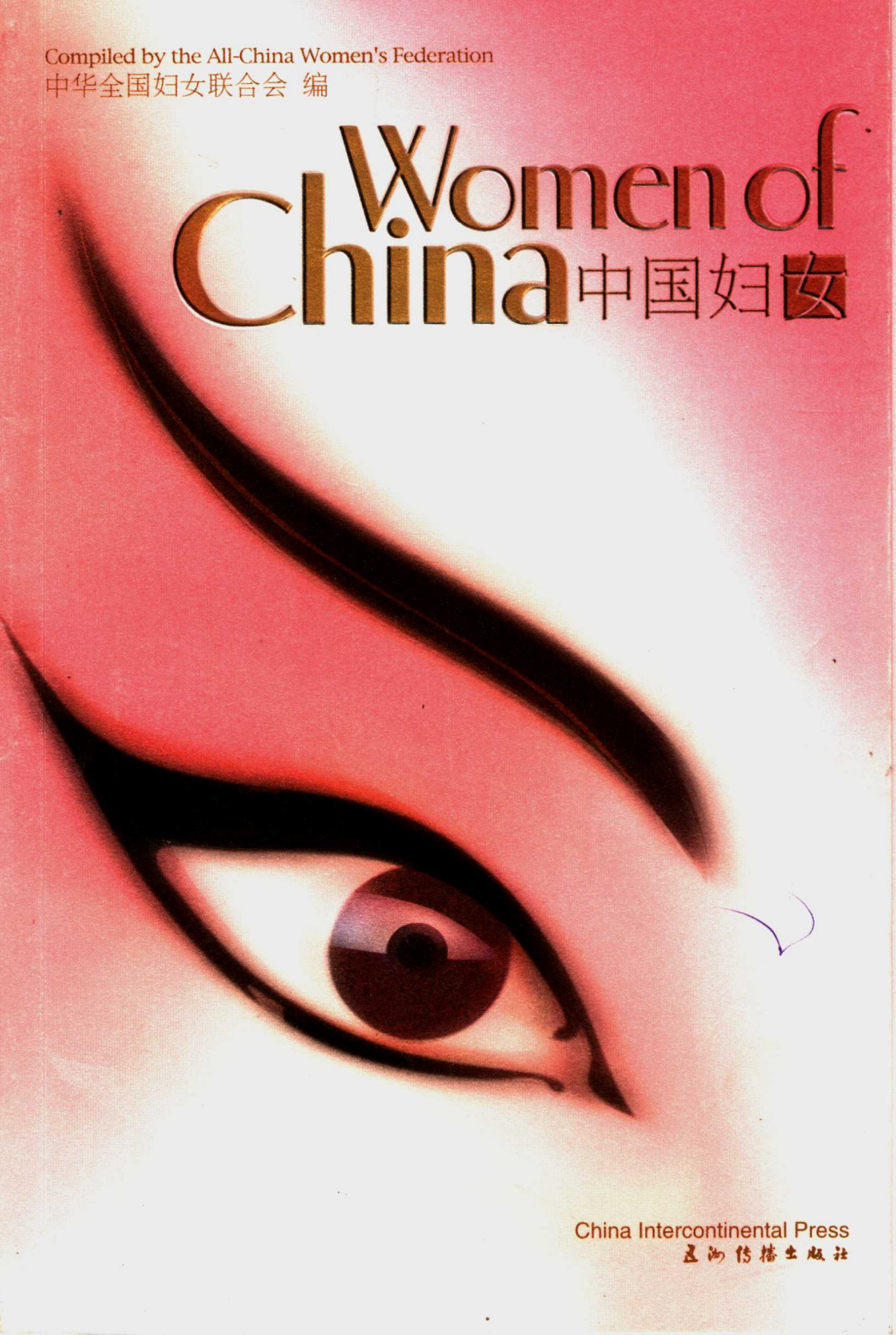


Compiled by the All-China Women's Federation
中华全国妇女联合会 编

Women of China 中国妇女



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Foreword

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Historically, few women have been recorded in the annals of Chinese history, even though it is one of countries with the most ancient books in the world. Only "vestal virgins" and "paragons of chastity", who did not remarry or committed suicide at the death of their husbands, could be written in China's official history. Women were overlooked as individuals, their voices were not heard and their wisdom was neglected. In the feudal society, which lasted several millennia, women experienced a bitter history of prolonged oppression by the regime, clan power, divine power and the authority of the husband. They were forced to follow the feudal ethical code of obedience to father before marriage, to husband after marriage and to son after the husband's death.

