

PRIMARY ANALYSIS ON WOMEN'S STATUS OF RENHE TOWN, BAIYUN DISTRICT, GUANGZHOU

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ABSTRACT: There are more women than men in Renhe Town, about 40% of women have jobs. Young women under 30 years old are mainly industrial workers. The average years of education for all women over 6 years old are 6.03, but for men they are 7.64. The Women's Federation of Renhe Town is a vital organization. What it has done plays an active role in raising women's social status and encouraging women to take part in the community life. In the past, women mainly participated in different collective agricultural labour assigned by their carders. Women had not much chance to show their intelligence and wisdom. Since the policy of 'reform and open door to the outside world' was carried out women have had more and more chance to bring their abilities into full play and many women become capable persons of different trades and professions. Now, in Renhe, women are the main force of factories and dispensable part of all kinds of production work done in units of families.

KEY WORDS: women's status, Renhe Town, Women's Federation, women's issue

I. INTRODUCTION

The research on women issue is one part of small town research, one of the three sections of comparative research on metropolitans of Asia. The small town, Renhe Town, is a suburban town of metropolitan Guangzhou. This paper is just an initial report of the research and stresses on women's status of Renhe Town. Women's status means women's political, social and economic status, though this paper mainly put stress on women's social and economic status. The first part of the paper mainly analysed the data of 1990 Population Census of Guangzhou, China^[1] and the second and third parts are mainly on the basis of interviews with

local leaders and other people. But what they said is not unanimous and I still have a lot to do in the future.

II. GENERAL SITUATION

1. Quantity, Sex Ratio and Age Sex Structure

There are 34,000 women among 60,000 permanent residents of Renhe Town. The sex ratio (men in 100 women) is 93.57. It is much lower than the average level 105.85 of Baiyun District, ranking the second lowest in 14 towns and 4 neighborhoods of the district.

From the population pyramid of Renhe Town (Fig. 1)^[1], we can see that the population type is the type of growth. Among all women, 38.28 percent are girls under 14 years old, 59.83 percent are in labour age of 15—64 years old and 5.89 percent are old women over 65 years old.

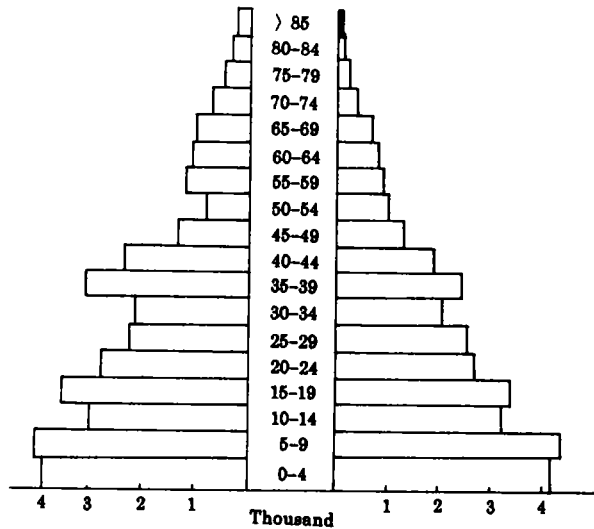


Fig. 1 Population Pyramid of Renhe Town

By analysing the age-sex structure, we can find the general trend that the older the age, the lower the sex ratio is. The sex ratio for different age group is listed below:

- 106.74 for age group of 0—14 years old,
- 95.75 for age group of 15—39 years old,
- 91.23 for age group of 40—46 years old,
- 54.95 for age group of over 65 years old.

Now we know that the total number of Renhe Town's women, especially women in labour age group, is larger than that of men.

This means that women labour resource is more plentiful than that of men.

2. Employment Situation

According to the data of 1990 Population Census, there are 32,700 employees among all permanent residents of Renhe Town. Among the employees, 1,670 thousand are women. The employment rate is 49.32 percent for all women and 82.76 percent for all labour age women. Though more women are employed than men, if we consider the whole population, the women's employment rate is still a little lower than that of men (Table 1)^[1].

Table 1 Employment situation of Renhe Town

	Employment population (person)	Employment rate (%)	
		For all population	For labour age group of 15—64
Total	32694	49.76	83.17
Men	15955	50.24	83.62
Women	16723	49.32	82.76

By analysing the industrial structure of employment population (Table 2)^[1], we can find that there is a big difference between male and female employees. There are 61.5 percent of women employed in agriculture, just a little lower than that of men; but 32.33 percent of women are employed in industry, almost twice times as high as that of men; and 6 percent of women are employed in the third industry, only about two fifths as high as that of men.

