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Barriers to Women's Gaining a Role in Grassroots Government: The Case of a Questionnaire Survey of Grassroots Civil Servants in China

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Abstract

This dissertation investigated the barriers faced by female civil servants in grassroots government in China when it comes to work and promotion. On the basis of the existing literature, three research questions are posed in this dissertation:1) Do women face barriers when seeking access to local government? If so, what are these barriers? 2) Does gender socialisation and gender norms have an impact on women's representation in government? 3) What are the career goals of women entering government at the primary level? To address these research questions, this dissertation used mixed methods research methodology, which employed a non-quantitative questionnaire to collect data. To ensure the accuracy of the final questionnaire, this dissertation conducted a Pilot Study to get feedback from the target people. According to findings and discussion, this dissertation found that traditional Chinese gender norms and gender-based discrimination, including internalised sexism constrain the job development of female civil servants at the primary level. It also found that the weakness of China's elderly care facilities makes daughters-in-law the primary bearers of elderly care responsibilities, which can place additional family burdens on grassroots women and discourage their job advancement. The study further found that the patriarchal dominant 'guanxi' culture is unfair to the development of female civil servants at the grassroots level. This dissertation mainly reveals the restrictions and barriers imposed on women under the patriarchal culture.

Keywords: gender norms, gender roles, gender socialisation, grassroots female civil servants, internalised misogyny

1. Introduction

Women's professional development is one of the issues discussed in contemporary feminist political economy. The underrepresentation of women in politics is a global phenomenon (Krook, 2007, p. 367). Women make up almost half of the world's population, but they are less involved in decision-making and general political processes compared to men (Abubakar & Ahmad, 2014, p. 65).

Most of the relevant literature from the Global North on the reasons for women's underrepresentation in politics takes a gendered socialisation perspective, arguing that socialised gender roles are responsible for keeping women out of political interests (Fox & Lawless, 2011, p. 60). People are socialised to believe that politics is a man's world (Deason, Greenlee, & Langner, 2015, p. 136) and women are socialised to believe that they belong in the home (Eagly & Wood, 2012, p. 468; Voorpostel & Coffé, 2012, p. 31; Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019, p. 36), and were prevented from developing political ambitions (Deason, Greenlee, & Langner, 2015, p. 136). Stereotypes of women, internalised sexism and internalised misogyny are created because of socialised gender norms (Piggot, 2004, p. 14; Joyce et al., 2021, p. 503). Masculinity is socialised as a need for political leadership (Conroy, 2016, p. 59; Hayes & Lawless, 2016, p. 70; Gershon, 2013, p. 702), while femininity is not considered to overlap with leadership (Schneider & Bos, 2014, p. 248).

With a long history of patriarchy, this sexism in the political sphere is even more severe in China (Tang, 2020, p.191). Researchers at Peking University published a report on gender discrimination in the workplace in China based on a sample of 3,000 employees, and in terms of job type, women dominate in the service, education and production sectors (76.4%), while in the government, less than 12% (Wang, 2009, p. 188). Existing research in China on the under-representation of Chinese women in government suggests that the prevailing public view continues to attribute this under-representation to women's lower capacity in political roles (Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30; Sun, 2010, p. 52; Zhao, 2006, p. 61; Sun, 2010, p. 52). Women are less educated than men in political participation, unable to meet the demands of political participation (Zhao, 2006, p. 61; Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30) and are prone to psychological weaknesses such as lack of self-confidence, dependence on men at work, and lack of work goals (Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30; Zhao, 2006, p. 61; Shi, 2010, p. 137).

Based on the existing literature, three research questions are posed in this dissertation:

1) Do women face barriers when seeking access to local government? If so, what are these barriers?

2) Does gender socialisation and gender norms have an impact on women's representation in government?

3) What are the career goals of women entering government at the primary level?

To address these research questions, this dissertation takes the political representation of female civil servants at the grassroots level in China as its chosen topic and based on the existing literature, empirically investigates the current situation of female civil servants in local government police departments in Zhanjiang City, China, using a questionnaire. The survey was open to grassroots civil servants of all genders in order to obtain gender-specific perceptions of female grassroots civil servants' representation. The final questionnaire returned 205 responses.

This dissertation sets out its mixed methods research methodology, which employed a non-quantitative questionnaire. To ensure the accuracy of the questionnaire and data, a Pilot Study (PS) was conducted with a sample of ten participants selected by intrinsic interest sampling. In the PS, a pilot questionnaire was created, and a qualitative feedback survey was conducted to obtain the participants' opinions on the final questionnaire changes.

After examining the questionnaire results and responding to the research questions, this dissertation further discusses and compares the similarities and differences between the findings and earlier studies and suggests some possible explanations. Last, it concludes the whole paper and reflects on the shortcomings and benefits of the approach used and data obtained in this dissertation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Most studies have found a lack of female representation in government organisations (Hessami & Fonseca, 2020, p. 2; Schneider & Bos, 2019, p. 174; Fox & Lawless, 2011, p. 59). Existing research on women's underrepresentation in government in the Global North suggests that prevailing views create a range of barriers for women to gender socialisation and gender norms, for example, women are discouraged from taking an interest in politics (Fox & Lawless, 2011, p. 60); women are expected to take on more domestic responsibilities (Voorpostel & Coffé, 2012, p. 31); stereotyping and sexism of women by voters and the media (Hayes & Lawless, 2016, p. 70); internalised sexism at work, etc. (Joyce et al., 2021, p. 503). In contrast, existing research in China on the underrepresentation of Chinese women in government suggests that the prevailing public view continues to attribute this underrepresentation to women's lower capacity in political roles (Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30; Sun, 2010, p. 52; Zhao, 2006, p. 61; Sun, 2010, p. 52). The comparison shows that women's underrepresentation in politics has been more intensively studied in the global North, while research in China has been limited to women's intrinsic capacities, with little research into what prevents women from developing their intrinsic capacities. The reason for this research gap may be that the development of feminism in China can challenge traditional Chinese Confucian views (Han, 2018, p. 740). For example, in China, feminists are often stigmatised and used as a metaphor for women who are disliked and despised (Han, 2018, p. 740). In the government's eyes, the term 'feminism' implies social or political change that could pose a potential threat to China's political stability (Han, 2018, p. 740). As a result, the study of women in China is often not in deep.

This chapter reviews the main studies relating to women in government. Western research was found through Google Docs and the University of Birmingham Library. Chinese literature is found in CNKI, which is a Chinese literature search site in China.

2.2 Western Research

In the West, the reasons for women's under-representation in politics have been more intensively studied in terms of gender role socialisation and sexism. Women are discouraged from taking an interest in politics because of the socialisation of gender roles (Deason, Greenlee, & Langner, 2015, p. 136). And the sexism generated by socialised gender, including internalised sexism and internalised misogyny, can create further inequities for

women at work.

2.2.1 Gender Roles in Socialization

Due to the socialisation of gender roles, women are actively discouraged from taking an interest in politics (Fox & Lawless, 2011, p.60). Women's social roles tend to be more family-oriented and they are groomed for the role of wife or mother in terms of personality trait development and value orientation (Fox & Lawless, 2011, p. 60), resulting in low political ambition (Deason, Greenlee, & Langner, 2015, p. 136). Political science scholar Sapiro (1982, p. 277) found in a survey and study of a sample of married delegates to the 1972 US Republican and Democratic National Conventions that women's family obligations were associated with lower political ambition and reluctance to take on public commitments, while men pursued their ambitions despite their complex family lives. And from the perspective of feminist scholars, this might be limiting and may not consider several factors that contribute to this gender ambition gap (Deason, Greenlee, & Langner, 2015, p. 136) but simply assumed that women deserved to take on more domestic responsibilities. People are socialised to believe that politics is a man's world (Deason, Greenlee & Langner, 2015, p. 136) and therefore women are considered to belong to the family and are not encouraged to take an interest in politics (Fox & Lawless, 2011, p. 60). Eagly and Wood (2012, p. 468) find that males and females are segregated into specific roles, and congruence between biological sex and gender roles is expected and rewarded, while deviation is punished. For example, when a young girl demonstrates leadership skills, she is negatively labelled as 'bossy', while young boys who demonstrate the same skills are praised as 'confident' and 'leaders' (Bos, Schneider & Utz, 2019). The perpetuation of practices such as this that encourage children to embrace gender identities and roles associated with their biological sex can lead to women being actively discouraged from developing ambitions in politics.

Socialised gender roles have also led to women taking on more responsibility for their families. The number of dependent children in the household exacerbates the persistent gender gap, as mothers' leisure time is far more restricted than that of fathers (Voorpostel & Coffé, 2012, p. 31). In qualitative evidence, Lawless and Fox (2010, p. 81) found that 65% of women surveyed felt that childcare was a barrier to political leadership competition for women who might be considering running for office. When women reach the same professional positions as men, they may still not be able to participate equally in politics because they take on more domestic and family care work (Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019, p. 36). Furthermore, the number and age of children can also delay the political ambitions and competitive ambitions of elected women (Deason, Greenlee & Langner, 2015, p. 137). Having older children can reduce some personal barriers for women in political office (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2010, p. 7), due to the fact that mothers can take less care of their older children. In order to meet competing demands, women pursuing political leadership roles may limit their family responsibilities by choosing not to have children (Deason, Greenlee & Langner, 2015, p. 137). However, not having children in order to succeed in the political arena may also create family problems for women. Childlessness can lead to stigma or marginalisation, mainly in terms of marital instability, cheating husbands, and harassment and rejection by in-laws and mothers-in-law (Van Balen & Bos, 2009, p. 117).

2.2.2 Gender Stereotypes, Internalised Sexism, and Internalised Misogyny

Stereotypes and biases against women candidates by voters or party leaders can also have a negative impact on women's participation in politics. There are also many stereotypes of female candidates among voters or party leaders. Bos, Schneider, and Utz (2017) find that most voters typically perceive political leaders to be masculine. These opinions are partly since persona coverage of political candidates generally focuses on the masculinity of the candidate rather than femininity (Conroy, 2016, p. 59; Hayes & Lawless, 2016, p. 70). Female candidates have also received a great deal of coverage questioning their competence (Meeks, 2012, p. 179), and this extensive coverage can draw public attention to the incongruity between being a woman and holding a male political leadership role (Gershon, 2013, p. 702) and reinforce stereotypes about women's participation in politics. This suggests that the focus on masculinity in news coverage affects female candidates by telling them to harbour masculinity to get media attention and coverage, while femininity does not get the attention of the media and the public. Voters believe that female candidates do not possess masculinity (Schneider & Bos, 2014, p. 248) and are therefore unsuitable for the political office they are running for. However, if female candidates display masculine traits, such as a stern image, they also face attacks for being too masculine and not feminine enough (Falk, 2010, p. 70). To succeed in politics, women leaders must compromise their gender identity, balance masculinity with femininity, and maintain femininity while possessing the qualities of 'toughness' and 'decisiveness' in order to please the public (Saluja, & Thilaka, 2020, p. 228).

Manifestations of sexism against women are often overlooked and internalised and are referred to as natural behaviours (Joyce et al., 2021, p. 503). This is referred to as internalised sexism against women and is also often associated with internalised misogyny (Saluja & Thilaka, 2020, p. 230). Internalised misogyny is again different from internalised sexism. The latter uses the natural differences between men and women to reinforce gender norms (Saluja & Thilaka, 2020, p. 230). The former serves as an enforcement strategy to maintain sexist

discourses in society (Yoon, 2017, p. 110). Internalised misogyny is conceptualised as a discourse that devalues women as well as mistrusts them (Piggot, 2004, p. 14). Internalised misogyny would have a negative impact on the social status of women, which is mainly reflected in the devaluation of women and their role in society, which then increases and maintains the power of men (Piggot, 2004, p. 14).

Internalised misogyny is perpetuated not only by men but also by women (Piggot, 2004, p. 15). Internalised misogyny among women is an act of horizontal oppression that reinforces the devaluation of girls and the core patriarchal culture (Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1993). Internalised misogyny among women can be analysed by looking at traditional gender roles, such as the presence of behaviours that prioritise men, objectify themselves or place themselves in a subordinate position (Bearman, 2009, p. 19).

