Sheridan, 1976; Witke, 1975). Now with the end of egalitarian recruitment practices and the return to elitism, well-educated women such as the mayors have replaced the "worker-peasant" type.

Contextual Change: the Post-Mao Political Discourses

Women mayors entered politics in an era in which Chin has left the memory of the Cultural Revolution behind and is heading for modernization. The condition and premise, under which women leaders of the earlier generation entered politics, have been either removed or transformed. The post-Mao reform outlined a new ideological and cultural paradigm for women in politics so much so that the values and norms associated with the socialist past are no longer valid. In order to understand this change and its' subsequent consequences, it is necessary to excurse into the Chinese communist leadership concept which governed the socialist period.

The Chinese communist leadership concept was primarily based on the principle of loyalty and obedience. A good cadre was necessarily a good soldier

of the Party, who would do whatever the Party expected him or her to do. Education and knowledge was not considered an advantage but rather a disadvantage, for education and knowledge leads to independent thinking, which would in turn undermine one's degree of loyalty and obedience (Lee, 1991).

The principle of loyalty and obedience also governed gender relations in politics. Generally, there was a built-in tension 'between gender and class identity' (Croll, 2001:32), which has never been "fully explored either practically or theoretically" (ibid.). Instead, the tension was resolved in two ways, both entailed suppression of women's gender identity. One way was the circumscription or bounding of women's organizational spaces and activities so that activities were restricted to those, which were not socially or politically disruptive. The other way was the muting of women's collective voice by encouraging women to adopt the dominant language, modes of address and dress and skills to enter male spaces on terms of more male than female, which involved the silencing of gender identity and consciousness (ibid.).

During the socialist period, women in politics were to remain loyal to the Party and to the overall 'class interests' as well. Revealing own gender identity was contradictory to women's commitment to the broad class interests and was therefore prohibited (Jancar, 1988; Witke, 1975; Wang, 2002). While male modes of looking and handling prevailed as a norm, women's own gender and political identity was subdued and subjugated. In ideology, women were defined as merely a male equivalent. In everyday life, women had to adopt a man-like look (Terrill, 1992), speak a male language, and imitate male roles and male pattern of behavior in order to be accepted as an equal. The lack of gender reference in politics, together with the absence of independent women's organizations, gave rise to tokenism, gender stereotyping and gender assimilation in politics (Witke, 1975; Jancar, 1978).

The post-Mao reform outlined a new ideological and cultural paradigm, which 'has implications for, and influences, the platforms, agendas and priorities of women individually and collectively' (Croll, 2001:38). Two broad discourses emerged and fundamentally altered the concept of leadership in general and the concept of women in politics in particular. One is the discourse of gender difference, which emerged in the 1980s on the convergence of serious feminist deconstruction of the Maoist 'woman' category (Barlow, 1994; Li Xiaojiang, 1988, 1994) and popular culture and consumerism that sells women's sex (Johnsson, 1998; Hooper, 1994, 1998). Women, in the post-Mao political and cultural milieu, are no longer expected

to be the "same" of but rather "different" from men (Yang, 1999; Wang, 2001).

The 'gender difference' discourse created a new gender order, which bears multi-implications for women in politics. Firstly, the discourse rediscovered women's roles as mothers, wives and celebrated these as a hallmark of the female gender. In line with the Party's retreat from its' earlier radical attack on the family 'as an institution inappropriate for a socialist society' and the official recognition of the family 'as serving a variety of key functions' (Palmer, in Lubman, 1996:113), family life in post-Mao China has assumed a firm legitimacy. With the rediscovery of women's roles as mothers and wives, domestic performance is now read into the perceptions of women leaders. During the socialist period, women leaders were often encouraged to sacrifice family and personal life and were rewarded for doing so (Sheridan, 1976; Wang, 1999), now the practice of sacrificing family for career is no longer accepted (Wang, 1999; Min in Yeo, 1997). Not only social pressures linger, but women in politics themselves also aspire to explore the meaning of womanhood and family life. How to maintain a normal family life on top of a very demanding job remains a challenge to women mayors.

Secondly, the 'gender difference' discourse rediscovered the notion of femininity (Croll, 1995) and invested a great interest in women's look-at-ness (Yang, 1999). On the convergence of growing public frowning upon 'masculine, sexless' type of women, economic affordability and availability of cosmetic products, a feminine look has become desirable and hence a marker of the female gender. Grew up during the socialist period in blue trousers and flat Mao shoes, women mayors now face a challenge as how to develop a look appropriate to their gender as well as how to deal with make-up, hairstyle, colors and shapes. At the same time, they must see to signify their professional image through a 'feminine' look so as to achieve both role-appropriateness and gender-appropriateness.

Thirdly, the 'gender difference' discourse rediscovered and celebrated gender behavioral differences. 'Femininity' does not only entail the way of look but also personality and behavior (Wang, 2001; Meng, 1995). While women are now generally believed to be 'soft', caring and less aggressive, women in politics face a challenge as how to characterize and develop their political behavior to the extent of gender appropriateness. On the one hand, they do see 'softness', i.e. care, sympathy, patience and dialogue, a constructive way of dealing, acting and reacting. On the other hand, however, 'softness' is often interpreted as a sign of weakness and indecisiveness in politics. How to incorporate normative leadership striking power with a

'feminine' pattern of behavior characterized by 'softness' remains a perpetuate challenge to women mayors.

The other is the discourse of modernization and modern leadership quality, which rose in line with the policy shift from revolution to modernization and, consequently, the change of cadre criteria from emphasizing political loyalty to 'ability'. In idea, leadership ability is no longer associated with family origin and political trustworthiness. In practice, recruitment priority is now given to candidates with education, work experience, professional skills and other tangible forms of capability (Lee, 1991). Moreover, as economy management has gained more weight in the post-Mao political agenda, the importance of decisional rationality is now very much emphasized. Paralleling to these developments is the introduction of elections and electoral methods into the cadre selection process, which further highlights the importance of individual competence and competitiveness (Wang, 1999).

Given that men and women are no longer the 'same' but rather 'different', the discourse opened a question of which gender is more suitable for modern leadership roles than the other. At this point, the discourse has shown a clear tendency to construct women as a weak, less politically eligible sex. Firstly, the discourse tends to fanfare the 'objectiveness' of the 'ability'-determined criteria and the fairness of selection based on the criteria. In short, the best will get the best positions. In comparison to men, women in Chinese society have much limited access to politics. Those, who entered politics, are often given lower and lesser weighty positions and much limited political privileges (Howell, 2002). The status quo of women is now interpreted as a reflection of women's own 'quality'. All of sudden, women's quality in general and women's leadership quality in politics is called into question (Wang, 1999; 2001).

Secondly, the discourse boosts up competition mentality and competition determinism. Gender quotas aiming for a gender balance in politics are now believed to contradict the principle of faire competition and are thereupon reduced to merely a protection of the 'weak' (Wang, 1999). Since gender quotas in China exist only in the range that pertains to women, denigration of quotas in the vein of competition determinism turned women into a politically weak and less competitive category dependent of protective measures.[8] In this connection, women's competition readiness in general as well as in politics is called into question.

[8] China has neither election law quota regulation nor political party quota regulation. Likewise, sanctions for non-compliance are not found either. Gender quotas here refer to the constitutional quota regulations, which vaguely stipulate that the member of women deputies to the People's Congress should be increased gradually, and the Party instructions which often encourage an increase

Thirdly, the discourse has given rise to rationalism and pragmatism, which views development and modernization as a necessarily historically progressive process. Accordingly, attributes compatible to development such as logic, abstract thinking, rational reasoning and rationalized behavior are now deemed as the true traits of leadership quality (Wang, 2001). Since women are now believed to be rather different from men, the depiction of the rational world actually does not include them. On the contrary, women are placed in the world of sentiment and often portrayed as irrational creatures. Women's psycho-cultural quality, from this point of view, becomes also a problem if women should stand for modern leadership responsibilities.

The condition for women in politics in post-Mao China has thus become quite different from that in the 1970s. Instead of political trustworthiness, women in politics today are measured by their performance ability based on knowledge, competitiveness and psychological strength. Instead of one-sided career commitment in the public sphere, women in politics today are expected to be dutiful wives and loving mothers at home as well. Moreover, they also have a 'gender' to do and are expected to look and behave to the extent of gender appropriateness. Clashes and compromises between these contradicting roles become a lingering puzzle, which needs to be 'named' and discussed towards the prospect of developing personal as well as collective coping strategies.