The sinister custom of feet binding, started from the Nantang Dynasty (AD 937-975), not only devastated women's bodies but also their minds. They were kept in a limited living space and taught with a credo that declared "the absence of literary attainment in a women is indeed a virtue." The cry of women's emancipation in China started from the prohibition of feet binding and the call for women's education.

After the Opium War (1839-1842) Western imperialist powers invaded China. The "self-sufficient" and natural economy in which "men plough the fields and women weave" began to gradually collapse.

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China fell into a half-colonial and half-feudal society. Patriots stood up to seek ways to save the country. At the end of the 19th century, early bourgeois improvers launched the Hundred Days' Reform (1898). They held that to strengthen the power of a nation should start from improving the condition of the citizens. They focused on the situation of women with the lowest social status and called for equality between men and women and rights for both genders. They also raised the issue of feet binding and starting women's education, all of which attracted attention.

In the early 20th Century with the appearance and growth of China's early bourgeoisie did democratic ideas begin to be promoted in China. The Revolution of 1911 led by Dr. Sun Yet-sen overthrew the Qing Dynasty and incorporated the claim of equality between men and women in the revolutionary program. It called for women to be involved in social life and be a central part of important reforms. Women intellectuals in the middle classes held high the flag of gender equality, while devoting themselves to the anti-Qing cause and the establishment of the Republic of China (1912-1949). They strove for women's rights, started women's education and launched women's newspapers. They became aware that women's emancipation should combine with national

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liberation. For the first time women's voices were heard in society. These women were the pathfinders on the road to women's emancipation.

The year 1915 saw the rise of the New Culture Movement. Its supporters held democracy and science as their flag and crusaded against old feudal morals, traditions and ideas. Individual freedom, liberation of personality and personal independence became the goal of the female emancipation movement during this period. With the victory of the October Revolution (in Russia in 1917), Marxism was introduced to China, which raised public awareness of women's issues. Women's emancipation became an important part in the revolution against feudal ideology. In 1919, the May 4th Movement against imperialism and feudalism was launched. With female students as the vanguard, women intellectuals and workers devoted themselves to the patriotic movement against imperialism. Spurred by the social movement, women's emancipation entered a new stage. The direct result was the opportunity for women and men to have open social intercourse and for universities to accept women. Men and women would be able to receive education in the same schools and calls for independent marriage were heard and acted upon.

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Progressive women intellectuals began to be affected by Marxism's theories on women's emancipation after they were influenced by democratic ideas. They began to look for the correct way to emancipate the women of China. The growth of women workers of modern times changed the nature of Chinese women. A group of women chose the revolutionary road to liberate the Chinese motherland and the female masses.

The women's movement changed from the old type of feminism in the period of democratic revolution to women's emancipation in the period of new democratic revolution. In the first half of the 20th Century, China experienced the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945) and Revolutionary Civil War (1945-1949). Chinese Communist Party members led people to strive for national independence and class liberation and regarded realization of equality between men and women as a permanent goal.

The founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949 brought great changes to the social status of Chinese women. For the first time, women appeared as masters of the country. A group of outstanding women were elected State leaders, while many others who had gone through the test of wars, took on positions

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as cadres at various levels. The Common Program (a provisional institution) adopted at the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in 1949 proclaimed the abolishment of the feudal system that fettered Chinese women. It ruled that women should enjoy equal rights with men in the political, economic, cultural and educational fields and in all other aspects of social life. The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China was the first law constituted after the founding of New China. It was brought into effect in May 1950. The Marriage Law oversaw a new marriage system based on the free choice of partners, on monogamy and on equal rights for men and women and on the protection of the lawful rights and interests of women and children. In 1954, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China was issued, which again ensured equal legal status between women and men.

In rural areas, women took part in agricultural production in the land distributed to them at land reform. In towns and cities, women came out of the home and participated in the country's industrial construction. They entered various fields, including those once solely occupied by men. Women drove trains and tractors, flew planes, carried mails and established themselves as geological explorers. Deng Yingchao (1904-1992), forerunner of the Chi-

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nese women's movement and wife of late Premier Zhou Enlai (1898-1976), once said women's involvement in trades they had never entered before proved they had rid themselves of the sense of inferiority and gained confidence and courage to study and struggle hard. With a spirit of perseverance, she said women, like men, could do any work and could do as well as men. The saying "women hold half of the sky" had great impact on the traditional tendency to overlook women's role and helped establish a new image of Chinese women.

At the end of the 1970s, China adopted a reform and opening-up policy. The system of planned economy was transferred to market economy. Market competition posed new challenges for career women looking to survive and develop. Women constantly faced up to changes and developed as they adapted to a new environment in which the dependence on the State and collectives was greatly weakened.