A great difference also exists in vocational structure (Table 3)^[3]. Unlike industrial workers, women's employment rate in other careers is lower than that of men. There are not many female leaders or office workers. In other words, there are only 4.69 percent and 15.66 percent of women in these two careers.

According to a survey made by the Town Womer's Federation in November 1991, the total number of female agricultural labourers was 11,976 and over half of them also held other jobs concurrently. Among all female farmers, 415 were (3.46 percent) at the age of 20—29, 3,670 (30.6 percent) at the age of 30—39 and 7,891 (65.9 percent) at the age of over 40. According to 1990 Population Census, there were 5,063 women at age of 20—29 and 5,223 women at the age of 30—39. This fact means that only about 8 percent of young women at the age of 20—29 are agricultural labourers, but the middle aged women of 30—39 are about

70 percent.

Table 2 Industrial structure of Renhe Town (%)

Item	Industrial structure			Percentage of women
	Total	Men	Women	
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	51.20
1. Farming, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery and irrigation	62.32	63.09	61.59	50.60
2. Industry	24.84	16.99	32.33	66.63
3. Construction	2.15	4.33	0.08	1.99
4. Transportation and communication	2.02	3.95	0.17	4.39
5. Business, catering trade, supply and marketing, storehousing	3.64	4.92	2.43	34.12
6. Real estate management, public utilities, residential and consultive services	1.30	1.73	0.89	35.14
7. Public health, sports and welfare	0.46	0.51	0.41	45.33
8. Education, culture and art, broadcasting and television	2.01	2.38	1.65	42.01
9. Scientific research and technological service	0.09	0.10	0.08	46.67
10. Finance and insurance	0.20	0.26	0.14	35.38
11. Government, party and mass organization	0.97	1.74	0.23	12.30

In short, women's employment rate of Renhe Town is rather high. The middle aged and old women are mainly agricultural labourers and young women under 30 years old are mainly factory workers. But only very few women are leaders and office workers.

3. Educational Level

In Renhe Town, the average educational level of women is lower than that of men. In every ten thousand women of over 6 years old, 3 are graduated from universities, 11 from polytechnic colleges and one from special or technical secondary schools, respectively corresponding to about one-fifth, one-fourth and two-fifths of men (Table 4)^[1]. In addition, 1999 women are illiterate or half illiterate, and it is 3.4 times more than that of men. The average years of education for all people over 6 years old are 6.8. But for men they are 7.64 years and for women they are 6.03 years.

Table 3 Vocational structure of Renhe Town (%)

Item	Vocational structure			percentage of women
	Total	Men	Women	
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	51.20
1. Professional and technological persons	3.12	4.16	2.39	37.63
2. Leaders of government, Party, mass organizations	1.04	2.04	0.10	4.69
3. Office workers and related persons	0.86	1.49	0.26	15.66
4. Business employments	2.91	3.92	1.95	34.35
5. Service employments	2.86	2.96	2.77	49.57
6. Farming, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery labourers	62.01	62.48	61.56	50.83
7. Industry and transportation workers	27.07	22.95	30.97	58.58

Table 4 People with all kinds of education in a ten thousand population of over 6 years old in Renhe Town
(unit: person/per ten thousand persons)

	Total	Men	Women
University	9	15	3
Polytechnical college	26	41	11
Special or technical secondary school	72	106	41
Senior middle school	936	1327	579
Junior middle school	3033	3278	2811
Primary school	4661	4775	4556
Illiterate or half illiterate	1263	456	1999

III. THE WOMEN'S FEDERATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF ITS MAJOR TASK

1. The Composition of Women's Federation of Renhe Town

In China, Women's activities are mainly organized by the Women's Federation. The Women's Federation of Renhe Town is led by both the local committee of the Communist Party of China and the Women's Federation of Baiyun District. Under the leadership of the Town Women's Federation, there are 23 Village and Neighborhood Branches and 303 women groups at the basic level. The Town Women's Federation has 18 members, representing women from all walks of life in the whole town.

2. The Transformation of the Major Task of the Town Women's Federation

"Since the 1950s, the major task of the Town Women's Federation has been

transferred according to the changes of the economic and social life conditions and women's situations in different times." Zhu Yuemei, head of the Women's Federation of Renhe Town said.