Women's role in politics (also in society in general), as an issue, is caught right in the centre of the ideological and cultural change in post-Mao China and has to be redefined and renegotiated within the paradigm of modernization and gender difference. At the individual level, as the result of my interview and survey research shows, Chinese women mayors are trying hard to fulfill the multi-roles that await them. Drawing on their experience and reassessment of the socialist past, they seldom question the essentialist, pseudo-scientific accounts of gender difference and women's quality but rather welcomed the new rhetoric as a challenge. In everyday life, they strive to integrate the roles in the public and the roles as women and the female sex. And, despite of frustrations and difficulties, they firmly believe that a balance between these roles is achievable, if consciousness and will power is in order.

At home, they consider themselves mothers and wives rather than 'career women' (Ma, interview). In the 2001 WMA survey, 39 participants (76%) agree with the saying "a woman should be a good wife and mother at home

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of women cadres at all different levels. For more about gender quotas in China see http://www.idea.int/quota/index.cfm.

even if she is in a high position and often very busy at work" as against 12 (24%) who disagree. In public, they view themselves as an equal of men, successful career makers and, at the same time, feminine women. In the same survey, 47 out of the 51 participants agreed, "a women cadre should pay enough attention to make-up, hairstyle and dress" as only one disagreed and other three answered 'don't care'. At work, they see themselves and their male counterpart a complementary pair in the political universe and believe that they have something special to contribute. They work hard and efficiently. But at the same time they also believe that women carry disadvantages and need self-cultivation for improvement.

The role of women in politics, as in the case of women mayors, is thus compartmentalized. Not only do they reside in -and travel constantly between- two different domains, the public and the private, but also they tend to oscillate between egalitarian and traditional sexist gender ideologies 'in accordance with shifting interactional situations', relying on their good tact. How to build up personal competence and develop a strong career profile in accordance with gender appropriateness remains a lingering challenge to women mayors.

The Mayor-Training Program and the Formation of the Women Mayors' Association

Since October 1983, the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee has been running a training program for mayors jointly with the Ministry of Construction and the Chinese Society of Science. The aim is to prepare China's mayors for the task of urban development and provide them a forum to discuss various development theories and practices (Wang, 1992). Given that a large number of rural counties have been turned into cities very quickly (Chung, 1999), the necessity of training is obvious. By 1991, 15 training classes have been held with the participation of more than 800 mayors. They called the training program "a special university of mayors" (ibid.).

Due to the lack of data, it is unclear as how many women mayors have participated in the training and what was the proportion of women mayors in each of these training classes. A woman named Zhang Ying, then vice-mayor of Yulin city in Guangxi Province and now head of the Bureau for Environment Protection in the same province, attended the tenth training class. To her, the training was good and important but something was

missing. Upon her return, Zhang wrote a letter to the organizers and pinpointed the necessity of paying a special attention to women mayors. The letter reads,

> The training class for mayors has, like a big tree, borne fruits all over the country. The class connected mayors and played an immeasurable role in forging a strong network among them. We should, however, bear in mind that women mayors often encounter some 'special problems' due to their psychological and physiological differences from men. A special attention must therefore be paid to the thriving of women mayors. Hereby may I suggest conveying a conference for women mayors before the International Women's Day this year [1991] and via the conference set up an organization of women mayors [Zhang, cited in (Wang, 1992: 400-401].

Both Ye Rutang (vice-minister of Construction) and Chu Chuanheng (chief engineer of urban planning at the Ministry of Construction) were very positive towards Zhang's idea.[9] They responded to Zhang's letter and supported her initial, though the letter was written in a clear male-superior vein. It reads,

> Female talent is a great source of manpower, which has not been fully tapped yet. Just like human brain needs a balanced development between the right and the left cell, we should also see to develop and utilize women's talent in politics. We are used to write with the right hand [men-ed.], but now it is on time to learn to write with the left hand [women-ed.]. And the left hand can write well, if we keep practicing [Chu, cited in (Wang, 1992: 401].

An enquiry was then sent out to every single women mayors of the country for approval or disapproval. The number of women mayors and vice-mayors across the country was about 150 at that time.[10] More than 100 of them welcomed the initiative, including women mayors from two largest cities in

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[9] Ye is the chief and Chu deputy chief organizer of the Mayor-Training Program.

[10] According to the special column on women mayors in Dujiangyanbao (Dujiangyan News) 11 September 2000, there were about 100 women mayors across the country at the time the WMA was founded. The number is now about 150 according to the working report presented by the Secretariat of the WMA to the Third National Mayors Congress in June 2001.

China, Beijing and Tianjin. With these positive responses in house, intensive preparation was set in motion. In a period of two months, Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang Province well known for Longjing tea and the Western Lake, Xihu, was made ready to host the first national conference for women mayors.

The conference opened on 1st March 1991. Nearly one hundred women mayors and vice-mayors were present, representing 22 provinces (Wang, 1992). As expected, the conference formally adopted Zhang's initiative and announced the birth of a national organization for women mayors. The title of the organization, as the conference decided, was Nüshizhang Lianyihui (Women Mayors Society). The objective is to organize activities suitable for women mayors, discuss the problems women mayors faced in common and promote urban development in the areas of women mayors' responsibility, such as social welfare, culture, health and education (Wang, 1992:403). The conference elected the Executive Committee, which is the leading body of the organization consisting of 31 women from 23 provinces. Wu Yi, then vice mayor of Beijing, was elected president and twelve persons were elected vice-presidents including Zhang Ying, the initiative-taker herself.

Later in 1991, the China Mayors' Association (CMA) was set up in Beijing with Liu Qi, then mayor of Beijing and now member of the 16th Politburo, as the president. The WMS then decided to become an affiliated department of the Mayors Association and thus changed its name from Nüshizhang Lianyihui to Zhongguo Shizhangxiehui Nüshizhangfenhui (the Sub-Association of the China Mayors' Association for Women Mayors (WMA). This duel structure allows the WMA to join the activities for all mayors and to organize activities for women mayors separately (Ni, interview).

The WMA was registered as a shehui tuanti (civil organization). The membership covers all women mayors, vice-mayors and cadres of mayoral-rank, such as district magistrates. A newly appointed mayor will normally receive a membership registration form from the WMA. Or she could contact the WMA for membership registration by her self. Once the registration is completed, the WMA will issue a certificate to confirm the membership.

As a civil organization, the WMA obtains hardly financial support from the State. It collects membership dues, while the amount per person is very moderate.[11] Instead, city member fees become the main source of income. A city becomes automatically a city member of the WMA when its mayor(s)

[11] According to Ni Jin, domestic program officer of the China Mayors' Association, there are internal regulations 'prohibiting the amount of individual membership fee from exceeding 10 yuan per year' (interview, 2000).

join the organization and should thus pay the city member fee. [12] Besides, the WMA also raises fund from different sources.[13] The financial situation was considerably improved since the China Mayors Tower in Guangzhou opened in 1995. A splendid five-star hotel, the Tower is a gift of the Guangzhou municipality to the China Mayors' Association. Part of the hotel profit goes to the WMA for activity purposes. [14]

The Secretariat of the WMA is located in the north lobby of the Ministry of Construction compound, which also houses the Secretariat of the CMA. The Secretariat is in charge of three basic functions, i.e. international liaison, domestic liaison and information. Wang Yinping, a middle-aged woman, has been running the secretariat since the WMA was established. She is a member of the Central Committee of the Chinese Association for Promoting Democracy, one of the non-communist parties in China. She is also deputy division chief of the Training Centre for Mayors and deputy secretary-general of the WMA. [15] The other staff member is Zong Zaipeng, a middle-aged woman whose background is unknown. When she was transferred to the CMA in late 2000, a young woman named Zhang Xuebin filled the vacancy left by Zong.

Tao Siliang is both the chief architect and main driving force of the WMA. She is daughter of Zeng Zhi and Tao Zhu. Her mother Zeng Zhi, a life-long revolutionary and highly respected woman within the Party, was deputy director of the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[16] Her father Tao Zhu, former secretary of the CCP Guangdong Provincial Committee, was director of the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee from 1966 to 1969. During the Cultural Revolution, he was singled out as the third capitalist roader after Liu Shoqi and Deng Xiaoping and eventually died of persecution in 1969. Tao Siliang suffered a career setback for a long period of time because of her father. She studied and practiced medicine until she got a position at the Organizational Department of the CCP Central Committer in 1984 after her father was rehabilitated. Tao is both secretary-general of the China Mayors' Association, chief editor of the CMA's magazine China Mayors, and vice

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[12] No concrete information about the city member fee was released. It must vary according to the size of cities.