2.3 China Research

Existing Chinese studies of women's under-representation in the government in China suggest that the dominant view among the public is still that this underrepresentation is due to women's low capacity or aptitude for political roles (Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30; Sun, 2010, p. 52; Zhao, 2006, p. 61; Sun, 2010, p. 52). The later view was that women's lack of political participation was caused by the patriarchal environment and was not innate to women (Zhuang, 2016, p. 11). If women are given the same environment and conditions as men, they too can demonstrate superior cognitive skills and judgement in public affairs. In addition, there are some arguments that there is gender injustice in the promotion process and system of civil servants (Tan, 2020, p. 25), as promotion by recommendation of leaders comes with the acquisition and maintenance of social connections (Zhuang, 2016, p. 13), making the promotion method unfair to women.

2.3.1 Intrinsic Factors

Some scholars argue that their own low quality is an inherent factor that prevents women from gaining political roles (Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30; Sun, 2010, p. 52). In terms of educational quality, Chinese women are less educated and less advanced than men, making it difficult for them to meet the requirements for political participation (Zhao, 2006, p. 61; Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30). In terms of psychological qualities, feelings of inferiority, dependence, submissiveness, and timidity are the main psychological barriers to women's political participation (Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30; Zhao, 2006, p. 61; Shi, 2010, p. 137). Such psychological weaknesses make women afraid to openly fight against male-centrism and to venture into the realm of power (Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30). Female leaders are less assertive than male leaders (Sun, 2010, p. 52). As a result of the social division of labour and socialisation, there is much less overlap between femininity and the traits required for leadership, with the traits required for leadership often aligning with masculinity (Sun, 2010, p. 52). Women are very submissive and dependent on men when it comes to political participation (Shi, 2010, p. 137). To demonstrate this, Shi (2010, p. 137) found in a survey of village committee elections in rural China that women were more likely than men to be influenced by the public and public opinion during the voting process in village committee elections and tended to vote for whomever the men wanted to vote for.

In conclusion, early Chinese studies argued that women's entry into political roles was mainly hindered by their own innate deficiencies, such as psychological weaknesses. In fact, these opinions suffered from an internalised sexism towards women. Later Chinese scholars countered this by arguing that women's seeming lack of competence in political participation was a result of the oppressive gender norms of a long-standing male-centric patriarchal culture (Zhuang, 2016, p. 11).

2.3.2 Patriarchal and Traditional Gender Norms Constrain Women's Development

Women's ability to perceive and judge public affairs is not innately deficient, but rather inhibited by acquired conditions that prevent them from manifesting their abilities (Zhuang, 2016, p. 4). The gender roles women play are not determined by their innate biological characteristics and formation but are a product of social life and change as it evolves (Bao, 2013, p. 72). Once given the same conditions of participation as men, women can exhibit cognitive abilities comparable to those of men (Guo, 2010, p. 23).

In addition to this, in China's long-standing male-centric culture, women's political behaviour remains a replication of male-constructed political behaviour rather than an autonomous gender-conscious individuality (Shi, 2010, p. 137). For example, women working in government departments are held to male standards by their colleagues and leaders, and women themselves are expected to behave in a masculine manner (Li, 2004). As a result, women may be perceived as lacking the 'masculine characteristics' they believe are required to enter politics and are unsuitable for government positions. At the same time, women are generally aware of gender inequalities and higher-status women feel they need to work harder and perform better to compete with men on an equal footing.

2.3.3 'Guanxi' and Social Connections

In China, people are increasingly relying on social connections to get promoted or to find good jobs (Liu, 2007,

p. 139) — a practice known as ‘guanxi’ — and government departments are no exception. Some scholars have linked ‘guanxi’ in China to ‘social capital’ in Western societies (Smart, 1993, p. 388). Some scholars argue that strong relationships facilitate women’s access to political social capital (Zhu, 2010, p. 30; Liu, 2007, p. 139; Zhuang, 2016, p. 13; Tan, Guo & Zhou, 2017, p. 383), but the existence of gender norms restrict women’s access to and use of ‘guanxi’ (Liu, 2007, p. 139; Zhuang, 2016, p. 13).

In Liu’s (2007, p. 139) study on female guanxi and employment in China, there are three main channels through which women obtain guanxi, namely the connection of family members of origin, marriage, and women who have established good relationships with their direct leaders due to good performance. For women, there is a positive correlation between strong kinship ties and the acquisition of political social capital (Zhu, 2010, p. 30; Tan, Guo & Zhou, 2017, p. 383). Firstly, the guanxi with the family of origin is mainly through their father who has a high social status, which makes it easier for some women to get higher education, good jobs, and promotions (Liu, 2007, p. 139). It has been shown that among university graduates, a high parental official position is associated with a 15% wage premium in the graduate’s first job (Li et al., 2012, p. 519). These opinions suggest that strong ‘guanxi’ from the family members of origin can have a positive effect on career outcomes. Secondly, guanxi for marriage for women is about finding a husband with a high social status, which can also lead to a strong social relationship to have a promotion to their career (Liu, 2007, p.139). For example, having strong kinship ties can increase access to political capital by having access to the director or party secretary through a high-status father or husband (Zhu, 2010, p. 30).

Another aspect of having strong ‘guanxi’ is with colleagues and leaders. In local government departments, the promotion of cadres also requires a strong network of connections. Tan (2020, p. 28) found from a quantitative questionnaire of local civil servants that the majority believed that the subjective impression of the leader greatly influenced the selection of candidates, followed by the evaluation of their ability to do the job. People choose the candidate that the leader indicates in his mind at the motion meeting when making a recommendation, and the first candidate is usually a male cadre who is appreciated by the leader. Obviously, democratic recommendations are just a formalistic way of going through the motions, and if one has established guanxi with the leader and is recommended, one can only be promoted. However, the strength of the relationship gained in this way is limited and subject to change. It may be weakened if the leader is transferred out of the unit (Liu, 2007, p. 139).

Traditional gender norms can restrict women from developing their social relationships (Zhuang, 2016, p. 13; Liu, 2007, p. 139), which can be a barrier to women’s advancement in the workplace. Socialised gender norms lead to women having more family responsibilities (Tang, 2020, p. 192), which can also limit women’s access to contacts. Most female civil servants must go home after work to take care of their children and cook for their husbands, and do not have the opportunity to attend the banquet social events that civil servants use as networking opportunities. Social relationships are often maintained through social occasions such as get-togethers, drinking and gift-giving (Qi, 2013, p. 312). To get leaders to appreciate you, apart from a high-profile demonstration of your ability to do your job, is to give gifts, drink and other social ways (Qi, 2013, p. 312). In addition to this, women who befriend their leaders may find themselves hindered by rumours due to the relatively low tolerance of intimate relationships between men and women outside of marriage in Chinese society (Liu, 2007, p. 139). These rumours can limit the way women find relationships and hinder their careers (Liu, 2007, p. 139). Those women who become leaders are also rumoured to be sleeping with male leaders (Liu, 2007, p. 139).

However, these three main opportunities for women to have strong social ties are fundamentally detrimental to gender and work equality and increase women’s subordination. Guanxi, whether from fathers, marriage, or leadership, mean that women are dependent on others for promotion, reinforcing women’s subordination. Furthermore, if a woman does not have a father of high social status, or if she is not married, or if her husband does not have a high social status, it will be more difficult for a woman to move into a position where she can develop a positive relationship with someone in a leadership role. The fact that more women come from working-class or poor families is not conducive to their equal advancement. In addition, there are lesbians who may not marry men, even though Chinese society and law do not currently recognise homosexuality. This means that special types of women are at a disadvantage in guanxi culture.

2.4 Summarise and Compare Chinese and Global North Literature

There are also many differences between the Global North and Chinese literature in this area. The Global North literature emphasises that the socialisation of gender roles has actively discouraged women from taking an interest in politics, and focuses on stereotypes of women in elections and internalised sexism, covering not only women but also lesbians. Most Chinese literature emphasises that the reason for women’s under-representation in government is due to Chinese women’s own inferior political ability compared to that of men. In addition, many Chinese scholars argue that guanxi culture helps and facilitates women’s political careers, suggesting that gender norms limit women’s access to guanxi.

In the existing Chinese literature, however, research on the limits of women's socialisation into gender roles remains limited. Many perspectives are tainted with unconscious internalised sexism against women, even if the author is also female. For example, it is argued that women are less psychologically qualified and capable than men (Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30; Zhao, 2006, p. 61; Shi, 2010, p. 137). It is argued that femininity, because of the socialised division of labour, is inconsistent with the masculinity required for political leadership (Sun, 2010, p. 52). These views fail to critique the results of the socialised division of labour and endorse masculinity for leadership as a lack of overlap between femininity and masculinity. In fact, these perspectives are unconsciously sexist, arguing that women should have leadership that is comparable to masculinity to gain a role in government. Furthermore, guanxi culture is not fair to the female population in terms of career progression, since these views do not take into account the specificities of particular groups such as lesbians and poor women. Even if some women are promoted at work due to strong kinship ties, this still reinforces the subordinate status of women.

Even though much of the research on women in politics in the global north has been on women in elections, some of the perspectives on stereotyping and internalised sexism and internalised misogyny can still be used to help fill the existing gap in the literature on women's career development in Chinese grassroots government.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This dissertation takes the political representation of female civil servants at the primary level in China as its chosen topic and conducts empirical research in the form of a questionnaire on the current situation of female civil servants working in police department in local government in the city of Zhanjiang in China. The survey was open to grassroots civil servants of all genders to obtain gender-specific perceptions of socialised gender norms.

The method of data collection used was an online questionnaire. As this questionnaire was not a purely quantitative questionnaire, text boxes were also used to collect data, so a mixed methods design was used for this study. The questionnaire was designed based on the opinions summarised in the literature review to verify the veracity and accuracy of the information obtained through the literature collection or to be used to supplement the existing literature to derive my research questions.

A pilot study (PS) was conducted before the final questionnaire was distributed, and some of the questionnaire questions were improved by the PS. This section will be presented in chapter 3.4.

3.2 Mixed Methods Designs

The mixed method involves the collection of qualitative and quantitative data in response to research questions (McNabb, 2020, p. 364). It generally includes the analysis of both types of data. In mixed methods research, the research project's qualitative and quantitative components typically use different data collection models (Leeuw & Hox, 2008, p. 138). The questionnaire used in this study used not only choice questions needed for quantitative research but also text boxes to obtain additional views and answers. Using open text boxes enables participants to articulate their views and experiences more clearly and to add insights that the researcher might not have predicted.

3.3 Data Collection and Tool

This dissertation uses questionnaires as the main method to collect data, supplemented by literature and internet data. All empirical research requires some type of data collection. Survey research is one of the most common methods of data collection used in social science research (Jarbandhan & Schutte, 2006, p. 669). It is mainly used to discover the actual state of existence of various social phenomena in real society and is the best way to obtain first-hand information (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004, p. 1312). In addition, the first-hand information collected through the questionnaire method of in-depth social reality can also be used to corroborate the authenticity and accuracy of the information obtained through the documentary method and network data (Chen, 2007, p. 15). It can also be used to supplement the existing literature and network information, and more comprehensively and effectively reflect the actual state of existence of social phenomena. Besides, the questionnaire in this study is not purely quantitative (Chen, 2007, p. 15). This questionnaire provides open text boxes, and the mixed methods approach allowed me to gain additional insight by analysing the language of the participants.

The tool used to collect the information was the Tencent Questionnaire, a web-based questionnaire software developed by Tencent. I was advised by my university to use Qualtrics, but it does not work in China because the internet is walled. To make the questionnaire more accessible to my questionnaire participants within China, it was much easier to use Chinese questionnaire software.

3.4 Study Population and Sampling Method

The population of this study is the civil servants (public officials) of the local public security departments (police) in China. This sector was chosen because gender differences are traditionally more typical. The government sector in policing is the prototype for traditionally male-dominated institutions, and women remain underrepresented globally (Raba-Hemp & Garcia, 2020, p. 21). Women's choice of the police department can therefore be described as a challenge to traditional gender roles, a phenomenon that differs from traditional gender expectations (Shen, 2022, p. 2). As a result, a study of grassroots women in the police service would more typically reflect the research problem. There is no limit to the age group of the target group, as this allows for a better comparison of the differences in views between people of different ages.

The city chosen is Zhanjiang, Guangdong Province, China. Many studies on gender issues in China have chosen to look at large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, while smaller or medium-sized cities are neglected. In fact, the more typical gender problems at the grassroots level may occur in small and medium-sized cities, where the trend towards gender equality is still developing and represents the majority of the total number of cities.