In the countryside, a new system of contracted responsibilities on a household basis with remuneration linked to output has seen many women growing with enthusiasm to be masters of farming, animal rearing and fish breeding. Consequently, many households have been able to rid themselves of poverty. In the process of readjustment of the agricultural structure, many women started to apply

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mixed farming concepts to adapt to market demand. Among them are a large group of women running specialized farming operations and entrepreneurs of township enterprises. In addition to that, many thousands of women have entered cities to look for chances for development.

In urban areas, women have constantly increased their ability for market competition. Some of them have developed into experienced entrepreneurs with significant assets through their hard struggle to create their own businesses. Women in fields such as science and technology, education, sports, and literature and art, have found a way to develop in a new social environment. They have demonstrated their advantages and talents in competition with a sense of self-respect, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-improvement. And in this way they have become stronger. Facing reforms of enterprises and employment pressure, many women have faced the tests of being laid off. With the support of government policy, they have strengthened their own capacity by attending various vocational training programs and found new work.

It has been 20-plus years since China adopted the reform and opening-up policy. Along with China's development and social progress, more and more

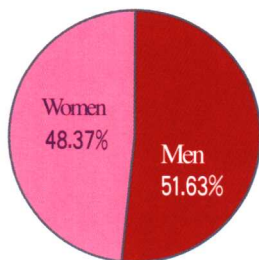
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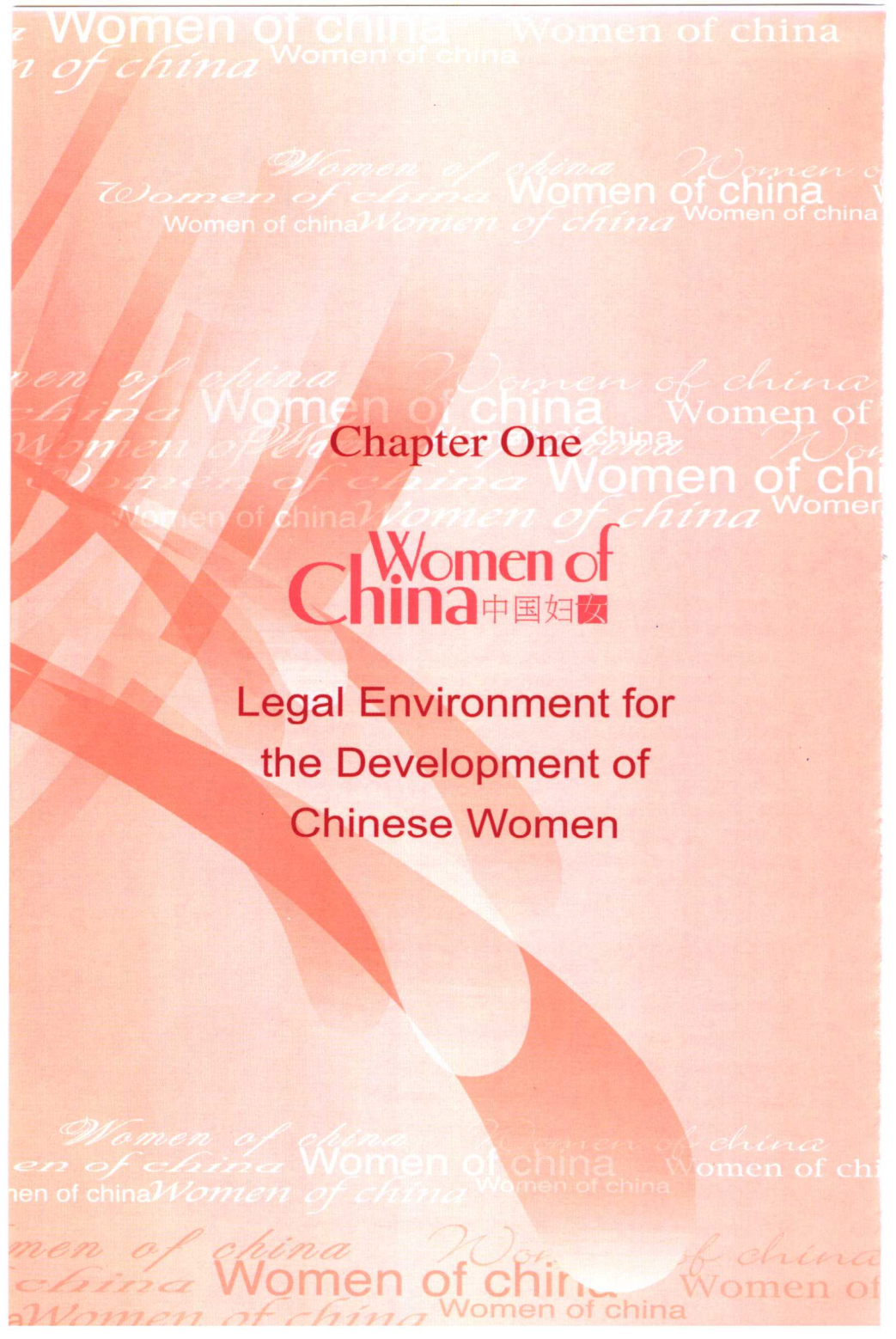
women have improved their educational level; more and more women have created a new career drawing on their wisdom and experience and more and more women have realized how to safeguard their legal rights and interests. They stick it out in adverse circumstances and rise to the occasion in difficult times. Through the test of the socialist market economy, Chinese women have become more mature and confident while maintaining a graceful bearing. In a light of equality, development and peace, they are working hard for a better life in the future.