[13] According to Tao Siliang, it has not been difficult to raise fund because 'people especially business people often feel honored to be able to support the activity of women mayors. It is a good investment for them.'

[14] No precise information about it was released. But according to Tao Siliang, the profit from the Hotel has provided "a solid economic foundation for the things we are doing and plan to do".

[15] See Dujiangyanbao 11 September 2000.

[16] For more about Zeng Zhi, see Zeng Zhi's autobiography "A Revolutionary Survivor", Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1999. Zeng Zhi passed away in 1999.

president of the WMA. She has an office in the southern lobby of the Ministry of Construction compound. There she supervises the Secretariat of the WMA on daily basis.

The WMA as a women's organization enjoys a group-membership of the All-China Women's Federation. Such a membership enables the WMA to be represented in the leadership structure of the ACWF. Tao Siliang, for instance, is a member of the Executive Committee of the ACWF.[17] On the other hand, such an affiliation relation also allows the ACWF to monitor and study the activity of women mayors as a case of funücanzheng (women's political participation). From the beginning of the reform onwards, it has become a top priority of the ACWF to investigate issues related to women's participation and representation in politics (Howell, 1996; Wang, 1997; Rosen, 1995).

The WMA as a Women's Space

From the very outset, the WMA organizers envisaged 'a kind of loose network, where women mayors can meet and talk' (Tao, interview). Via meetings and gatherings, however, the WMA brought women mayors together and hence created a women's space. The space constitutes one of the important compartments in women mayors' daily life, where they can be themselves and feel free to do and show their gender without being held accountable. In a hectic everyday life on the conjunction of diverse roles across the public and the private domain, such a space proves to be an important outlet for women mayors.

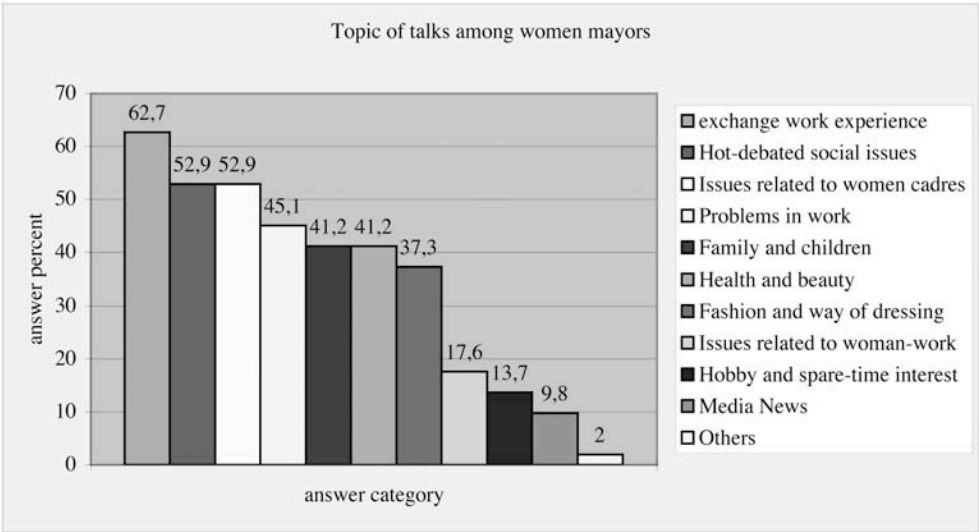
In this 'women's space', for instance, women mayors can talk openly about their life, about the challenges, joys and difficulties they have encountered in pursuing a public career. This applies especially to the first two national meetings of women mayors. The reason why such a topic assumed great prominence, according to Tao Siliang, is due to the fact that all women mayors 'have gone through quite a lot. Whether sweet or bitter, they have tasted all flavors of life and had had nowhere to spell it out' (Tao, interview). In daily working situations, a mayor signifies power and authority and is not supposed to reveal personal feelings. Although clashes and harmony between career and family concern all women in politics, it is generally regarded as a personal matter as how they cope. The women's space created by the WMA not only provides an outlet for women mayors but also makes women mayors'

[17] See Dujiangyanbao11 September 2000.

personal experiences ‘public’. They can talk about it and draw on each other’s strength.

In the 'women's space’, women mayors can bring up and discuss issues of their particular concern. As the WMA questionnaire survey shows, while work-related talking still occupies the first place, women mayors do engage in talks that are exclusively gender-related when they gather together. These include, for instance, issues concerning women cadres, family, children, healthy, beauty, fashion, attire and so on. The importance of a women's space, as magistrate Chen elaborates, is that 'you can possibly talk about the topics related to women only if you are in a women's space. Otherwise it won't be possible to bring a women's topic up. There is no atmosphere for it" (Chen, interview).

Figure 1. Types of Talks Among Women Mayors N=51



Source: The 2001 WMA survey.
Question: What do you usually talk about when you meet other women mayors on a meeting, for instance?

In the ‘women’s space’, women mayors can display, express and cultivate a feminine look. They can dress in the way they personally like and do not have to worry, whether the look is proper or not in the eyes of others. On the one hand, women mayors aspire to develop a gender-appropriate look like any other women. On the other hand, however, it is generally held that women mayors represent the image of government institutions and must therefore

dress and look accordingly. As so, they must maneuver skillfully between what is gender-appropriate and what is role-appropriate in daily life. In the space of their own, however, they can relax and be themselves. Magistrate Chen illustrates this point. "We take the liberty to dress as colorful and attractive as we could during the meetings. You would notice it immediately, if you take a quick look around. We blossom like flowers because we know that the 'flower' will soon 'whither' after the meeting. Back to work, we must dress in the way that is proper according to our position. Here during the meetings we can relax and enjoy our beautiful dresses" (ibid.).

In the space of their own, socializing takes place among women and on women's premise. Self-restraint is no longer necessary, since males are not present. The dominant form of social life within the Chinese officialdom is dining and wining. Apart from formal reception banquets, male leaders also eat out as a group. And it is through dining and wining that they figure out each other, exchange information, and build up trust or non-trust relations. Very often, the dinning table is the place, where negotiation goes on and deals are made. To their dismay, many women mayors find this form of social life highly problematic. First of all, they find it inconvenient to go out in evening hours because they have a family to take care. Secondly, they have their reputation at stake if they dine and wine with a bunch of men (Chen, Xi, interview). They must take cautions against potential intimacy or possible rumors about their sexual conduct.[18]

In the space of their own, women mayors have no need to worry. The atmosphere of gatherings, as the Training Class for women mayors in Guangzhou in 2001 demonstrated, is typically pleasant and relaxing. They exchanged name cards, went to shopping together, did 'women talks' during the break, joked about things and took lots of photos of each other. At the banquet dinner on the fourth day of the Class, they embraced each other, proposed a toast to each other, and took again lots of photos. Mayor He, Liu and magistrate Chu entertained the guests with songs and stories.[19] As Tao stated proudly in the interview, "our women mayors are feeling creatures indeed. If you give them a couple of days together, then they will leave the

[18] Magistrate Chen, "it is inconvenient for a woman mayor to mingle with male colleagues" in informal situations. False allegation of sexual misconduct can easily rise and ruin a woman's reputation and career". Magistrate Xi, "the former woman mayor in my city had a bad reputation She was regarded as 'unclean' because she was often seen dancing with men at evening parties. Her husband grew suspicious, they quarreled very often at home, so rumors about her sexual misconduct (zuofeng wenti) spread quickly. I made rules for myself. I can wine and dine with them [the male colleagues]. I have to. I cannot totally avoid them. But, if they stand up and begin to dance in the middle of the banquet, I will insist to remain seated. I will not dance with any of them, no matter what".

[19] The description is based on my participant observation of the class in a four days period.

place like old friends to each other". In an interview prior to the event, the author asked Ni Jin, the domestic program officer of the CMA, to describe possible differences between a gathering of male mayors and that of women mayors. Without a second hesitation, Ni smiled and uttered, "Women mayors hug each other when they meet. We men don't" (Ni, interview).

The WMA as a Means of Empowerment

The number of mayors per city varies from city to city in China. Normally, a mayor team will consist of from 5 to 10 persons. Despite the growing number of women mayors over the past years, however, most China's municipalities contain only one woman. A review of the 1998 National Mayor List shows that very few cities (districts) have more than one women mayor. Recent national, provincial as well as local regulations recommend that 'at least one woman must be installed in each leading body of the Party and government at each levels".[20] Ironically, many government departments actually stopped recruiting women after having met the requirement for "at least one" (Chen, interview). In the WMA survey, 72.5% of the participants indicated that she is the only woman in the mayor team of her city.