In the 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s, the rural women could hardly decide their own marriages by themselves and most of them were illiterate. Thus the major women's work was propagating the new marriage law, advocating free marriage and setting up literacy classes. Most young and middle aged women at that time, now over 50 years old, attended these classes. With their own efforts, they made great progress, and some of them, for example Zhu Yuemei's mother, now can write letters and read newspapers.

After the mid-1960s, with the development of the collective economy of the people's commune and the general improvement of women's education, women's major task was transferred to training women's key member and teaching them practical skills, such as how to plant rice, to cultivate green manure and how to raise pigs and poultry in a scientific way.

In the 1970s, the task of the Women's Federation was stressed on building up civilized family and helping to open training classes related to agricultural production.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, women have played more important roles in the economic development and in the community life along with the changes of organization forms in agricultural production and the development of various countryside enterprises. Therefore, what the Women's Federation has done is various. In Renhe Town, the work can be divided into three main types. The first one is to help women study science and technology and develop family economy. The second one is to enrich women's life and promote building the civilized families. The third one is to spread the knowledge of law and to protect women's legal rights and interests. The main methods used are running various training classes, setting up women's research groups on different agricultural techniques, organizing many kinds of competitions, receiving letter visiting, giving advice and consultation cooperated with other government departments and mass organizations. Take the training classes as an example. Having cooperated with the Adult Educational Centre of Renhe Town, the Women Federation invites some teachers who make circuit of the villages to give lessons on subjects interested by women, such as sewing, cooking, haircutting, etc. and lessons of how to harmonize family relationship. The Women's Federation also help other government departments set up classes for young couples preparing to get married and for young parents and give them lessons about family planning and pass on knowledge of how to bear a healthy child and how to bring up healthy and intelligent children.

From Zhu Yuemei's introduction, we can consider that the work done by the Women's Federation in different times has played an active role in raising women's social status and encouraging women to take part in community life.

IV. CHANGES OF WOMEN'S ROLE IN COMMUNITY LIFE

1. Women's Role in Economic Life

There are a little more female employees than male employees in Renhe Town. There are 94 percent of female employees working in agriculture and industry, and they respectively accounting for 50.6 percent and 66.63 percent of all labour force of these two parts. Moreover, these two parts respectively made up 36.62 percent and 41.58 percent of gross countryside social production* in 1991^[2]. Thus it can be seen that women play a very important role in economic development of Renhe Town. But not until the beginning of the 1980s, did women mainly participate in the collective agricultural labour assigned by their cadres. So women had not much chance to show their intelligence and wisdom. Since the policy of reform and open door to the outside world was carried out, women have had more and more chance to bring their abilities into full play. Though still only a few women can be leaders now, many women have become capable persons of different trades and professions. The following are some examples.

1.1 *Women in industry*

There are more than 400 industrial factories in Renhe Town, and most factories produce shoes, clothing, electronic cell and plastic articles. Most of the workers in these factories are women. Though chief leaders are mainly men in most factories, women leaders do remarkable work in some plants. Taking Xing Hua Leather Articles Plant as an example, it originally belonged to town government and was contracted by a Hongkong business man in 1980. Since then, the boss has been in charge of the plant's raw material supplying and product selling, but nearly all routine work has been dealt with by Ms. Yang, Vice Director, employed by the boss in 1980. Now, the plant has about 250 employees, among them, only 4 porters and one maintenance worker are men and all others are native women. Because most of them come from the peasant families, in their busy farming seasons, the plant has to reduce order forms so that workers can go home to do farm work. If order forms can not be reduced, Ms. Yang will tell the

* Gross countryside social production does not include the production value of the enterprises which are located in Renhe Town but don't belong to the town.

workeres in advance in order workers can hire some helper to do farm work instead. Some workeres who are badly needed in their farm work can still ask for leave during the farming seasons. Since the boss can guarantee the raw material supplying and product selling and Ms. Yang is good at management, the plant has made good profits. Workers can not only have ralatively high income but also have time to take care of their homes. Therefore, the labour force is ralatively stable and the native women enjoy working in this plant.

1. 2 *Women in agriculture*

Since the contract system of combining responsibility with output was carried out, a family has become a production entity. Family memebers must exert themselves in production. Thus women, knowing only a few skills in the past, began to study various agricultural teachniques. Many women became capable of farming or raising animal husbandry. For example, Zhang Guiping originally was a farmer, and just received 4-year education in a primary school. At the beginning of the 1980s, her husband contracted a small village plant. But a few years later, the plant went bankrupt. In order to help her husdand pay the debt, Zhang began to raise pigs. At first, she just raised a few and later with the help of the Women's Federation and village cadres, Zhang got a bank loan and could raize more pigs. Learning from the other people's experience and her own groping, Zhang accumulated a whole set of good methods. Through her raising pigs, Zhang and her husband paid their debt and their three children's tuition and remodeled their house. Other farmers often came to consult her, and in 1990 recommended by the Women's Federation, Zhang became a saleswoman and a consultee of the Livestock and Aquatic Product Company of Renhe Town. She even lectured in the training classes to introduce her experience to the other people.