The sampling method is snowball sampling. The sampling method used in the Pilot Study (PS) is different from that used in the final questionnaire, which is described in detail in Chapter 3.6. Snowball sampling involves starting with a small group of initial contacts and then asking them to provide additional respondents who are part of the overall target population under study and selecting subsequent respondents based on the leads formed (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019, p. 3). This sampling method was chosen due to the sensitivity of grassroots civil servants working in grassroots government departments, many of whom may be reluctant to reveal their real names rather than participate in this thesis study. And this sampling method is suitable for sensitive populations, or those who require anonymity and a degree of trust (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019, p. 4). To do this, I first invited a worker who works in grassroots government and then asked him to help me distribute this online questionnaire to their unit's WeChat group chat. WeChat is a social networking software developed by Tencent in China, which is now used by many work units to connect (like WhatsApp) (Harwit, 2016, p. 312).

3.5 Questionnaire Design

3.5.1 Basic Information

The first part is the basic information, and questions about gender, education, and age. In terms of gender, like Question One, there is a tendency for gender identity to fall outside of the traditional binary gender (Dietert, 2013, p. 25). Therefore, I have added the 'Others' option, if available. In terms of the education level and Question Two, Chinese women have lower educational qualifications and levels than men, which makes it harder for them to meet the demands of political participation (Zhao, 2006, p. 61; Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30). For this reason, I have devised a question to ask about the educational qualifications of grassroots civil servants.

1. Your gender
   a) Malee
   b) Female
   c) Other(specify)
2. Your educational level
   a) Diploma
   b) Undergraduate
   c) Masters
   d) PhD
3. Your Age
   a) 20-30
   b) 30-40
   c) 40-50
   d) 50+

3.5.2 The Barriers

In this part, it is turned to the issue of barriers at the general level.

First, I designed a question, that is Question Nine as below, to first examine whether grassroots civil servants are aware that women have a harder time obtaining roles in government than men.

Then, I devised a multiple-choice question that might encompass all the barriers to female civil servants gaining roles in primary government, such as Question Ten. This would facilitate my subsequent development of

questions from specific barriers.

Question Nine Do you think it is difficult for women to obtain roles in government, Compared to men.

9. Do you think it is difficult for women to obtain roles in government? (Compared to men)

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agreed

c) Disagree

d) Strongly Disagree

e) Don't Know

Question Ten If you think it is difficult for women to obtain governmental roles, to what extent are the following factors involved?

10. (Multiple Choice Questions) If you think it is difficult for women to obtain governmental roles, to what extent are the following factors involved?

a) Socialised gender roles and gender norms

b) Family factors

c) Women's lack of political ambition

d) Ability to work

e) Leadership appreciation and recognition by colleagues

f) Policy impediments, please specify___

g) Some positions with male preference

h) Other, please specify___

Next, I devised a question about asking participants about their work annoyance, like Question Eleven. By asking participants about their work annoyance, it is possible to invert their motivation to work (Tan, 2020). This increases the credibility of the barriers to promotion faced by women. Similarly, designing the Question Twelfth ''What would you prefer promotion nominations to focus on'' would in turn lead to the question of what factors are currently being focused on for promotion that makes grassroots civil servants unhappy.

Question Eleven As a primary civil servant, what is your biggest annoyance?

11. As a primary civil servant, what is your biggest annoyance?

a) Low social status

b) Low salary

c) Promotion difficulties

d) Family does not understand and support

e) Opinions are hard to get listened by leaders

Question Twelfth Which of the following options do you think is fairer to focus on when evaluating candidates for promotion nominations?

12. Which of the following options do you think is more important to focus on when evaluating candidates for promotion nominations?

a) Ability to work

b) Educational level

c) Length of service

d) Passing exams or not

e) Comments from colleagues or leaders

3.5.3 Gender Socialisation and Gender Norms

In order to examine whether gender socialisation and gender norms have an impact on women's representation in government, this study designed separate questions on gender temperament differences, gender competence differences, behavioural patterns and social division of labour due to gender socialisation and stereotyping.

13. Do you think there is a tendency for women leaders to be unfeminine?

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agreed

c) Disagree

d) Strongly Disagree

e) Don't Know

To examine 'question 13' of stereotypes in terms of gender temperament reference was made to Schneider & Bos (2014). Voters' stereotypes of female leaders can be measured in terms of gender temperament (Schneider & Bos, 2014, p. 248). Masculinity is a leadership trait that voters value (Schneider & Bos, 2014, p. 248), but female leaders face attacks if they are too masculine and not feminine enough (Schneider & Bos, 2014, p. 248). This exemplifies the ambivalence of socialised gender norms for female leaders in the workplace. Similarly, applied to the Chinese grassroots civil service workplace, colleagues may be more inclined to recognise male leaders, and if female leaders are too masculine, colleagues may perceive female leaders as not feminine enough due to stereotypes.

14. Do you think women leaders are less capable than men?

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Disagree

d) Strongly Disagree

e) Don't know

There are gender differences in how potential political candidates perceive their political skills and attributes (Fox & Lawless, 2011, p. 63). Gender socialization leads women to doubt their ability to enter the political arena (Fox & Lawless, 2011, p. 63), and voters can also have a bias towards female candidates' abilities, believing them to be less competent than men (Fox & Lawless, 2011, p. 59). Voter bias may lead women to perceive themselves as less competent and fundamentally inferior to men, thus affecting their confidence and attitudes towards obtaining government roles. Applying the same reasoning to grassroots government in China, leaders may be inclined to promote men due to a biased perception that women are less capable. Colleagues may also perceive female leaders as less capable than men due to bias. Question 14 was designed for this reason.

15. Do you think male leaders are more rational than female leaders in dealing with problems?

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agreed

c) Disagree

d) Strongly Disagree

e) Don't know

Cognitively, women are socialised to be more artistic, whereas men are socialised to be rational and analytical (Schneider & Bos, 2014, p. 248). Therefore, men dominate decision-making because they are more rational, while women are expected to comply because they are more emotional (Lutz, 1996). To test whether grassroots civil servants are influenced by this socialised sense of gender perception, I designed question fifteen.

Since the social division of labour restricts women's gender expectations to the family and is linked to the family factor, I have placed the topic of the social division of labour in Chapter 3.3.4 Family factor to describe it.

3.5.4 Family Factors

To investigate whether family factors and social division of labour have an impact on women's representation in government, this study designed questions based on the gender normative gender division of labour and used text boxes to obtain more information on family reasons.

In terms of the division of labour in society, patriarchal culture has shaped women into roles suitable for caring for the family and denied women the ability to acquire roles in government. In detail, the social role expected of men is to be the provider for the survival of the family, in keeping with masculinity, while the social role expected of women is to look after the home and family, in keeping with femininity.

16. If your wife was a civil servant on the rise in her career, you would:

a) persuade her to give up her promotion and settle for the status quo and spend more time with her family

b) Understand her career and suggest shared family responsibilities

c) Support her career and take the initiative to take on more family responsibilities

d) Don’t Know

17. If you think there are indeed family factors preventing you from being promoted, please briefly describe which family factors.

3.5.5 Job Aspirations and Political Ambitions

The gender political ambition gap can be one explanation for the under-representation of women in government (Deason, Greenlee & Langner, 2015, p. 136), as clear career goals and ambitions are the basic drivers of career development. To investigate whether female grassroots civil servants have lowered their career expectations and political ambitions due to being influenced by traditional gender role expectations, I designed questions twenty-one and twenty-two.

21. Do you have a clear plan for your career?

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Disagree

d) Strongly Disagree

e) Don’t Know

22. What are the promotion expectations for your current role?

a) deputies at the township and sub-division level

b) chiefs at the township and sub-division level

c) deputies at the county and section level

d) chiefs at the county and section level and above

e) No job expectations for now

3.5.6 Competence Confidence and Competition

Some research argue that women’s roles are less confident, more dependent, submissive, and dependent than men in the government sector because of the social division of labour and socialization (Sun, 2010, p. 52). The marginalization of government women in power is also often attributed to a lack of ambition and drive and a lack of career aspirations and plans. Some empirical studies seem to support this deficiency of female managers, as Yuan & Meng (2004) argue that women are passive and reactive.

Much of the literature refers to a lack of awareness of women’s participation in political decision-making and a lack of the same enthusiasm for advancement as men when faced with competitive situations. I set the question of whether they would be brave enough to compete and observed their competitive mindset. (Question 25).

23. Are you confident in your ability to do your job?

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Disagree

d) Strongly Disagree

e) Don’t Know

24. Do you rely mainly on yourself to do your own job, rather than relying on others?

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Disagree

d) Strongly Disagree

e) Don’t Know

25. Do you have a sense of achievement at work?

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Disagree

d) Strongly Disagree

e) Don't know

26. Do you love your current job?

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Disagree

d) Strongly Disagree

e) Don't Know

27. Do you ever feel like a failure at work?

a) Often

b) Sometimes

c) Occasionally

d) Never

e) Don't Know

28. If there was an internally competitive position at a higher level in your unit, would you apply for it as long as the conditions were met?

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Disagree

d) Strongly Disagree

e) Don't Know

3.6 Questionnaire Mini-Pilot, Mini-Survey on Pilot Feedback, and Improvements

A pilot study (PS) is a small-scale research project conducted prior to a final full-scale study (Almirall et al., 2012, p. 1889). When piloting a study, researchers can identify or refine a research question, discover what methods are best suited to pursue it, and estimate how much time and what resources will be needed to complete the final version of the larger study (Ismail, Kinchin & Edwards, 2018, p. 1). Pilot studies are therefore essential for refining research designs. Before rolling out the final questionnaire to the primary level group of city civil servants, it is advisable to find out what the target individual thinks about it.

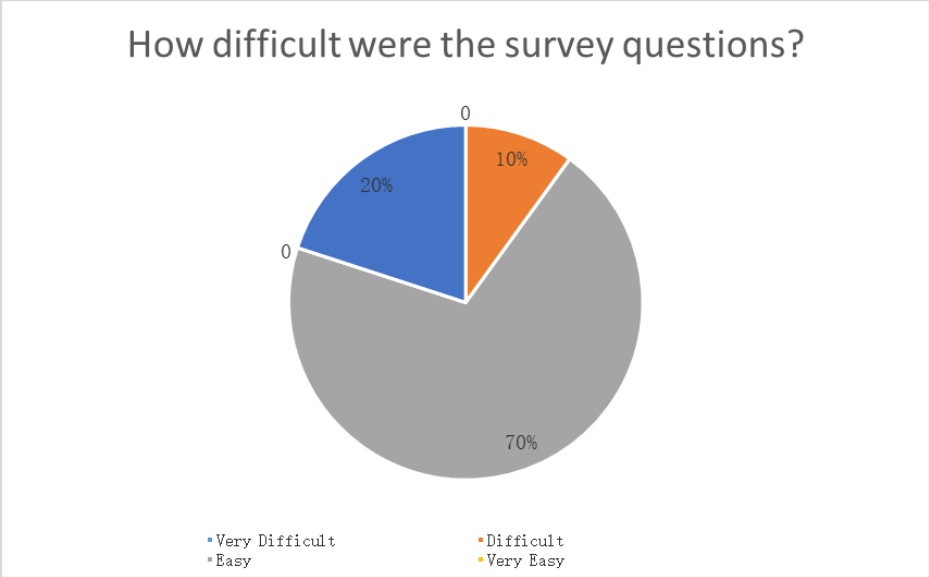
To this purpose, I conducted a pilot study in which the questionnaire was distributed to a small target group of people. I invited five male grassroots civil servants and five female grassroots civil servants to participate in my pilot study. My pilot study was divided into three parts: first, the participants were first invited to fill in my dissertation research questionnaire. Secondly, I created a mini-survey on feelings and feedback and invited them to complete the feedback and make suggestions. Third, based on the feedback, I set some mini-interview questions to better facilitate my final questionnaire revision.

The ten participants who participated in the pilot study were selected through a sampling method of intrinsic interest sampling. They were grassroots civil servants who were called in as a result of the interest in this study. Before the pilot study began, the invited participants were informed that the pilot study was not anonymous and that as I would need their feedback for my final questionnaire, I might conduct small interviews with them on some relevant questions based on the results of the questionnaire's roll-out in the pilot. I also assured my pilot participants that the real names of the participants were known only to me, and that in my thesis, participants were still using numbers instead. In addition, their data will only be used to revise the final questionnaire and written into my thesis and will not be used for other purposes. The pilot study was conducted only with the consent of the pilot participants.

3.6.1 The Design and Result of 'Mini-Survey on Pilot Feedback'

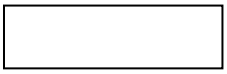
The first section deals with the difficulty of the questionnaire, the length of time it took to complete, and the feeling of using the application. Question 1 helps me to understand whether the survey questions are easily understood by the respondents or whether they need to be simplified.