Chinese Female Population

China carried out its fifth national population census on November 1, 2000. According to the result published in March of the following year, China had a male population of 653.55 million and a female population of 612.28 million in its 31 mainland provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities and in the army, accounting for 51.63 percent and 48.37 percent of the total respectively.



Chinese Female Population



Chapter One

Women of China 中国妇女

Legal Environment for the Development of Chinese Women



Gender Equality in the Constitution

China's policy of gender equality and protection of women was ensured in the Common Program (a provisional institution) adopted at the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) convened in Beijing in September of 1949. The Common Program stipulates: "The People's Republic of China shall abolish the feudal system which holds women in bondage. Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic, cultural, educational and social life. Freedom of marriage for men and women shall be instigated."

In 1954, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) was adopted at the First National People's Congress (NPC). Article 85 stipulates: "All citizens of the People's Republic of China are equal before the law." Article 86 stipulated: "All citizens of the People's Republic of China who have reached the age of 18 have the right to vote and stand for election, regardless of nationality, race, sex, occupation, family background, religious belief, education, property status, or length of residence. Women have an equal right to vote and stand for election as men." Article 96 stipulates: "Women in the People's Republic of China enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of political, economic, cultural and family

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life. Marriage, the family, and mother and children are protected by the State."

The amendment of the Constitution of the PRC was passed at the Fifth Plenary Session of the NPC convened in December 1982. Article 48, Chapter Two, stipulates: "Women in the People's Republic of China enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of political, economic, cultural and social and family life. The State protects the rights and interests of women, applies the principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women alike and trains and selects cadres from among women." Article 49 stipulates: "Marriage, the family, and mother and children are protected by the State. Both husband and wife have the duty to practice family planning. Parents have the duty to rear and educate their children, and children who have come of age have the duty to support and assist their parents. Violation of the freedom of marriage is prohibited. Maltreatment of old people, women and children is prohibited."

Legal System Safeguards Women's Rights and Interests

China, one of the signatories, acceded to the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" in 1980. The Chinese Government stipu-

lated a series of laws and regulations to safeguard women's rights and interests. The legal system to safeguard women's rights and interests and promote their development has come into being, with the Constitution of the PRC as the basis and the Law of the PRC on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women as the core. Relative laws include Civil Law, Criminal Law, Electoral Law, Labour Law, Marriage Law, Compulsory Education Law, Law on Maternal and Infant Health Care, Law of Succession, Adoption Law, Trade Union Law, Population and Family Planning Law and Rural Land Contracting Law.

In this legal system, the Law of the PRC on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women (LPRCPRIW) is an integrated fundamental one protecting women's rights and interests in all respects. The LPRCPRIW adopted at the Fifth Session of the Seventh NPC convened on April 3, 1992, keeps to the basic principle of sexual equality, the special protection of women's rights and interests, gradual improvement of the social security system for women and the prohibition of any discrimination, maltreatment and persecution directed at women.

With the promulgation and implementation of the LPRCPRIW, enforcement regulations of the LPRCPRIW were issued by people's congresses at provincial, autonomous region and municipal levels. Relative policies were made to solve problems relating to safeguarding women's rights and interests. Judiciary organs and women's federations at various levels have carried out various forms of publicity and the NPC and people's congresses at various levels have undertaken enforcement inspections relating to the LPRCPRIW. With these efforts, more and more women began to become aware of their rights and interests. They also developed an ability to search for legal help when their rights and interests are infringed. At the same time, the promulgation and implementation of the LPRCPRIW strengthened society's appreciation of the need to safeguard women's legal rights and interests.

In November 2001, along with 14 government