Consequently, women mayors have been much less visible than their male counterpart. Despite the fact that they have been working hard and achieved remarkable accomplishments, women mayors remained rarely known, especially at the time of ten years back. 'The public was poorly informed about them. The visibility of women mayors was rather low' (The Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, 2001). As Tao Siliang described, 'On the one hand, the public knew little about women mayors. On the other hand, women mayors as a group did not weight equally with male mayors in the eyes of authority" (Tao, interview). Since 1991, the WMA has taken series of steps to 'popularize the image of women mayors and to enhance women mayors' contact with all walks of social life (The Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, 2001).

Media Focus

In order to reach out to the public, the WMA adopted an active policy towards the media. On the International Women's Day, 8 March 1993, for instance, the WMA held a joint celebration with the All-China Women Journalists Association and invited both Chinese and international female

[20]See, for instance, the Recruitment Plan of the Shaanxi Province 1996-2000.

journalists to join the event (ibid.). The media would usually focus on women-related issues on the International Women's Day. With the presence of women mayors in a group, the WMA succeeded in attracting the media attention to women mayors. The event was widely covered by both Chinese and international newspapers. [21]

Obviously, the WMA, as an organization of women mayors, has much greater potential to attract the media attention than individual mayors. When a meeting is in session, the WMA summoned a large number of women mayors to one place and hence created a national event, which the media would go after. The national women's magazine Zhongguo funü (Women of China), for instance, disposes a specialized journalist to cover all the WMA events.[22] A gathering of women mayors is also interesting "staff" for local medias. During the second Executive Committee meeting in Dujiangyan city in September 2000, for instance, the event filled a half space of the local newspaper Dujiangyanbao (Dujiangyan News). [23]

In 1996, the WMA launched an essay competition, inviting essays on "The Charisma of Women Mayors in China". The aim was to advance public knowledge about women mayors. In cooperation with Xiandai Liangdao the (Modern Leadership) magazine in Beijing, the campaign brought forward several hundreds articles on women mayors in newspapers and magazines. In March 1996, the WMA convened a ceremony at the Grand People's Hall in Beijing to mark the end of the competition. Chen Muhua and several other top national leaders were invited to present awards to the winners. [24]

Publication

Apart from working with the media, the WMA is also quite conscious about the role of publication in promoting women mayors' publicity. Since 1992, the WMA has published four books on women mayors. The first book, came out in 1992, was a result of the Hangzhou meeting in 1991 and the National Working Meeting in Guilin in 1992. A total of 78 essays written by women mayors were included in the book. Of these, 61 essays dealt with issues related clashes and balance between career and family, and the remaining 17 on issues related to urban administration and economic development. The second book was published in 1996 and contains 54 essays that were presented to the Second National Congress for Women Mayors in Huadu city in 1996. As the

[21] For more about the celebration, see (The Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, 2001).
[22] This information was obtained through a telephone conversation with the journalist, Wang Xiaoming.
[23] See Dujiangyanbao 11 and 13 September 2000.
[24] For more about the competition, see (The Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, 2001).

conference themed in social welfare, the essays addressed social welfare thinking and practices in various locale contexts. This type of publication has a two-fold aim. It is supposed to create a venue for women mayors to discuss local policies and to inform the public about the work of women mayors (Tao, interview).

The third book is an illustrated catalogue of women mayors published jointly with the ACWF in 1995 during China's run-up to the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women. It presents illustrated stories of 52 women mayors. The fourth book appeared in 1999 in connection with the 50th anniversary of the People's Republic of China. It is a follow-up of the 1995 catalogue with some updated information. This type of publication is supposed to reach the broad public and generate socialization effects. According to the Secretariat of the WMA, the books "opened up a window for ordinary people to know more about women mayors, who will in turn serve a role model for the female populace, especially young women who have the ambition for a political career" (The Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, 2001).

International contact and diplomacy

In an effort to promote women mayors' visibility, the WMA has been actively seeking an international platform. The first face-to-face international contact took place in Shanmenxia city, Henan Province, in September 1991, when the WMA convened a *yantaohui* (research-discussion conference) on women politicians and entrepreneurs. The event was organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Henan Provincial Government. Delegates from Australia, France, Germany and Japan attended the conference together with twenty women mayors or so from China. They discussed various issues of common interest and exchanged ideas with each other. An event like this, according to Tao Siliang, enables the outside world to know more about women mayors in China and Chinese women mayors to learn the experiences of their international sisters (Tao, interview).

In international contexts, the WMA as a national organization of women mayors represents China's image. Diplomatic success will thus not only promote women mayors' international visibility but also in turn strengthen women mayors' position domestically. The WMA could use diplomatic successes to trade for more favorable conditions. Largely due to this reason, the WMA, for instance, vigorously lobbied for sending a delegation to the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Huairou, Beijing, in 1995. To the WMA, the Conference would be a good learning process for women

mayors. To the Chinese government, a delegation of women mayors would help to promote China's national image in terms of gender equality. The negotiation hence ended up in a success. A delegation of fifteen women mayors arrived in Huairou and participated in the NGO forum of the conference (The Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, 2001).

The WMA also organizes trips to abroad. In 1997 and 1999, the WMA sent a delegation to Germany and Russia respectively. In October 2000, a delegation of women mayors headed by Tao Siliang visited the United States and Canada. The purpose of these trips is to partially strengthen international exchange and partially promote women mayors' international contact. During the visits, the women mayors studied urban development and management in the host countries and exchanged experiences with the hosts on a variety of issues such as social welfare, insurance, education, and health-care policies. The visits, according to Tao Siliang, were highly successful, and the WMA never hesitate to tell the successful stories. The WMA Secretariat writes, "with their elegance and dignity, the women mayors made a deep impression on the people in host countries. They conveyed to the outside world a positive image of women mayors in China. They earned China respect and enhanced China's friendship with other parts of the world. They are good-will ambassadors of our nation indeed" (ibid.).

Political Visibility

One of the reasons why women mayors as a whole are less visible than men is that most of them are in charge of culture, education and public health -the so-called 'soft' responsibilities. Despite the state-derived policies and campaigns to equalize men and women in political life, the pattern of 'sex division of labor' in politics persists. When women do take up leadership positions, 'they are assigned to portfolios such as family planning, health and education, which are lower in the pecking order than economic management or industry' (Howell, 2002:43; Tao et al, 1993). As the WMA survey in 2001 shows, 50.2% of the women mayors work in the CEH areas (culture, education and health) as against 15.8% in economy, 3.7% in construction and only 3.5% in PPL (police, public security and law).[25] In order to enhance women mayors' visibility, the WMA began to organize tours of work inspection by and for women mayors in 1993.

Gongzuo kaocha (work inspection) is a basic technique of learning and professional exchange within the Chinese cadre force and bureaucracy. In a

[25] The remaining 26.4% is in charge of quanmian general and other assorted work assignments.

typical work-inspection situation, the organizer would select a spot of visiting by virtue of its deeds. Then a delegation of visitors would come to learn the experience from the selected spot. Upon their return, the delegation is supposed to emulate what they learned from the spot and generate similar work results so that the good deeds in one spot could spread to other places and proliferate. Given that most women mayors are in charge of the 'soft' areas of responsibility, which rank lower than the 'hard' assignments taking by men, very few women mayors were selected as a model of work inspection. Even though they were doing fine, what was going on within their jurisdiction was often deemed as unimportant and hence overlooked.

By organizing tours of work inspection by and for women mayors the WMA aims to highlight women mayors' work and readdress the lack of focus on women. Firstly, in a work-inspection situation, the woman mayor of the host city would be at the centre of the preparing and organizing. She would stand for mobilization and coordination of local resources. Secondly, her political weight in the local context will be enhanced, for she is the one who attracted visitors from outside. Thirdly, the tours of inspection organized by the WMA centered on women mayors' work and thereby projected women mayors' profile in the 'soft' areas of responsibility, which were often either overlooked or overshadowed. Up to 2001, the WMA has launched five inspection tours with the participation of nearly 100 women mayors (The Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, 2001). According to Tao Siliang, these tours have significantly promoted women mayors' visibility (Tao, interview).