1. How difficult were the survey questions?
   a) Very difficult
   b) Somewhat difficult
   c) Easy
   d) Very Easy
   e) Neither easy nor difficult



Question 2 helps me to understand whether the app used for the survey question is easily used by respondents or whether it needs to be replaced with another app.

2. Did you have any challenges navigating the application?



序号	答案文本	
1	没有，挺方便的	convenient
2	No	
3	No	
4	没有，小程序挺方便的	convenient
6	还好	Not bad
7	没有困难 非常流畅	no difficult
9	没有	No
10	没有，小程序挺方便的	convenient

Question 3 gives me a general idea of survey response times. Due to the busy workload of civil servants, surveys that take too long may result in a lower response rate. I can summarise the data obtained and interpret the information to help me understand if I need to shorten the survey or include more questions.

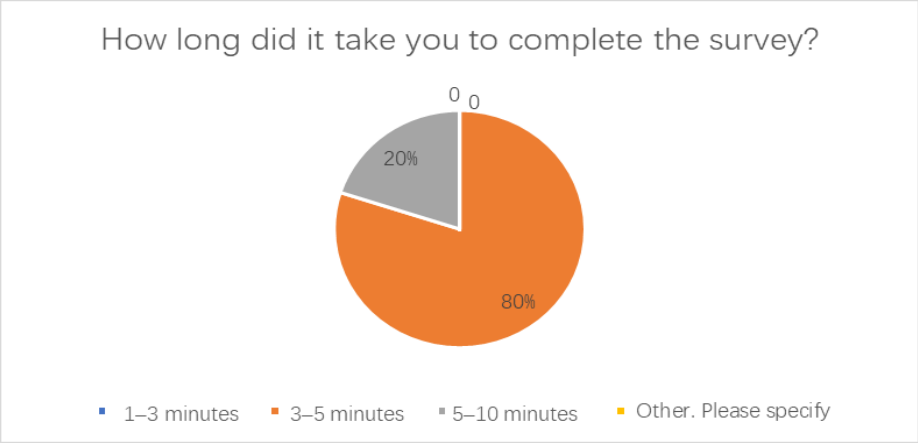
3. How long did it take you to complete the survey?

a) 1-3 minutes

b) 3-5 minutes

c) 5-10 minutes

d) Other. Please specify



The second part is about the design of the survey questions and whether they fit with the target group. The structure and presentation of the survey affect the quality of responses I get. By listing this question in the pilot feedback survey, I can see if I need to change the survey layout. If my pilot participants are not familiar with my questions, they will not be able to provide relevant information, which may affect the validity of my research data. So, I had to ensure that these questions covered the vast majority of the study's target audience.

4. The survey was well-designed.

a) Yes

b) No

c) Don't know

5. Were any of the questions unfamiliar to you?

a) Yes

b) No

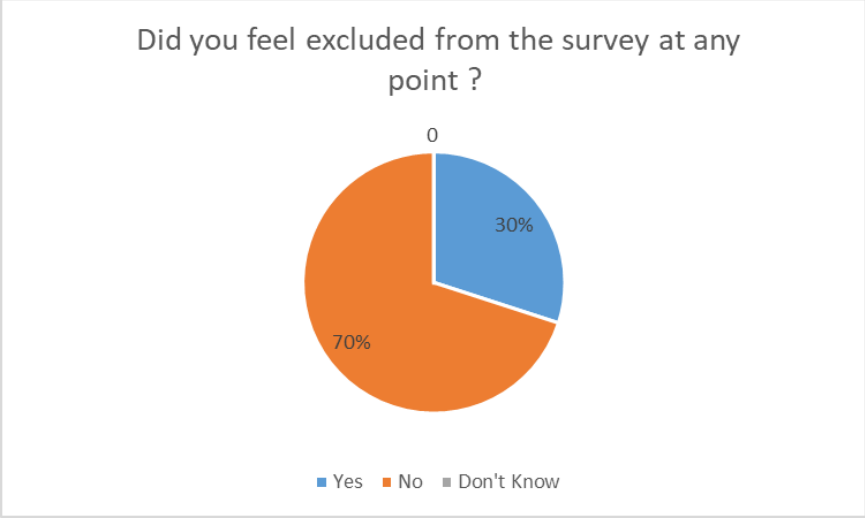
c) Don't know

6. Did you feel excluded from the survey at any point?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Don't know



As can be seen, three participants chose to feel excluded from the question.

7. Did you complete the survey?

a) Yes

b) No

8. If you didn't complete the survey, tell me why.

a) It was too long

b) The survey was poorly designed

c) I lost interest

d) Other reasons? Please tell me____

13. If you think this survey is not good enough, please give me your opinion, thank you.

Three participants answered this question 13.

Participant #7 gave the answer that the question was well designed, and the research questions were meaningful and representative.

Participant #9: No.

Participant #10: I am not sure about the policy issue; we cannot discuss this often.

3.6.2 Findings of Pilot Survey Feedback, Interview, and Improvements for the Final Questionnaire

Three participants chose to be excluded from the questions or felt that the survey was poorly designed, namely participants #2 (female), #7 (male), and #10 (male). I interviewed them and asked them to provide details of how they felt they had been excluded or that the questions had been poorly designed.

Interview Question One Could you please tell me the reasons why you felt excluded from the questions or believed the survey was poorly designed in the questionnaire?

#2 'I think the most intuitive obstacle for me at the moment is the family factor, which is most relevant to everyday life and a common topic of conversation in the office for most grassroots female civil servants. Whereas this questionnaire was designed to be mainly a text box on policy direction, I know little about this and do not have a clear sense that this is a barrier to my promotion, as the grassroots are more concerned about how to measure family and work.'

#7 'The problem may seem like grassroots men are unfriendly to women, but there is more conflict between women within the grassroots.'

#10 'Question Five is poorly expressed, that progress bar I don't know which side is bigger and which side is smaller.' (Original Question Five has been revised)

Interview Question Two Do you think your unit's promotion policy is fair?

#2 'I'm not sure of the policy reasons, but promotion requires good relations with leaders and colleagues. My mother-in-law doesn't quite approve of me socialising with colleagues after work and she demands that I go home immediately after work to cook for my children and husband.'

#7 'I don't want to talk about it, saying too much might affect my career.'

#10 'Promotion opportunities are generally given to older officers, who are more familiar with the leadership and have sufficient work experience and length of service. Other promotion policies are not known, except that you must stay at the grass roots level for enough years.'

Interview Question Three Why do you think the design of the survey is poor but don't raise the poor design in the feedback item, and if you could please talk to me about it?

#2 Seeing that nobody has filled it in, I didn't want to either.

#7 Too lazy to type as I'm not very proficient at typing on my phone.

#10 A habit born out of a self-preservation mentality. In the workplace, telling the truth will not benefit you and will be held against you by your leaders and colleagues.

In general, family would be an everyday topic for grassroots government servants, and family barriers are not just about marriage and childcare. In terms of policy, grassroots staff do not have a good understanding of the mechanisms for the promotion and only know that they have to be the first choice for leadership. For this reason, I have revised the final questionnaire, which included the marriage and children number, as for Figure 3.6.2.1 and Figure 3.6.2.2 and Figure 3.6.2.3.

4. Your marital status↵

a) Unmarried↵

b) Married↵

c) divorced↵

d) Widowed↵

Figure 3.6.2.1. Marriage question added after interviews

5. How many children do you have in your family?

a) No children↵

b) One child born↵

c) Two children born↵

d) Three or more children↵

Figure 3.6.2.2. Children question added after interviews

The birth of a child may delay the mother's political ambition, rather than eliminate it altogether (Deason, Greenlee & Langner, 2015). In other words, the child may divide more of the mother's time resources as an infant, but with the child in school, the mother has more time to divide between work. Therefore, I designed Question Six to investigate the age of the youngest child of female civil servants at the grassroots level.

6. (Non-required answers) If you have had children, what is the age of your youngest child?↵

a) 1-3 years↵

b) 4-6 years↵

c) 7-13 years↵

d) 14-17 years↵

e) 18+ years↵

Figure 3.6.2.3. Children question added after interviews

Also, I, therefore, realized that marriage and parenting may not be the only family factors that prevent women from gaining roles in grassroots government and that I should design text boxes for participants to answer more possible family factors.

17. (Female response) If you think there are indeed family factors preventing you from being promoted, please briefly describe which family factors.

Figure 3.6.2.4. Others family factors text box added after interview

Poorly expressed question mentioned by participant 10, see Figure 3.6.2.5 below. I then modified it to be a more intuitive multiple choice question, see Figure 3.6.2.6 as below.

If you think it is difficult for women to obtain governmental roles, to what extent are the following factors involved? (For each answer on a scale 1-5, where 1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree, 9=Don't Know)

a) Social opinion (thinking that women in politics will be less rational, etc.)
b) Family factors (influence of things like pregnancy, educating children, household chores, etc.)
c) Women's own political ambitions and aspirations
d) Barriers imposed for policy-based reasons
e) The position has a masculine character

Figure 3.6.2.5. Question that participant felt were not well expressed

10. (Multiple Choice Questions) If you think it is difficult for women to obtain governmental roles, to what extent are the following factors involved?

a) Socialised gender roles and gender norms
b) Family factors
c) Women's lack of political ambition
d) Ability to work
e) Leadership appreciation and recognition by colleagues
f) Policy impediments, please specify____
g) Some positions with male preference
h) Other, please specify____

Figure 3.6.2.6. Modified

In addition to this, I have put the policy option into an option (f) of the multiple choice and removed the following two questions. Due to the sensitivity of the questionnaire when I released it to the general public, it

was blocked, and proof of unit was required before the study could proceed.

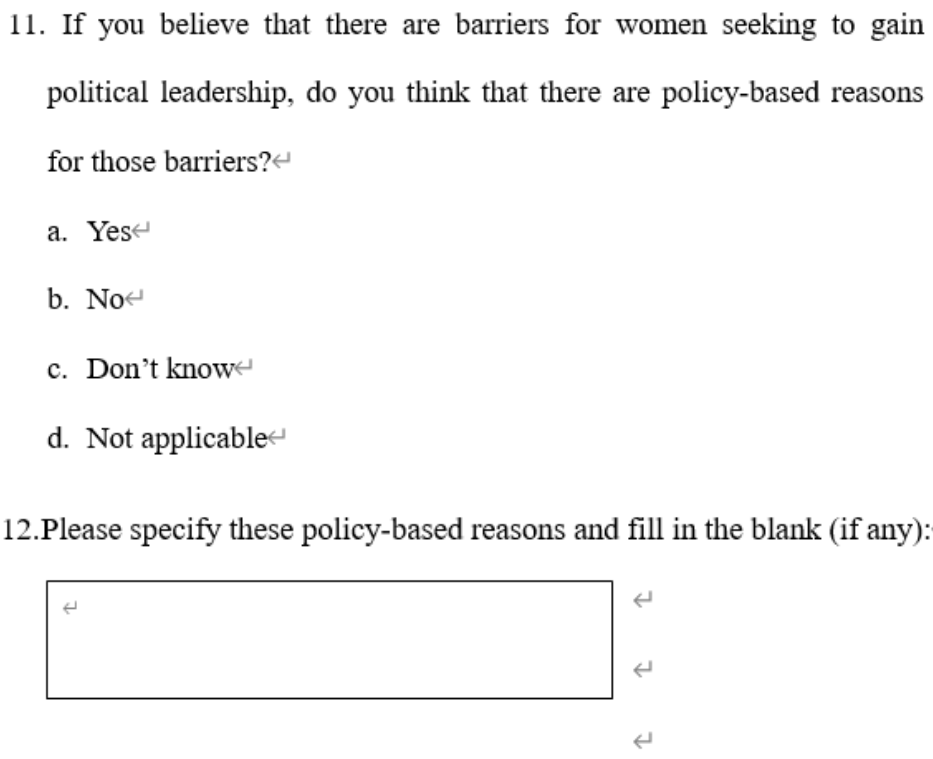


Figure 3.6.2.7. policy-related questions before revision

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Firstly, as respondents have the right to know, this study has been designed to disclose the purpose of my research in the questionnaire introduction so that participants are aware that the purpose of my research is to study the political representation of women in local government in China.