1. 3 *Women in individual business*

In individual business, women mainly manage clothing shop, foodshop, butcher', catering trade etc. Many of them make good profits. For example, Ms. Lei manages Yuan Lin (Garden) Hotel with her husband. The hotels' geographical location is superior. It is located between the courtyard of Renhe Town goverment and the Liuxí River Bridge. Across the Bridge is Sun Island Recreational Park. The hotel is a three-storeyed building with an architectural area of more than 1000 square metres. Its first floor is a restaurant and its second and third floors are guest rooms. Now the hotel is the biggest among individual hotels or restaurants of Renhe Town. In 1987 Ms. Lei and her husband made a bid for

constructing and managing the hotel. According to the contract, they could run the hotel for 15 years and did not have to pay the land rent, but the building would belong to the government when the contract ended. The couple invested more than one million yuan in the hotel including a bank loan of more than half million yuan. After the hotel opened in 1988, the couple disbanded the construction team also managed by themselves and paid their full attention to the management of the hotel. In order to decrease run cost by comprehensive management, they also contracted a big fish pond with an area of about 1400 square metres and raised about 100 pigs by the site of the pond. Over the past years, they made a yearly net profit of more than 0.3 million yuan. In the middle of 1992, they recouped capital outlay.

Briefly speaking, in the past women in the countryside were mainly housewives and ordinary farmers. But now, they have various special skills and become important members in all kinds of trades and vocations.

2. Women's Role in Family and Social Life

Since families became production entities, women's role in families has been more important than when family was just a cell of participating in the collective production. In the model of family productive management, every family member has to do his or her best to develop family economy and each needs help from the others. Women have more right to choose their family life they like and they also keep close relation with other members of the community. As a result, women become more and more active in participating social life. For example, the campaign of building civilized families is being virtually carried out because of women's participations on their own will. We are glad to see that many families are having a harmonious life and neighbours are willing to help each other.

3. Nonnative Women Workers

According to the statistics of Labour Service Company of Renhe Town at the end of June, 1992, there were 3027 nonnative workers working in town and village factories. They were about two-thirds of all workers and about half of all women workers working in town and village factories. Most nonnative women workers are young aged 16—25 and ever studied in junior high schools or senior high schools. Only a few of them are graduated from special or technical secondary schools, polytechnic colleges or universities. The latter are mainly managerial personnel but most of them take Renhe Town as a springboard. If they find better jobs, they will quit and take the better ones. Some nonnative women workers,

once they become skilled workers, also want to transfer to other places with favourable working conditions and higher wages and most young nonnative women workers will go back to their hometowns when they are married. As a result, just a few of them will stay and work there for more than two years. In order to attract new workers and to keep old workers, some big or middle factories like to pay them higher wages and provide them better board and lodging conditions. For example, both Rong Shan and Wan Li Da Shoe Factories have constructed dormitories and dining rooms. During holidays, some factories also arrange recreational and sports activities. Since 1991, Renhe Town, like other areas of Guangzhou City, have begun trying out signing and authenticating labour contracts in big and middle enterprises under the management of town or district governments. Both workers and managers sign the contracts and the Labour Service Company authenticates them. Workers must work in the factory at least one year as the contracts state. Managers are responsible for paying the insurance company the insurance premium of 12 percent of total wages for native workers and paying medical cost, living cost during their illness and industrial injury compensation to the nonnative workers who have worked in the factory over half a year. Now workers including nonnative workers know how to protect themselves. When their legal rights and benefits are encroached, they will ask the Labour Service Company for help. In short, both native and nonnative women workers have contributed a lot to the local development.

This paper is only a primary description of women issue in a small town. Some unsolved problems need further study. For example, the problems about nonnative women and women's roles in social and economic life of the community, especially women's role in town planning and town building. If possible, I also want to do some comparative research on women issue between the small town, Renhe Town, and the inner city community, Jinhua neighbourhood of Guangzhou City, to probe the roles and problems of suburban women and urban women in their own communities.

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