Network Building

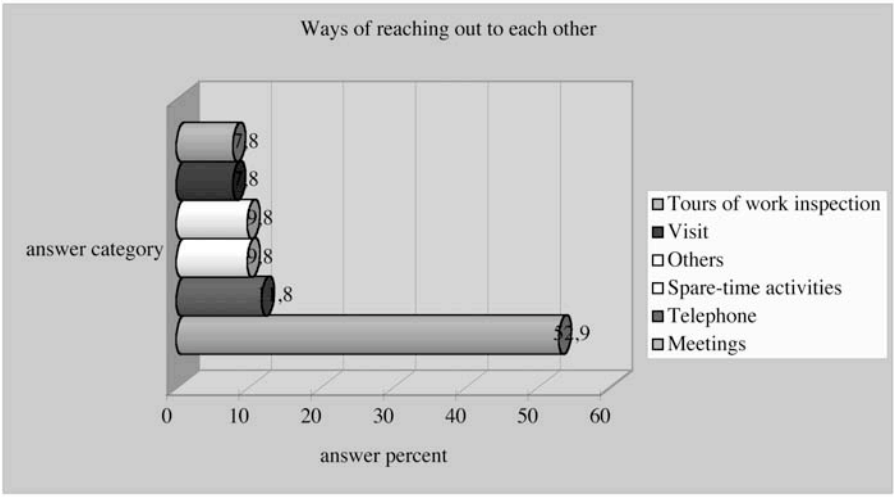
In the Chinese political domain, there is a distinction between 'doing a good job' (zuoshi) and 'hunting for status and privilege' (zuoguan) and no correlation between them is ever necessary. Very often, those who get ahead are not those who have done a good job. Connections and networks, as studies of political mobility in China have for long time ago concluded, are the primary capital leading to promotion and advancement (Lampton, 1986). That is why men, as a woman magistrate points out, spend more time on paoguan (lobbying for promotion) than on doing their job (Gao, interview). Women mayors are characteristic for hard working, a fact that is widely recognized by both men and women.[26] But the lack of a strong network

[26] In the interviews many women mayors and male local officials cited a popular saying 'nannüdapei, ganhuobulei' (when men and women work in a team, the burden is eased), meaning women work hard and efficiently.

seriously impeded their further advancement along the hierarchy. On the one hand, few of them had connections to the top (Liu, 2001:69). On the other hand, most of them are the only female in the mayor team of their city.

It seems that the WMA, as an organization, has greater potential than individual women mayors to build and develop network both among and around women mayors. Through organizing different types of activities, for instance, the WMA brings women mayors together and hence created a matrix of networking, which might not be available otherwise. As the 2001 WMA questionnaire survey shows, meetings and tours of work inspection organized by the WMA constitute among others a major venue of interpersonal contact among women mayors. It is via their participation in these activities that women mayors learned to know each other and developed ties of exchange, friendship and mutual support.

Figure 2. Means of Interpersonal Contact N=51



Source: the 2001 WMA survey.
Question: In which of the following ways do you reach other women mayors?

Being conscious about women mayors as a group, the WMA has taken steps to create and nourish a collective 'we' identity. It, for instance, launched a "Women Mayors Forest" in 1998 with the aim to "leave women mayors a permanent memory of their mayoral career" (Tao, interview). Located in the Ming Tomb area in an outskirt district of Beijing, Changping, the forest contains a tree for each woman mayor labeled after her name. A mayor can

either come to Beijing to plant the tree in person or submit a sum of 250 *yuan* to have the tree planted for her (He, interview). The forest serves a living monument and a connecting point for women mayors. Whether old or young, from near or far, they can always find themselves and each other in that piece of woods. During the Third National Mayors Congress in 2001, one of the scheduled activities for women mayors attending the conference was, for instance, to pay a visit to the Forest.[27] So far more than 300 trees have been planted, including those by senior top women like Wu Yi, Chen Muhua, Peng Peiyun and Lei Jieqiong (The Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, 2001).

The WMA membership is based on the tenure of a mayoral appointment. As time goes, some of the members have left their mayor office and advanced to higher positions. In order to stay in touch with these women and to facilitate networking between women mayors and higher-placed women party-government officials, the WMA developed a policy of "*Guangjiao xinpengyou buwang laopengyou*" (making new friends while maintaining old friends). In practice, the policy allows former women mayors to remain affiliated to the WMA so that they will continue to be invited to various activities (Tao, interview). In so doing, the WMA is able to accommodate socialization between junior women mayors and senior women party-government officials. Take Wu Yi, former vice-mayor of Beijing, minister of Foreign Trade, state councilor and now a member of 16th Politburo, as an example. The WMA continued to involve her after she left her mayor office. The second WMA Executive Committee meeting in 2000 elected Wu the honorable president of the WMA.[28] The highest placed and most powerful woman in the Chinese political hierarchy, Wu serves a source of inspiration for many women mayors and a powerful patron of the WMA.

In an effort to usher more women into higher positions, the WMA set up a database of women mayors, the Bank of Talented Women. The WMA accumulates information on promising women mayors and transmits the information further up to the Party's recruitment authority. The WMA also appeals directly to the Recruitment Department of the CCP Central Committee, the All-China Women's Federation and local governments, recommending outstanding women mayors for higher positions. With the WMA blessing and recommendation, some women mayors have been promoted to positions at the provincial level (The Secretariat of the Women Mayors' Association, 2001).

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[27] See the official program of the congress.
[28] See Dujiangyanbao 11 September 2000.

Resource Reallocating and Qualification Upgrading

The WMA is a major provider of off-job training for women mayors. The necessity of training, according to Tao Siliang, lies in three aspects. First, as more and more rural districts are converted into cities recently, the number of women mayors with rural experiences has been increasing. They need knowledge of urban development and administration.[29] Second, economy-related knowledge and information have become a 'must' for municipal leaders in the rapid development of a market economy, even though economy is not necessarily the major responsibility of many women mayors.[30]

Third, and more important, training is an important means of resource allocation and 'capital' accumulation. As training will normally result in merit buildup and network expansion, attendance to training is actually a springboard for career advancement. Because so, access to training is strictly controlled by the party's recruitment authority and has always been intensively competed over.[31] Women's lack of access to training is a widespread phenomenon observable at all levels.[32] In the 2001 WMA survey, the participants were given a question 'what is the biggest problem you have ever encountered since you started your mayor career?" Thirty-five of the 51 participants, 68.6%, answered the question. Among them, 12 persons (34% of the valid answers) singled out "unfair treatment', which refers to amongst others the lack of opportunity for training.

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[29] Tao, "the urbanization process has proceeded speedily in China in the recent years. Hundreds and hundreds rural districts were converted into cities (…). What needs to be done urgently is to implant modern knowledge of urban development and administration into the heads of the mayors from these areas so that they can guide their cities through the social, economic transformation process needed for becoming a modern urban community".

[30] Tao, "we are in an era of market economy. Ignorance to economy-related knowledge would constitute a severe handicap for one in a mayoral position. Given that most of our women mayors come from the sector of health-care, elementary education or the Women's Federations, it is of paramount importance for them to learn modern knowledge of economy".

[31] For a brief description of the correlation between training and promotion, see (Manion, 1985).

[32] The phenomenon is well documented and described. According to a research on women cadres done by the Central Party School of the CCP Central Committee, which runs training courses for high party and government officials, the percentage of women trainees in the school often remains around 10% or even lower (Chen, 1995). A survey of women cadres in Shandong province shows that up to 54% of the women cadres in the province have never participated in off-job trainings that last longer than a year, and 40% of the women cadres had never been given any chance for either a training or a job rotation outside the province border. According to another survey of women cadres in Zhejiang province, 58.6% and 58% of the women cadres at the county and section levels have never participated in any job-related trainings, neither before nor after their current appointment began. At the same two levels, the percentage of women cadres who have never been to training courses in general political theories is respectively 66.6% and 64.9%. The percentage of women cadres who have never received training in specialized knowledge is 63.2% and 72.3%. For more about these surveys, see (The Chinese Association of Women's Studies and the Institute for Research on Women of the All-China Women's Federation, 2001), pp.74, 161. According to a female university principal who was attending a training course at the Central Party School in Beijing at the time of interview, there were only seven women out of the total 43 trainees in her class (Cong, interview).

The rational behind the WMA training policy is thus to guarantee women mayors at least one opportunity for off-job training during the term of their mayor-ship, if they don't get it from else where (Tao, interview). Since 1993, the WMA has been providing trainings to women mayors on regular basis. The China Mayors' Association owns two training bases, which the WMA could share. One is located in *jiaotong daxue* (the Communication University) in Shanghai. The other is located in the China Mayors Tower in Gugangzhou, a 28-storey five-star hotel. Both classes are held once a year, and each class will last from one week to ten days. The Shanghai Research Class, as it is called, is specialized in issues related to administration, management and leadership techniques, while the Guangzhou Research Class focuses mainly on various economy-related issues.