Secondly, this study designed a consent form in which the researcher's name, email, and university department were indicated. The consent form also disclosed the purpose of the study, the steps of the study, and possible questions that might arise from the study. Possible research questions include, even though this questionnaire is anonymous, some of the oppression issues currently experienced by female government servants may be present in the study. Female civil servants may experience some mental stress when answering this questionnaire. To address this issue, this study informed the participants on the consent form that they might encounter some psychological problems during the interview. For example, they might be asked about sensitive topics and they could stop answering the questionnaire when they felt overwhelmed. In addition to the initial questionnaire, this study also indicated on the consent form that the information from their answers would be stored in the software of 'Tencent Survey' and that the results would be anonymous due to the privacy of the interviewees. When the content has been analysed and the postgraduate course has been completed, these questionnaire results will all be destroyed.

Last, this study did not use the real names of the participants when analysing the data, as the questionnaire was completed online in a way that protected privacy and complete anonymity.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

This dissertation used a combination of questionnaires and interview methods to find out whether the career development of female public servants in grassroots public organisations is in line with the barriers women face in political participation as understood in the Chinese and Western literature, or whether the barriers have evolved differently with the times. In this study, an online questionnaire was distributed to primary police officials in Zhanjiang City, Guangdong Province, China, in July 2022.

4.2 Basic Information of Participants

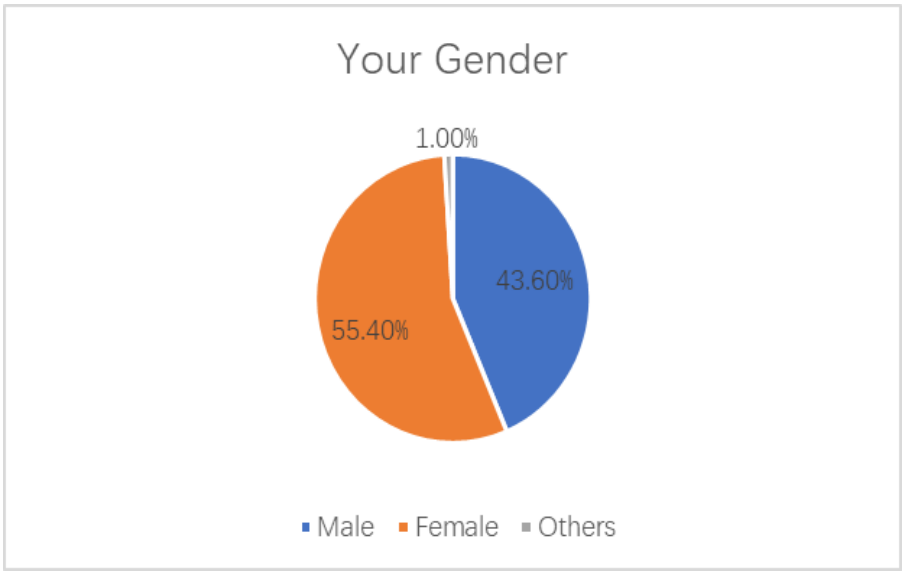


Figure 4.1. Gender

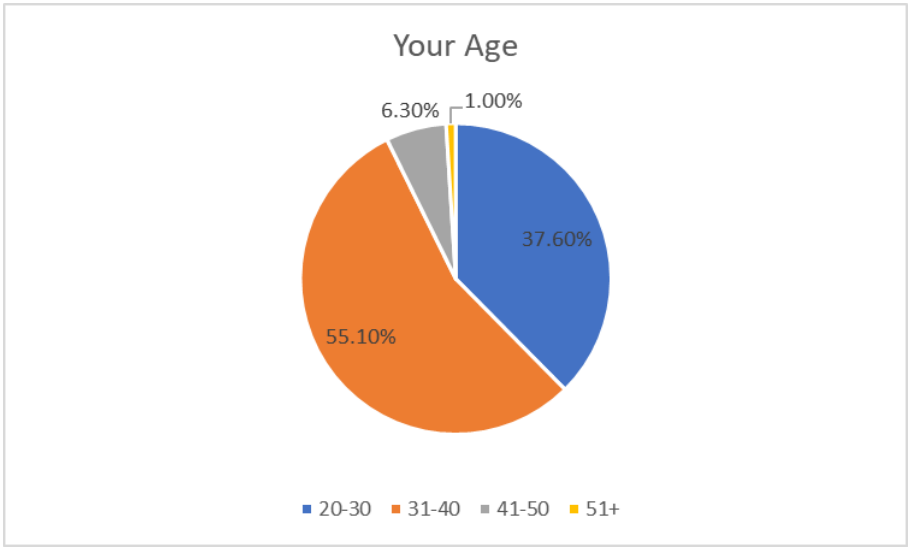


Figure 4.2. Age

After two weeks of drop-off, 205 questionnaires were returned. As for Figure 4.1, 89 (43.6%) were males and 113 (55.4%) were females, 2(1%) were Others. Those who selected Others did not specify their gender. Cultural stereotypes of gender diversity and transphobia (prejudice against transgender people) persist in mainland China (Lin et al., 2021, p. 954). Social exclusion and discrimination against LGBTQ people are fuelled by the presence of traditional Chinese family unit values (Wang et al., 2019, p. 440). As a result, non-binary people may choose not to disclose their gender identity to avoid discrimination at work and in life. My two non-binary participants, who may have feared that their answers would be exposed and cause discrimination and rejection by their colleagues, were reluctant to provide full details of their gender.

As for Figure 4.2, the age groups were distributed as follows: 37.6% were aged from 20 to 30, 55.1% were aged from 31 to 40, 6.3% were aged from 41 to 50, and 1% were aged 51 and above.

In the context of the implementation of civil service, women have been given equal opportunities to participate in government organizations and the female base in grassroots government organizations has begun to exceed that of men (Guo, 2010), but the reasons for the under-representation of women in leadership positions are still poorly addressed.

4.2.1 Education Level

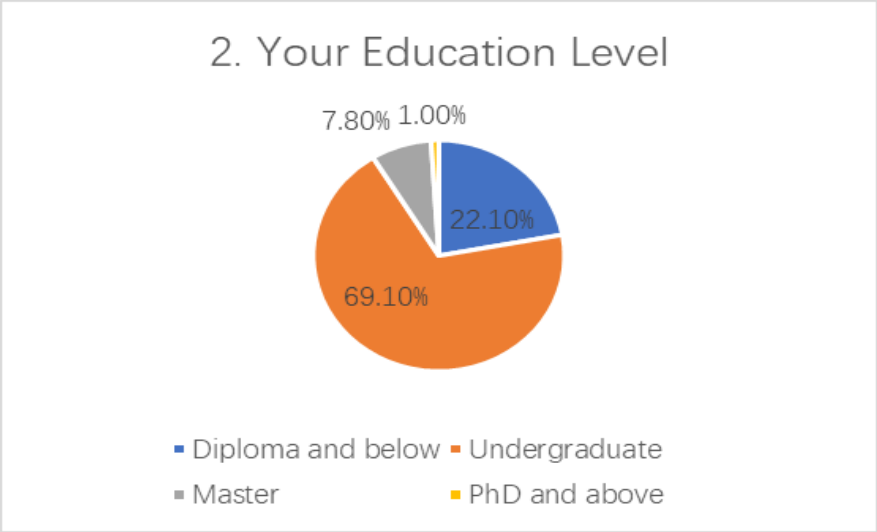
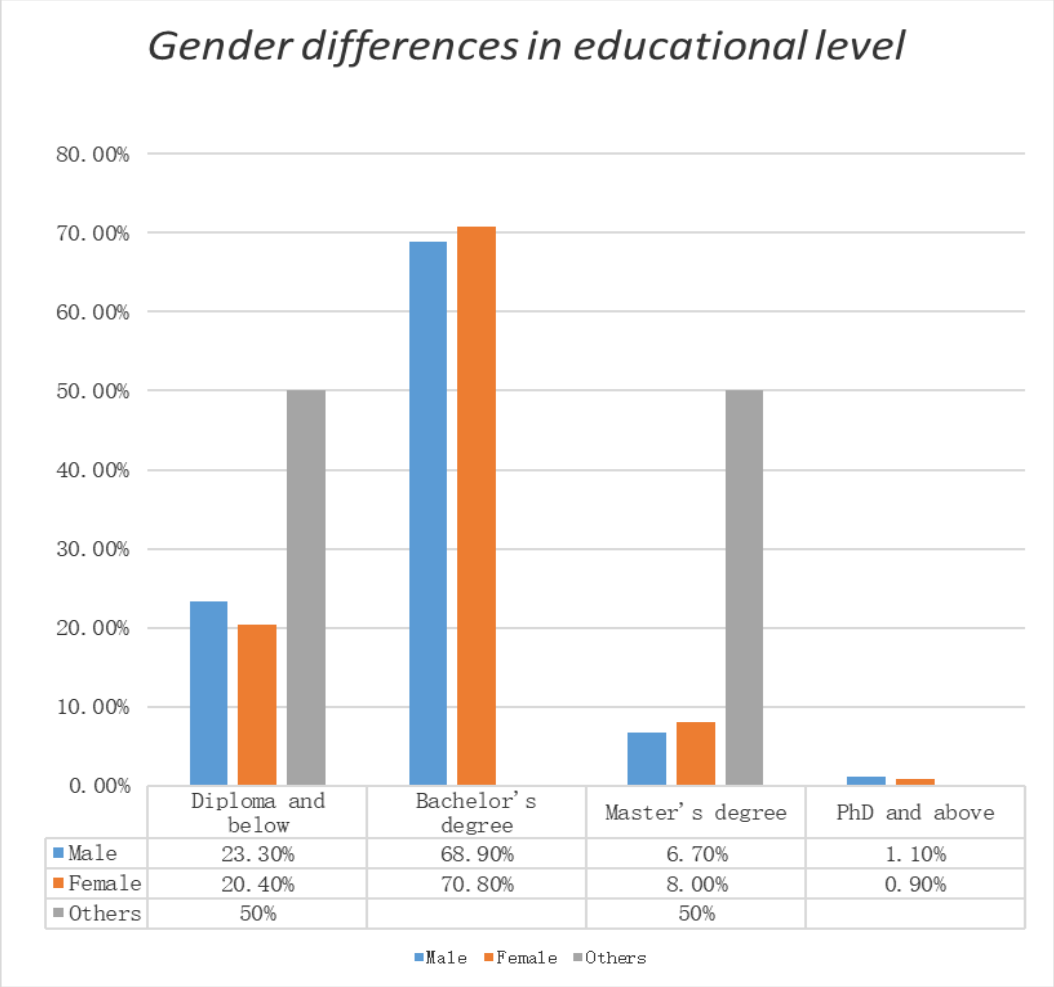


Figure 4.3. Education Level

Table 4.4. Gender differences in educational level



	Diploma and below	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	PhD and above
Male	23.30%	68.90%	6.70%	1.10%
Female	20.40%	70.80%	8.00%	0.90%
Others	50%		50%	

The statistics returned from the questionnaires show that highly educated government workers are in the majority. Among the primary civil servants who participated in the questionnaire, like Figure 4.3, 22.1% had a diploma or below (45), 69.1% had a bachelor's degree (141), 7.8% (16) had a postgraduate degree and 1% (2) had a Ph. D or above.

According to Table 4.4, of the primary civil servants who participated in the questionnaire, female civil servants had a bachelor's degree or above at 79.7% and male civil servants had a bachelor's degree at 76.7%. Most female civil servants are in higher education (higher education meaning a bachelor's degree or higher), which is a departure from the earlier literature which described women as generally less educated than men, suggesting that women are evolving with the times. This reflects the positive mindset of women civil servants at the grassroots level in this region who are eager to improve themselves before passing the civil service examination to enter the primary public sector and indicates the generally high quality of women civil servants at the primary level. It also reflects the fact that, at present, women's level of education may not be a barrier to women's role in government, because most women at the grassroots level already have a university education. However, given that the educational level of female civil servants at the grassroots level is even higher than that of men, it also seems clear that women face greater pressure in terms of education than men in order to obtain entry-level positions. This suggests that women seem to have to acquire a higher level of education than men in order to obtain the same positions as them. This may be due to unconscious sexism and stereotyping of women arising from traditional male-centric gender role expectations in China, reflected in unconscious male preference and devaluation of women (Evidence from Chapter 4.5 suggests that even though women currently have slightly higher levels of education than men, there are still many people who believe that women are less capable than men).