Up to 2001, the WMA has held three classes in Shanghai and two classes in Guangzhou with the presence of more than 150 women mayors. The author of this paper followed the second Guangzhou Economic Class for women mayors, which was in session from 27 November to 3 December 2000. Nearly 40 women mayors participated in the class. On the one hand, the lectures focused overwhelmingly on grand economy issues and were hence far beyond the reach of women mayors' daily work. On the other hand, however, the women mayors treasured very much the opportunity being offered to them. Their attitude towards the training class was overwhelmingly positive. Two typical arguments were often given to account for the importance of training.

The first is the 'learning and upgrading' argument. As magistrate Xi from Anhui Province states, 'I find the lectures very inspiring and empowering, even though they are not directly relevant to my work. I became better informed about national and international economic situations. On top of that I also learned new theories and new ways of thinking. My mind became more open than before' (Xi, interview). Mayor Liu from Shandong also deemed the lectures for having exposed her to 'new information and knowledge' and 'propelling' her 'to think' (Liu, interview).

The second is the 'opportunity' argument. Magistrate Xi, 'people working at the basic levels like me rarely have the chance to be exposed to new and grand theories like these. The lectures are far broader and systematic than what I have learned so far in the local context' (Xi, interview). Mayor Liu, 'I seldom travel for the purpose of study. There are so many meetings to attend that I hardly have any time to study. Many topics interest me and would be useful to me in many ways (…). But I am already drowned in the 'sea' of meetings. Thanks to the organizers of this training class, I finally got a change

to sit down and learn something. I feel I am recharging myself' (Liu, interview).

Consequences of Dealing with Gender

The rate of activity participation among women mayors, according to the 2001 WMA survey, is reasonably high. Of the total 51 survey participants, 25.5% have been member of the WMA for one year, 37.1% for 5 years, and 27.4% between 5-11 years.[33] 72.5% of the survey participants have been called to activities.[34] Among them, 68.5% have participated between 1-3 times, while the remaining 9.9% participated in between 4-10 times.[35] Of the activities they participated, national congresses of women mayors and research-study training sessions are the most common type.

What are the impacts of the WMA activities? Have these activities been beneficial to women mayors and in which way? What have women mayors achieved through their involvement in the activities? In other words, what consequence has organizing, as in the case of the WMA, borne with regard to women in politics? In the 2001 WMA survey, the impact of the WMA was measured against two indexes, namely work-related consequences and gender-specific consequences. The following paragraphs dwell upon the findings retrieved from the survey.

Work-related Consequences: Empowerment

Three questions in the questionnaire were designed to reflect the work-related consequences of the WMA activities: the role of the WMA as women mayors anticipated; the goal that women mayors personally wish to accomplish through being a part of the WMA network; and the benefits that the mayor mayors claimed to have received as a result of their involvement in the WMA activities.

What role do you anticipate the WMA to play on behalf of women mayors? Seven choices of answer were given and the survey informants were supposed to choose maximum two of them. As the result shows, the first priority is to provide training for women mayors and the second is to promote women mayors' visibility.

[33] The no-answer category accounts for 9.8%.
[34] Those who haven't been called yet and those in the no-answer category make respectively 21.6% and 5.9% of the total.
[35] The percent of no-answer is 21.6%

Table 4. Anticipated Roles of the WMA

Anticipated roles of the WMA	Number of answer	%
Providing training	31	59
Promoting visibility	22	42
Expanding network	19	36
Enhancing identity	14	26
Policy discussing	8	15
Social events	6	11
Providing service	1	2

What goals do you personally wish to accomplish through being a part of the WMA? Seven choices of answer were provided with the possibility of circling only one from the list. As the result shows, 41.2% of the answer goes to the category "I want to collect new information and learn new knowledge", another 15.7% and 13.7% goes to "I want to exchange work experiences with others" and "I want to know more people and expand ties of network" respectively. Learning and exchange are the primary goal that women mayors wish to achieve in becoming a member of the WMA. [36]

What benefits have you received from joining the WMA activities? Of the choices listed up, two categories scored highest. The first place goes to "I learned new things so that my mind become more open" (the upgrading aspect) and the second place to "I made new friends and extended my ties of network" (the network aspect). The table below presents the result.

Table 5. Stated Benefits from the WMA Activities (above 10)

Stated Benefits	Number	%
Learned new things and become more open in mind	38	74.5
Made new friends and extended ties of network	18	35.3
Had a fun	13	25.5
Exchanged work experiences	10	19.6

[36] The remaining 9.8%, 9.8% and 7.8% of answer goes respectively to "enhance self-confidence", "address women's issues" and "enhance women mayors' collective consciousness". The last category "have a fun" scored only 2% of the total answer.

The survey results demonstrate a neat match between the most common types of activities that the women mayors have participated, the role of the WMA as women mayors anticipated, the goal women mayors personally wish to pursue through joining the WMA and the benefits women mayors stated to have received from being a part of the WMA. To the extent that qualification upgrading and network building are the primary demand of women mayors, which the WMA has satisfactorily accommodated, the WMA activities have generated positive and empowering consequences.

Gender-Specific Consequences: Gender Consciousness

To ask the 'gender consciousness' question in the WMA context is aimed to discern whether, how and to what extent this women-specific organization together with its women-specific agendas has influenced the standpoint of women mayors regarding gender identity, gender issues and the way in which they view society. Very often, women in politics are accused for being gender-neutral or gender-insensitive. Indeed, women leaders in the 1960s and 1970s were characterized for concerning 'class', the general, rather than 'gender', the particular. It is thus interesting to see where women mayors position themselves in an increasingly gender fragmented societal, cultural and political environment as in post-Mao China. Have they become more gender neutral or rather more gender sensitive?

To ask the 'gender consciousness' question in the WMA context, however, can be a tricky matter. Gender consciousness formation among women mayors, if true, can result from the WMA activities and other sources as well. Likewise, women mayors' gender consciousness can emerge both before and after their involvement in the WMA activities. In the latter case, it is a question of "hen and egg". Nevertheless, although it would be unsound to assume a linier causal correlation between the WMA activities and women mayors' gender consciousness, it will be likewise implausible to totally exclude the WMA activities as a possible source of inspiration. The WMA agendas and activities, which are women-targeted and women-specific, must have had a certain impact on women mayors.

In the following, the findings from the WMA survey will be presented in a more or less "fact-giving" manner, leaving the source-of-gender-consciousness question open to imagination and discussion. The hypothesis is that both the individual and collective way (as of the WMA) of dealing with gender can influence women mayors' gender identity. In the survey, the operational concept of gender consciousness refers to the degree in which a woman mayor identifies herself with her female peers (Klein, 1984; Rinehart, 1992). A set of

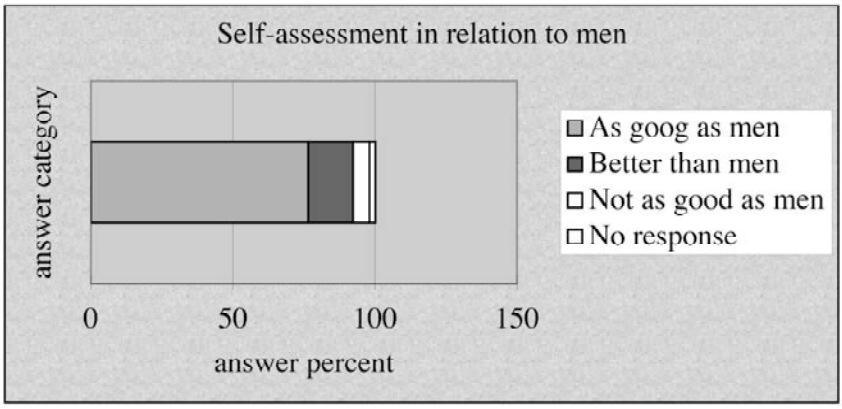
questions were posed to measure where women mayors place themselves in the gender scale, closer to their own sex or closer to the opposite sex.

Do you wish more women than you in your mayor team? This question serves an indicator of gender consciousness in the sense that a negative answer may signify "I don't need more women" or "I don't want more women", whereas a positive answer may signify both "I need" and "I want". In comparison, those who answered the question positively should be more likely to place themselves close to their own sex than those who answered negatively. As the survey result shows, 98% of the survey participants wish to have at least one more woman in their mayor team with the degree of desire varying from "strongly wish" (11.8%) to "wholeheartedly wish" (56.9%) and just "wish" (29.4%).