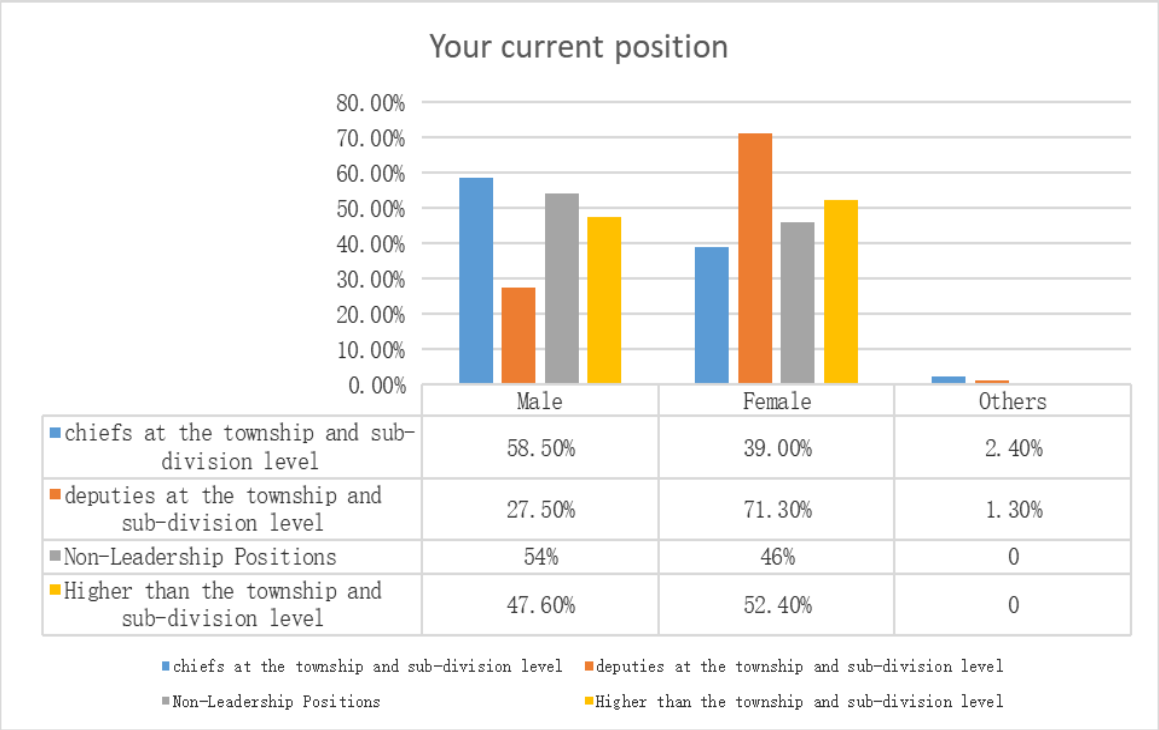
4.2.2 Position

According to Table 4.5, at the grassroots level, the majority of the position 'deputies at the township and sub-division level' are women, at 71.3 percent (57). In the Chinese civil service at the grassroots level, deputies are often seen as virtual positions in leadership positions at the grassroots level, as they do not have decision-making power (Guo, 2010, p. 12). In decision-making, deputies often have to defer to 'chiefs at the township and sub-division level' (Guo, 2010, p. 12). This shows that even when women are promoted to leadership positions, they are mostly positioned at the deputy and virtual level, with few opportunities for women in positions of real power.

The majority of the gender in the position of 'chiefs at the township and sub-division level' is male, at 58.5 percent, which means that men continue to predominate in positions of real power. In China, being the 'chiefs at the township and sub-division level' means that the chances for the top are higher, as the next level of promotion is the 'deputies at the county and section level'.

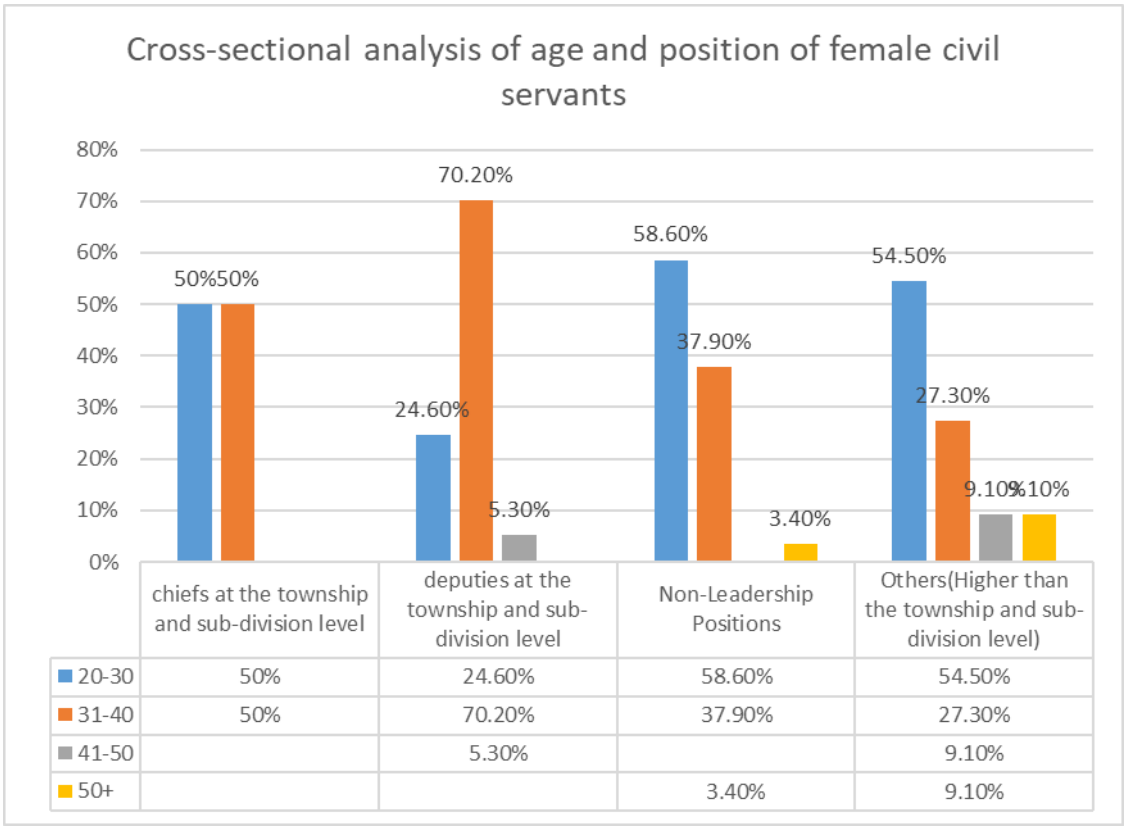
Next, a cross-sectional analysis of the age and position of female civil servants was conducted, as shown in Table 4.6. The majority of female civil servants at the township and sub-division level are in the 31-40 age range. This means that they have been working for many years and are still at the grassroots level at mid-life.

Table 4.5. Gender differences in current positions



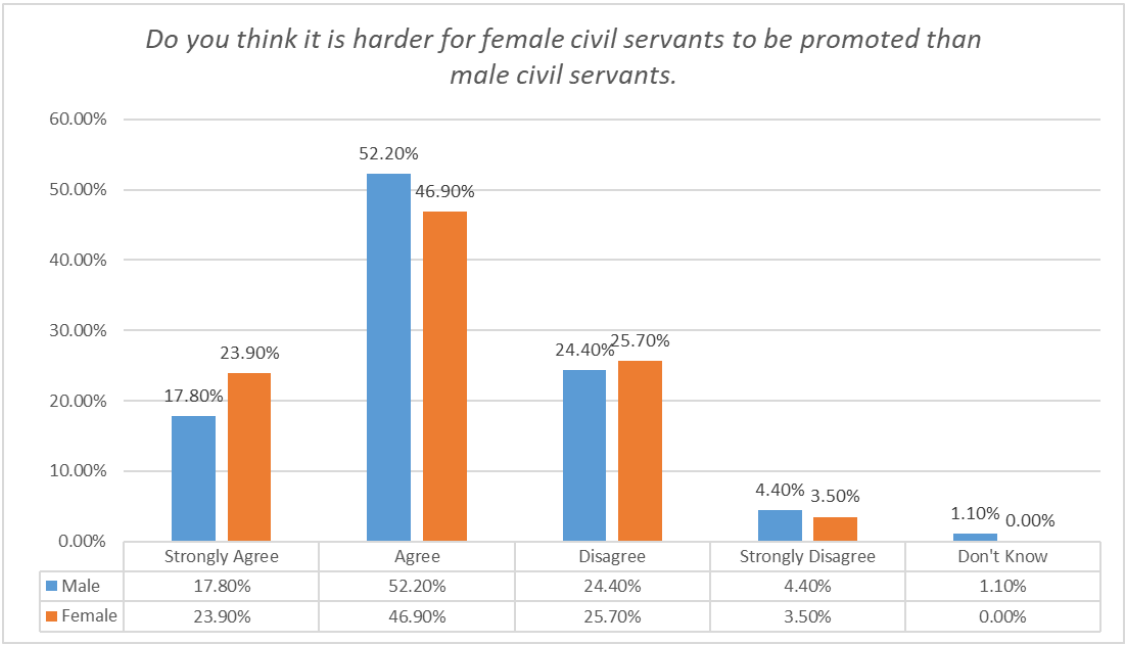
	Male	Female	Others
chiefs at the township and sub-division level	58.50%	39.00%	2.40%
deputies at the township and sub-division level	27.50%	71.30%	1.30%
Non-Leadership Positions	54%	46%	0
Higher than the township and sub-division level	47.60%	52.40%	0

Table 4.6. Cross-sectional analysis of age and position of female civil servants



4.3 Barriers

Table 4.7. Do you think it is harder for female civil servants to be promoted than male civil servants.



As shown in Table 4.7, the majority of junior civil servants, both male and female, considered it more difficult for female civil servants to be promoted than male civil servants. This indicates that they are aware of the difficulties in promotion opportunities for female civil servants.

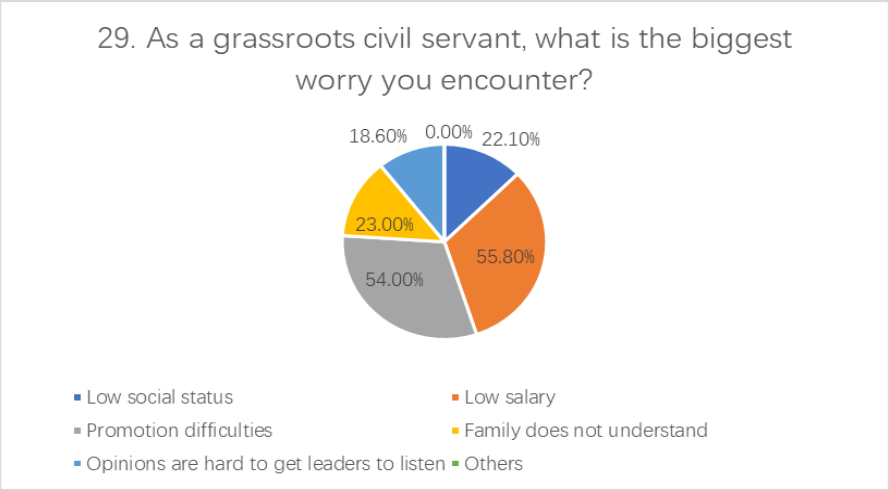
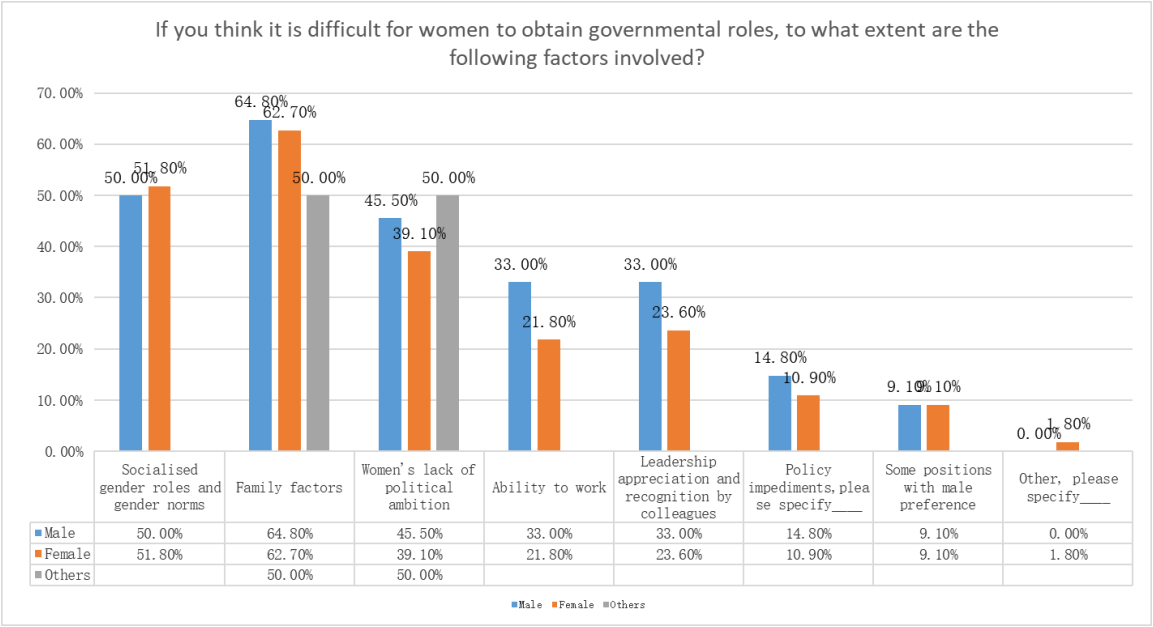


Figure 4.8. 'As a grassroots civil servant, what is the biggest worry you encounter?' (Data of female civil servants)

As for Figure 4.8, 55.8% of female grassroots civil servants who participated in the survey chose "low salary", followed by "difficulty in promotion" at 54%. More than half of the female respondents chose these two options.