Whom do you usually turn to in case of problems, male or female colleagues and friends? The rational behind listing up this question as an indicator of gender consciousness is: those women mayors who turn to a woman colleague for comfort and help may in consciousness feel more comfortable about and show more trust to their female colleagues/friends than those who normally turn to a male colleague. The result, however, is even. The survey participants seek comfort and support from female (21.6%) as much as from male colleagues (21.5%). The remaining 56.9% talk to family members and private friends including 3.9% no-answer. A possible explanation could be the influence of other variables. If a woman mayor, for instance, has only male colleagues or if the matter in concern happened to be within the jurisdiction of a male colleague, then she will have no other choices than talking to a male colleague.

Do you consider yourself an equal of men in terms of qualification and ability? This question serves an indicator of women mayors' self-confidence. The link between self-confidence and gender consciousness often lies in that the more a woman becomes gender conscious the more likely that she becomes self-confident. As the survey result shows, more than 70% of the women mayors regard themselves as good as men. Moreover, nearly 20% of them consider themselves even better than men. Only a small 10% feel that they are less equal to men in terms of qualification and ability.

Figure 3. Self-Assessment in Relation to Men N=51



How are you concerned about various gender issues in Chinese society and what issues are you concerned more than others? This question, together with the following three, was designed to reflect the extent to which women mayors identify themselves with the female population at large. A list of 24 current women's and gender issues were provided and the participants were to scale their degree of concern from "very concerned", "concerned" to "not really concerned", "almost unconcerned" and "absolutely unconcerned".[37] The first five top scores on the positive end of the scale, i.e. "very concerned" and "concerned", go to eight issues as shown in table 5. The result indicates a high degree of concern among women mayors over some of the key problems facing Chinese women in today.

[37] Among the list there are two questions pertaining specially to women cadres, such as the proportion of women in politics and training and selection of women cadres. The degree of concern showed in the survey, as one can expect, is the highest. These questions are excluded from the analysis in this section.

Table 6. Issues of Concern

Issues	Very concerned	Concerned	Total	%
Women's right to education	19	22	41	80
Equal opportunity for employment	20	20	40	78
Trafficking of women and children	17	22	39	76
Equal pay for equal work	16	22	38	75
Laid-off women	15	23	38	
Female poverty	11	25	36	71
Illiteracy	11	25	36	
Reproductive health	12	24	36	

What is your attitude towards women's studies? Emerged from the academia and within the Women's Federations, women's studies have since the mid of 1980s played a prominent role in addressing and research into issues and problems related to women in present China (Wang, 1997; Min, 1999; Lin Chun, 1998; Hsiung, 2001b). Attitude towards women's studies can thus indirectly indicate women mayors' stance in relation to gender polarization and gender inequality in Chinese society. As the result shows, 68.7% of the survey participants circled the first four choices of answer, which appreciate the role of women's studies positively. Another 19.6% indicated their doubt about women's studies (capability and competence to create change as measured against the government) and only 11.8% know very little about them. The majority of women mayors is found positive towards women's studies and is able to appreciate the roles of women's studies.

Table 7. Attitude Towards Independent Women's Studies N=51

Choice of answer	WMA	
	Frequency	Percent
WS call public attention to gender issues	8	15.7
WS play an important role in solving women's problems	11	21.6
WS provides useful references for policy formation concerning women and children	11	21.6
WS guides us towards a deep understanding of the gendered structure of our society	5	9.8
WS cannot solve women's problems alone without the government	10	19.6
Don't know much about WS	6	11.8
WS as purely academic enterprises are irrelevant to social realities	0	0
No response	0	0
Total	51	100

Do you think that women organizations in politics should work side by side with women's NGOs in order to promote and protect women's rights and interests? This question should reflect the degree of women mayors' personal willingness to cooperate with women NGOs. NGOs, or popular women's organizations as Milwertz termed, have been the main driving force for social change and gender equality in present China (Milwertz, 2002; Perry, 2001). Degree of personal willingness to cooperate with NGOs will not only indicate women mayors' concern over gender inequality but also their eagerness to tackle the problem and bring about changes. As the survey shows, 80.4% of the survey participants circled "yes" to the question. Most women mayors are willing to work with women NGOs.

Table 8. Degree of Willingness to Cooperate with Women NGOs N=51

ANSWER	WMA	
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	41	80.4
Don't know	3	5.9
No	4	7.8
No response	3	5.9
Total	51	100

The fourth question concerns the degree of women mayors' familiarity with prominent international as well as national documents on women including some Western feminist works that have been translated into Chinese. Familiarity with these documents will not only indicate women mayors' concern over gender issues but also their readiness to seek information and inspiration concerning women's rights and interests. As the survey result shows, Chinese governmental documents on women are the items that the participants are most familiar with, whereas Western feminist works are the item that they are least familiar with. The survey demonstrates a reasonable level of familiarity with recent national political documents on women among Chinese women mayors.

Table 9. Familiarity with International and National Documents on Women N=51

Items	Never heard	Heard	Have read	Have read thoroughly	Have been to training courses	No response	Total
CEDAW	7	30	9	2	0	3	51
Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategy	7	22	16	2	0	4	51
Beijing Platform for Action	0	20	23	5	1	2	51
Declaration against Violence against Women	7	32	9	0	0	3	51
The Second Sex	28	15	4	0	0	4	51
The Feminine Mystique	32	14	0	1	0	4	51
Our Bodies and Our Selves	26	18	1	1	1	4	51
Gender and China	20	20	5	1	1	4	51
The Program for the Development of Chinese Women 1995-2000	1	4	30	11	3	2	51
The Law of the PRC on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests	0	5	28	11	5	2	51
The White Paper of the PRC Government on the Situation of Women	3	16	22	6	1	3	51
The Survey on Women and Women's Social Status in China	7	23	14	2	1	4	51

Policy Consequences

Consequences of women mayors' gender consciousness can be studied at both the organizational and individual level. The question in concern is not "Do women make difference in politics?" It is simply a wrong question to ask. Firstly, gender equality as an indicator of good governance and precondition for sustainable development of the human species should be pursued by all governments and policy-makers, not particularly women. To place the responsibility of gender equality upon women alone is unfair and problematic. Secondly, as the recent results of gender studies have pinpointed, both men and women can be an agent of feminist politics and equality policies (Jardine & Smith, 1987; Digby, 1998). Inclination to gender equality should not be conditioned by the actor's biology, and to invest the hope for gender equality in women is to assume that only members of the female sex can have the potential to develop feminist politics.

Given the evidences on women mayors' gender consciousness, as demonstrated in the survey, what consequences would it generate in terms of policies? Do women mayors in China actually make an effort to reflect their concerns with the power invested in them? Do they actively seek to reframe policies in the light of gender equality? Or do they rather keep their work and their gender concern separate from each other? In the other words, what impact would women mayors' gender consciousness have on their behavior and policy preference?

At the organizational level, no apparent clue has been found to hint direct intersection and interactions between the WMA and women NGOs. Nor has the WMA actively engaged in broad gender issues. As many people including NGO activists often criticized, the WMA, as an exclusive organization of female officials, has inevitably a tendency to isolate itself from the rest of society, just like any official bureaucracy else. On the other hand, however, why should it be a problem, if the WMA keeps a clearly defined organizational profile, as any other civil organizations would do? It is the individual level that rather strong evidences have been found, indicating women mayors' pursuit of pro-women policies.

In the 2001 WMA survey, the participants were asked to indicate if they have put forward policy proposals in favor of women. The percentage of positive answer, as the table in below shows, is impressively high. 82.3% 'yes', whereas only 17.7% 'not yet' including 2% no-answer. Perhaps, the result should be read with some reservations given that: first, the distinction between "opinion-expressing" and "policy proposal" may not be obvious to everyone. Some of the participants, who answered 'yes', may have just

expressed their opinion on certain gender issues; second, many women mayors are in charge of women issues and other issues closely related to women. Some of those who answered 'yes' may have just done their job; third, in the post-Mao political discourses, to represent women's interests has become a socially acceptable and politically correct rhetoric. Some participants may have answered 'yes' in order to sound right.