In other words, their biggest dissatisfaction with their work at the primary level is the low salary, and the best way to improve their salary is to be promoted, which, coincidentally, is precisely their second biggest dissatisfaction.

Table 4.9. 'If you think it is difficult to promote women in the workforce at the primary level, what do you think are the most important factors affecting promotion?'



	Socialised gender roles and gender norms	Family factors	Women's lack of political ambition	Ability to work	Leadership appreciation and recognition by colleagues	Policy impediments, please specify____	Some positions with male preference	Other, please specify____
Male	50.00%	64.80%	45.50%	33.00%	33.00%	14.80%	9.10%	0.00%
Female	51.80%	62.70%	39.10%	21.80%	23.60%	10.90%	9.10%	1.80%
Others		50.00%	50.00%					

According to Table 4.9, it is very clear that for the majority of participants, the top three perceived barriers to women gaining roles in government were: family factors, socialised gender roles and barriers to gender norms, and lack of political ambition for women.

For female civil servants at the primary level, the biggest obstacle to promotion is the family factor, with 61.1% (69) of women voting for this. Meanwhile, male civil servants also considered family factors to be the biggest obstacle to the promotion of female civil servants, with 63.3% (57).

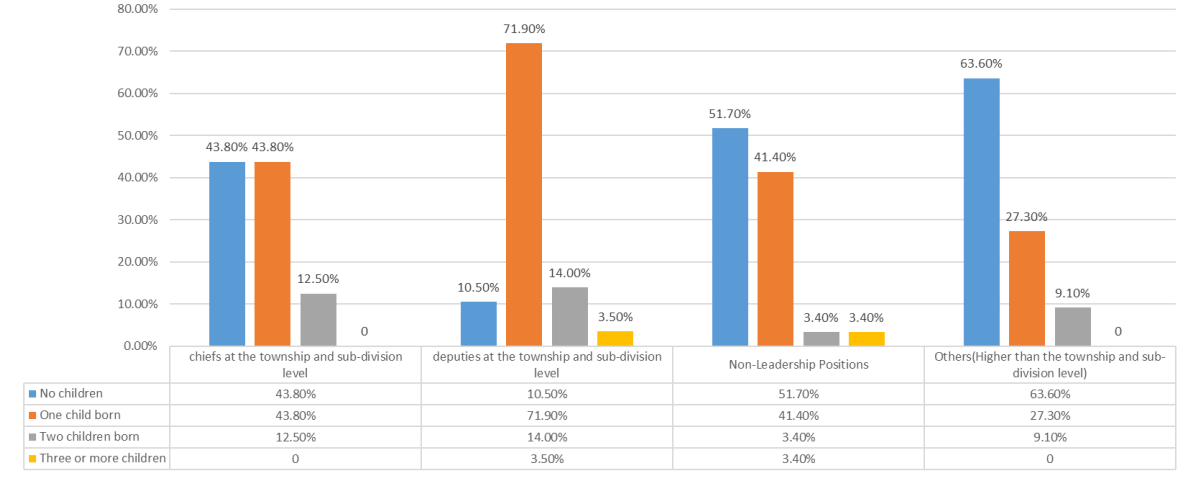
This would mean that most women at the grassroots level also see themselves as more capable of advancing to higher levels of leadership, but are held back by external factors, such as family factors and social stereotypes about women's roles.

4.4 Family Factors

The influence of family factors on female civil servants at the grassroots level in China would be significant. Due to traditional gender roles, most women might be expected to serve their husband, and his family, once they have married. The results of this questionnaire will be analysed in terms of marital status, maternity status, and other family factors.

4.4.1 Children

Table 4.10. Cross-sectional analysis of current position and maternity (female data)



	chiefs at the township and sub-division level	deputies at the township and sub-division level	Non-Leadership Positions	Others(Higher than the township and sub-division level)
No children	43.80%	10.50%	51.70%	63.60%
One child born	43.80%	71.90%	41.40%	27.30%
Two children born	12.50%	14.00%	3.40%	9.10%
Three or more children	0	3.50%	3.40%	0

Family factors include many kinds, one of which is childbirth. According to Table 4.10, the majority of women at the chiefs at the township and sub-division level are those who have never had a child or have only one child, at 43.8% each. In 'others' positions, most women had no children, at 63.6%. In contrast, women with three or more children are largely deputies at the township and sub-division level or have no leadership positions.

This suggests that women with no children or fewer children may not have the burden of educating children and have more time to devote to work and career, while women with more children are more often at the bottom of the promotion ladder. The explanation for this situation would be that leaders may tend to promote men with fewer family responsibilities to bear or women who do not have children. As leaders may assume that women who are mothers will spend less time at work than women who do not have children and men who have fewer family responsibilities.

Besides, mothers have to spend more time looking after their children than their partners or husbands, thereby presenting a phenomenon in the workplace where men have fewer family responsibilities and are more likely to be promoted. Traditional gender roles and social divisions of labour place more domestic expectations on women (Wood & Eagly, 2012) and therefore childcare is considered to be a type of family responsibility that falls on women (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018, p. 2). If women are busy working and not raising children, this can also cause resentment from their mothers-in-law, evidence of which comes from Chapter 4.4.3. Mothers-in-law's resentment may also be due to traditional gender roles and social division of labour.

4.4.2 Other Family Factors

For other possible family factors that affect the participation and promotion of female civil servants, this survey set up an open text box where women could write about anything that they felt was an obstacle to their current situation. Twenty-five of these female civil servants answered this question, and the views are collated and summarised below.

Question: (Female response) If you believe that there are indeed family factors that prevent you from being promoted, please briefly describe which family factors. _____

Common Opinion One: Must take care of the elderly and children.

Participants 129# I have elderly people at home who are sick, and I am the only child they have, and I must look after them.

Participant 164# I am an only child, and my husband is also an only child, so together we must take care off our

elderly people.

Common Opinion Two: My family did not understand my career.

Participant 1# I am now very busy at work and work requires more overtime. Mymother-in-law will complain that I am not taking good care of my husband and children and not doing my duty as a wife to my husband.

Participant 112# I am currently unmarried, but my parents are always pushing for marriage, my mom thinks I am almost past my prime childbearing years and that no man will want me when I am old.

Participant l35# I am currently in a deputy section position at the primary level (second manager of the section), and I want to do my best to be promoted to a full township position (The first manager of the section). Therefore, I usually have more social engagements and I must attend some social drinking parties after work. But my mother-in-law thinks it is humiliating for me to appear in public. She thinks going out to social functions is not the traditional role of a daughter-in-law to do.

Participant l4l# My husband, a businessman who earns more than me, would complain about my work and tell me that I might as well spend more time at home looking after him and the children.

To summarise, in the text box on other family factors as barriers to promotion for female civil servants at the primary level, the first was care for family members (e.g., only taking care of the elderly themselves, who are ill or taking care of children and husbands). Secondly, lack of understanding and support from family members, including the woman's parents, her husband, and her husband's mother.

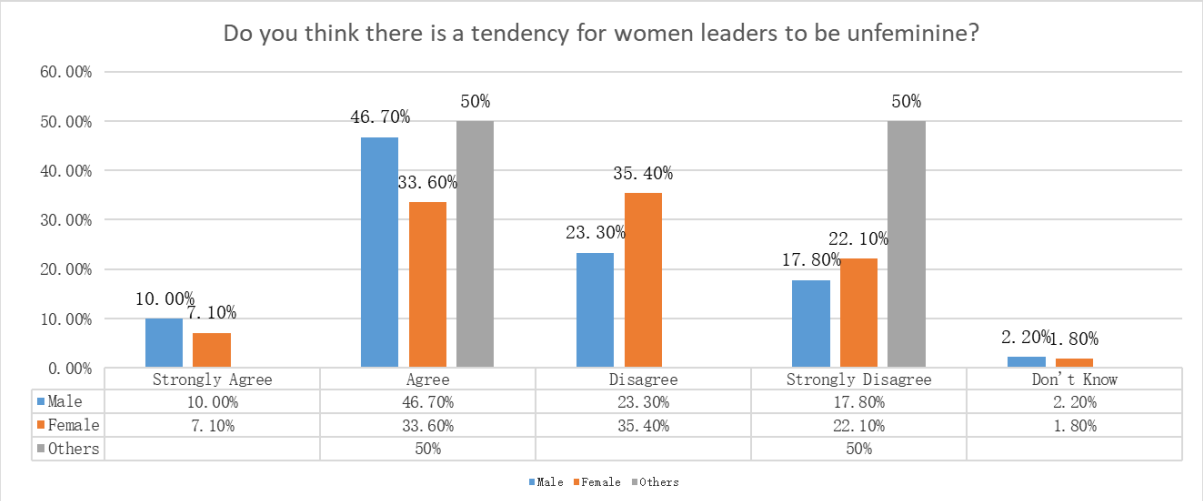
In particular, many women civil servants mentioned that they and their husbands are both only children, so caring for the elderly is a great deal of work.

There are also unmarried women's mothers and married women's mothers-in-law who display unsupportive behaviour towards women at work, which may be linked to sexism among women and the embrace of traditional roles by older women. Internalised sexism against women includes self-humiliation and the passive acceptance and maintenance of traditional gender role stereotypes (Wang, 2020, p. 6). Some married women's mothers-in-law or mothers of unmarried women who uphold gender norms may limit married women's labour force participation (Khanna & Pandey, 2021, p. 2), thus exacerbating women's subordinate status. This section will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

4.5 Gender Socialisation and Gender Norms

In order to examine whether gender socialisation and gender norms reduce the political ambition of female civil servants to participate in the workplace, this study designed separate questions on gender temperament differences, gender competence differences, behavioural patterns and the social division of labour resulting from gender socialisation and stereotyping.

Table 4.11. Do you think there is a tendency for women leaders to be unfeminine?

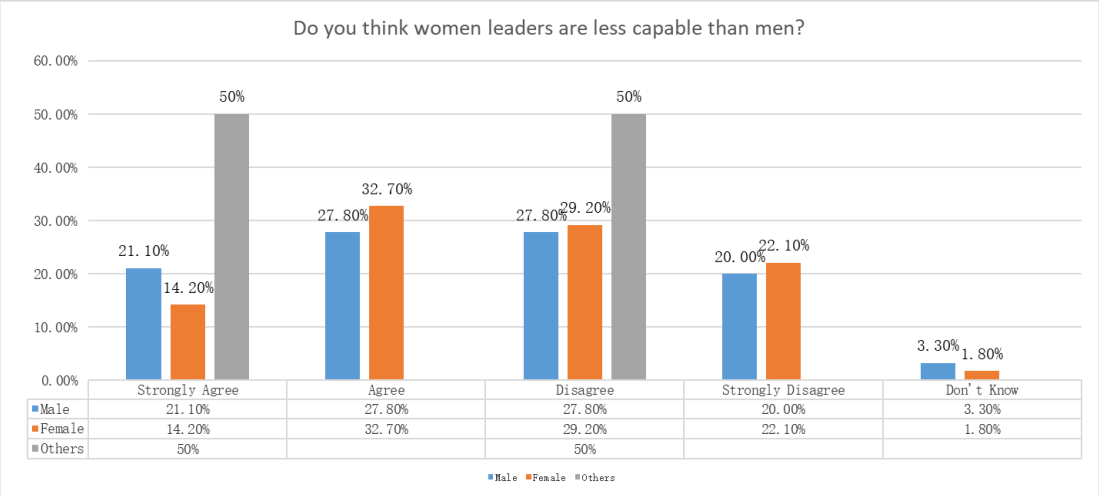


	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Male	10.00%	46.70%	23.30%	17.80%	2.20%
Female	7.10%	33.60%	35.40%	22.10%	1.80%
Others		50%		50%	

Firstly, gender temperament. According to Table 4.11, the data shows that 56.7% of men agree that "women leaders are not feminine" and 40.7% of women also agree with this view. There is still a large proportion of women who also have an unconscious gender bias against women leaders. It can be seen that the perception of

women leaders by both genders is influenced by gender stereotypes, which form an invisible barrier to women's access to senior decision-making bodies, directly limiting women's opportunities and power, resulting in a low proportion of women, which in turn limits the promotion of opportunities and power.