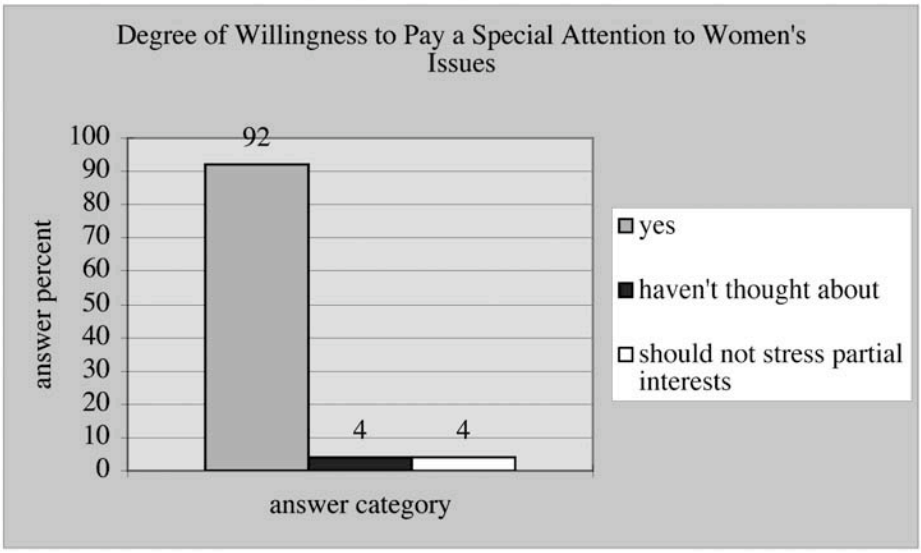
Table 10. Policy Preference of Women Mayors N=51

ANSWER	WMA	
	Frequency	Percent
Have	42	82.3
Not yet	8	15.7
No response	1	2
Total	51	100

Even so, the finding will still stand given that more similar evidences have been found. In the WMA survey, the participants were asked if they intend to put forward pro-women policy proposals in future. The result is again overwhelmingly positive. 82.4% 'yes', 11.8% 'not sure' and only 3.9% 'no' and 2% no-answer. In the interviews, the informants were asked if they mean that women in power should pay a special attention to women's issues and act in one way or another to the advantage of women.[38] The response is once again overwhelmingly positive. 92% of the informants gave a firm 'yes'. More than half of them added force to their 'yes' by either stressing the tone or using body gestures. Likewise, many went on in length to elaborate on the question in detail.

[38] A total of 73 informants participated in the interview. 10 as representatives their organization (the WM, the WMA and ACWF), another 13 failed to get to the question due to time limit. The total number of valid response is thus 50 (79% of the total).

Figure 4. Degree of Willingness to Pay a Special Attention to Women's Issues



Source: Interviews in China, spring and autumn 2000 and spring 2001.
Question: Do you think that women in politics should pay a special attention to women's issues and act in one way or another to the advantage of women?

In the survey, the participants were also asked whether the policy proposals they put forward have been adopted. The purpose was to find out what really happened to the proposed proposals and, on basis of that, assess women mayors' will power and ability to generate results. The hypothesis is: the fewer proposals have been adopted, the more likely that the proposal makers were just doing empty talks. Given the complicity of policy-making process and the absence of policy analysis from this study, the hypothesis is only suggestive. As the survey result shows, over half of the participants have achieved some kind results for the proposal they put forward. 66.7% of them have got their proposals through, 9.8% of them still have their proposals in the process, while 2% of them have got their proposals partially adopted.

Table 11. Outcome of the Posed Policy Proposals N=51

Answer	WMA	
	Frequency	Percent
Adopted	34	66.7
In process	5	9.8
Partially adopted	1	2
Not adopted	2	3.9
No response	9	17.6
Total	51	100

Concluding Remarks

The transformation of the totality in post-Mao China 'created the possibility for a transformation by the particular' (women) and outlined a new political and ideological paradigm for women in politics. The condition under which women mayors entered the political arena has thus become quite different from that in the 1970s. While the socialist gender equality ideology is still lingering in the background, two powerful discourses have emerged to create a new gender order. Women, according to the post-Mao discourse of gender difference, are no longer the 'same' of but rather 'different' from men. Their position in society and in politics as well, in the vein of the 'modernization and modern leadership quality' discourse, should both reflect and be determined alone by their quality. And, because men and women are different from each other, the quality between them is also different.

The implications of the gender difference and modernization paradigm for women in politics are two-fold. On the one hand, the recognition of gender difference seriously challenged the principle of gender equality, for the ranking order between men and women is immediately in question once they are defined as 'different' from each other. And since men and women can be different in many aspects, the question remained is why they should be treated equally, especially in an era of modernization, where individual efficiency and competence should determine who get ahead first. Accordingly, the discourse of modern leadership quality projected women's quality as a problem and relegated both women in general and women in politics a secondary status in terms of personal quality.

On the other hand, however, the recognition of gender difference also opens up some new options and opportunities. It allows women in politics to mark, display and cultivate their gender identity as well as to address, discuss and articulate gender-specific issues and concerns. The pressure of broad class interests on women's choice of life has diminished. Likewise, the 'quality' language can also be used to the advantage of women. Although women's quality is called into question, spaces are also made available for quality upgrading and self-improvement. Drawing on a 'quality' argument, women in politics can claim the need for quality improvement and negotiate for more resources and favorable conditions. There are positive, liberating edges within the negative, conservative ideology of gender difference and women's quality.

Women mayors constitute the largest cluster of female officials in the PRC history. Unlike women leaders of the Cultural Revolution generation whose gender was unmarked and neutralized, women mayors in post-Mao China strive develop a career to the extent of gender appropriateness. Drawing on their experience and reassessment of the socialist past, they seldom question the essentialist, pseudo-scientific accounts of gender difference and women's quality but rather welcomed the rhetoric as a new challenge. In everyday life, they strive to integrate the roles in the public and the roles as women and the female sex. And, despite of frustrations and difficulties, they firmly believe that a balance between women's multi-roles is achievable, if consciousness and will power is in order. The role of women mayors is thus compartmentalized. Not only do they reside in -and travel constantly between- two different domains, the public and the private, but also they tend to oscillate between egalitarian and traditional sexist gender ideologies in accordance with shifting interactional situations, relying on their good tact.

The WMA is a collective strategy of dealing with gender and the multi-challenges facing women mayors. Organizing is both an outcome of women mayors' growing self-awareness and a process through which they renegotiate identity, gender and power in politics. The WMA does not challenge the modernization and gender difference paradigm but rather see to accommodate women mayors' needs. By organizing various activities, the WMA created a 'women's space' and hence accommodated women mayors' gender-specific concerns. In this space, women mayors can freely talk about family, children, feelings, fashion and whatever topics interest them. They can dress and look in the way they personally like and don't have to worry, if it is proper in the eyes of others. In this space, socializing takes place on their premise. Reserveness and self-control to avoid intimacy and 'improper conduct' is no longer necessary.

The WMA is also a means of empowerment. It accommodates women mayors' work-related needs and hence bettered the condition for them. The WMA promotes women mayors' visibility by means of the media, publication and international visits. It organizes tours of work inspection by and for women in order to promote the political visibility of women mayors. The WMA mediates networking among women mayors. By adopting the policy of "making new friends while maintaining old friends", the WMA is able to socialize junior mayors and women in higher positions. It sets up a database of women mayors and recommends outstanding women mayors to the recruitment authority for higher positions. The WMA offers off-job training to women mayors in order to alter the existing pattern of resource allocation, which often reserves lesser opportunity for women.

The WMA activities have borne some positive consequences. There is a neat match between the most common type of activities women mayors participated, the role they anticipate the WMA to play, the goal they personally wish to pursue by being a part of the WMA, and the benefits they stated to have received from joining the WMA activities. Qualification upgrading and network activity are amongst others the primary demand of women mayors. The WMA has met the demand to the satisfaction of women mayors.

As a consequence of dealing with gender either individually or collectively, women mayors in post-Mao China share a clear profile of gender consciousness. They are overt self-confident. They identify themselves with female peers, wishing to have more women in their mayor team and turning to each other for support. They are well informed about -also positive towards- independent women's studies. They are deeply concerned about the problems facing women in today's China and are willing to cooperate with women NGOs to solve the problems. They are reasonably familiar with national as well as international documents on women. This gender consciousness has borne policy consequences. An overwhelming majority of women mayors has put forward policy proposals in favor of women and will continue to do so in future. Moreover, a reasonable proportion of the proposals have been adopted.

International scholarship on women and Chinese Communist politics has for long time ago characterized women's role in politics by tokenism and gender stereotyping. A totalitarian regime accompanied by the lack of independent women's organizations, the lack of effective political groupings, and the imposition of a strict moral code from above channeled women into a straight and narrow political as well as private life, which in turn froze them in

‘window dressing’ roles. This picture is no longer valid. Organizing is a process through which women renegotiate gender and power in politics. Even with the absence of a political reform leading to a democratic transition and of a distinctive increase of women’s proportion in politics, women’s roles in politics have undergone notable and significant changes. As Rosen rightfully points out, women cadres in post-Mao China seem to be more enthusiastic about political participation and are more able to do so (Rosen, 1995).

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