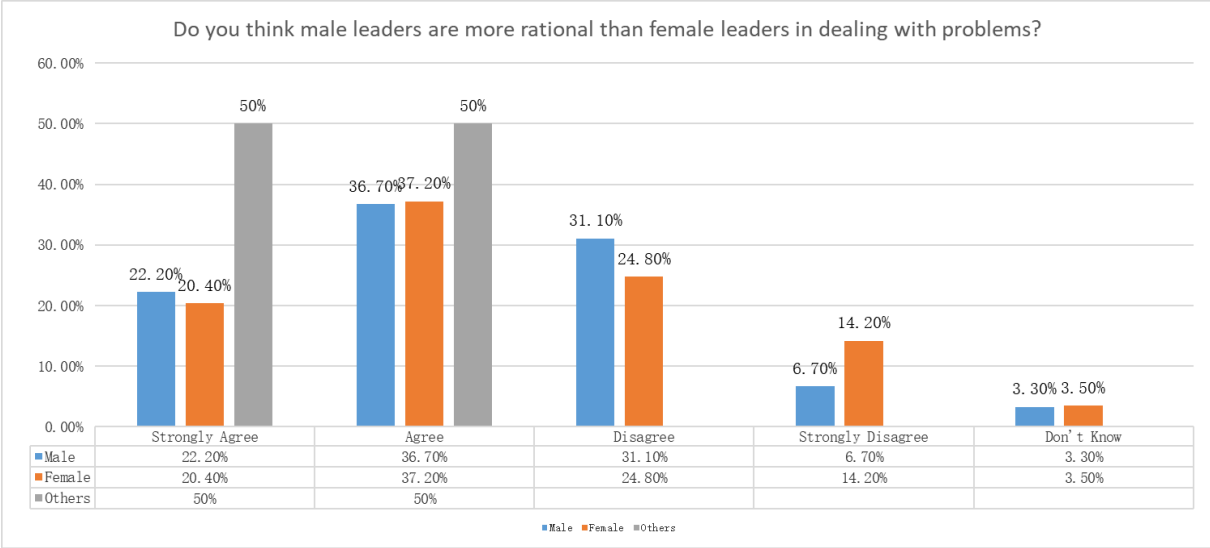
Table 4.12. Do you think women leaders are less capable than men?



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Male	21.10%	27.80%	27.80%	20.00%	3.30%
Female	14.20%	32.70%	29.20%	22.10%	1.80%
Others	50%		50%		

Second, gender differences in perceptions of political competence. In a review of the literature, gender socialisation has led women to doubt their ability to enter the political arena (Fox & Lawless, 2011, p. 63), and voters can also be biased towards female candidates' abilities, believing them to be less competent than men (Fox & Lawless, 2011, p. 59). In response to the question 'Do you agree that women are less capable of leading than men', as Table 4.10, of the female participants, 32.7% chose 'agree'. This indicates that there is still a proportion of female participants who are strongly influenced by gender socialisation and believe that men are more capable than they are. At the same time, 29.2 per cent and 22.1 per cent of the female participants chose "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree". This shows that there are also some women participants who have evolved with society and are challenging traditional gender norms. On the male side, the number of people choosing 'agree' and 'strongly agree' is about the same as 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' are about the same as those who 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. This indicates that there is also a growing trend among the male group to understand and support women, showing a trend towards gender equality perceptions. While two non-binary gender participants, one chose 'Strongly Agree' and one chose 'Disagree'. The equal number of people agreeing and disagreeing of 'women leaders are less capable than men' shows that there is a trend towards gender equality in Chinese society at the moment with regard to the contradictions and collision of ideas about traditional gender norms, but it still needs to be developed.

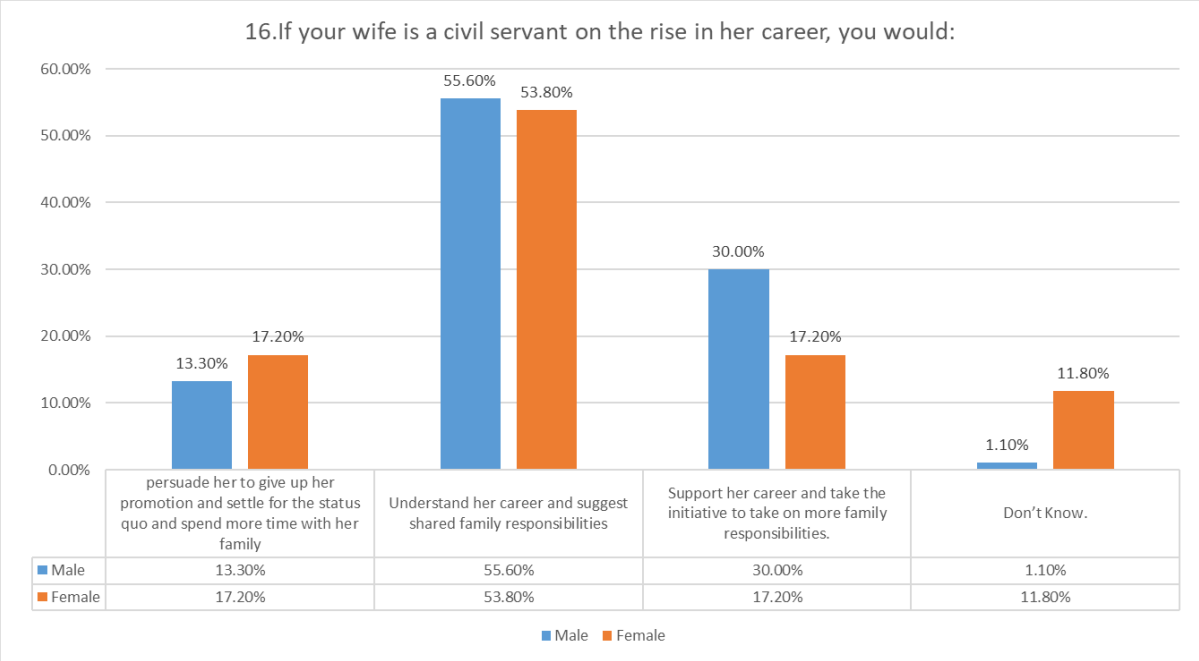
Table 4.13. Do you think male leaders are more rational than female leaders in dealing with problems? (By gender)



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Male	22.20%	36.70%	31.10%	6.70%	3.30%
Female	20.40%	37.20%	24.80%	14.20%	3.50%
Others	50%	50%			

Men are socialised to be more rational than women when it comes to decision making and perceptions of dealing with issues (Schneider & Bos, 2014, p. 248). Therefore, this may lead to the public preferring male leaders. According to Table 4.13, an overwhelming majority of people chose 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree'. This illustrates that there is still a large proportion of people in China who are stereotyped and discriminated against women's decision-making abilities by socialised gender norms. Table 4.13, by gender, the number of women who chose 'strongly agree' and 'agree' represented 57.6% (65) of the total number of women surveyed. The two non-binary genders selected 'agree' and 'strongly agree' for each. In contrast, 58.9% (46) of the men considered that men were more rational than women. This means that a significant number of men in the group of male grassroots civil service representatives agree that men are better placed to make decisions. It also means that there is still a majority of women in the group of female grassroots civil servants who question their decision-making abilities. In a few non-binary grassroot civil servants, their perceptions remain similar to the mainstream.

Table 4.14. If your wife is a civil servant on the rise in her career, you would



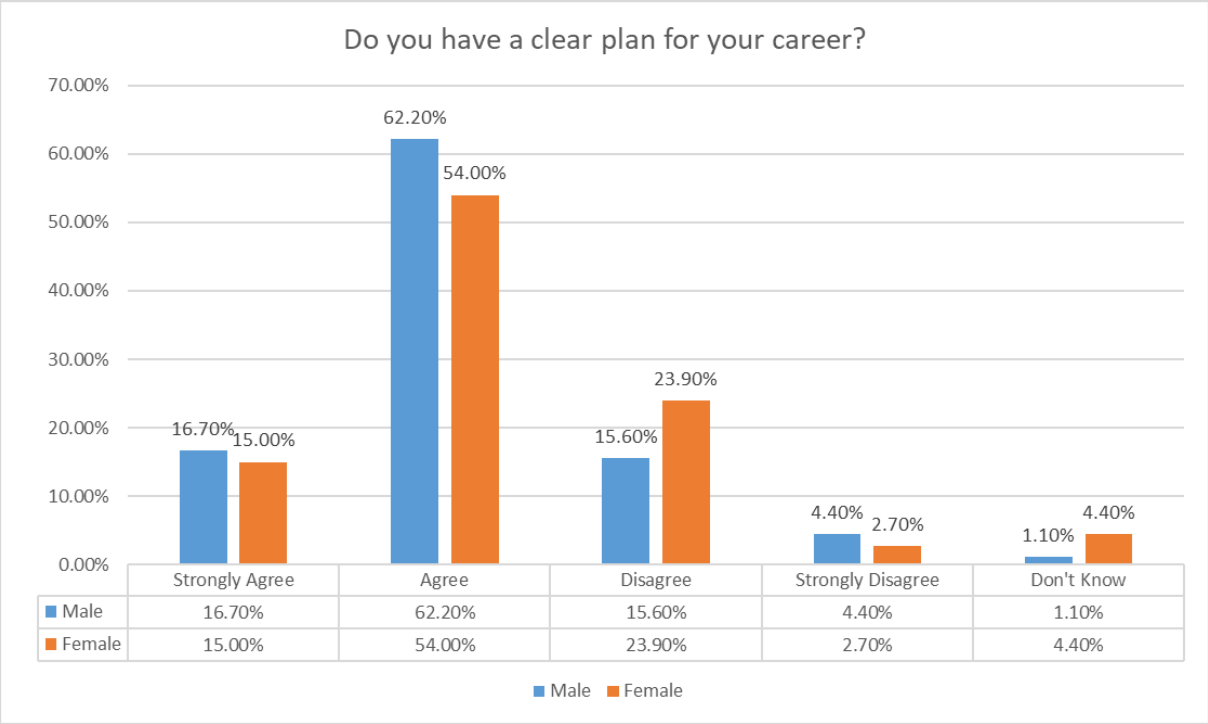
	persuade her to give up her promotion and settle for the status quo and spend more time with her family	Understand her career and suggest shared family responsibilities	Support her career and take the initiative to take on more family responsibilities.	Don't Know.
Male	13.30%	55.60%	30.00%	1.10%
Female	17.20%	53.80%	17.20%	11.80%

Besides, analysis in terms of participants' perceptions of the social division of labour between the genders. In Table 4.14, the highest number of males and females chose "understand her career and suggest sharing family responsibilities" and "support her career and initiate more family responsibilities", with 55. 6% and 30% of males respectively, compared to 53.8% and 17.2% of females respectively. In general, the gender consciousness of the majority of both sexes in terms of the social division of labour is not characterised by fixing gender, but rather by a more egalitarian gender consciousness.

As a whole, the majority of male participants appeared to be more conservative in the three areas of gender temperament, gender endowment and behavioural patterns, showing traditional and fixed characteristics. In contrast, there was an equal gender awareness among male participants in the social division of labour. The majority of female participants appeared to be conservative in their gendered behaviour patterns, showing traditional and fixed characteristics. The majority of the female participants appeared to be conservative in their sexual behaviour patterns and were traditional and fixed. It can be seen that women are becoming more gender conscious, although there is still a relatively large proportion of women who are more conservative in their thinking about gender norms.

4.6 Career Planning and Job Expectations

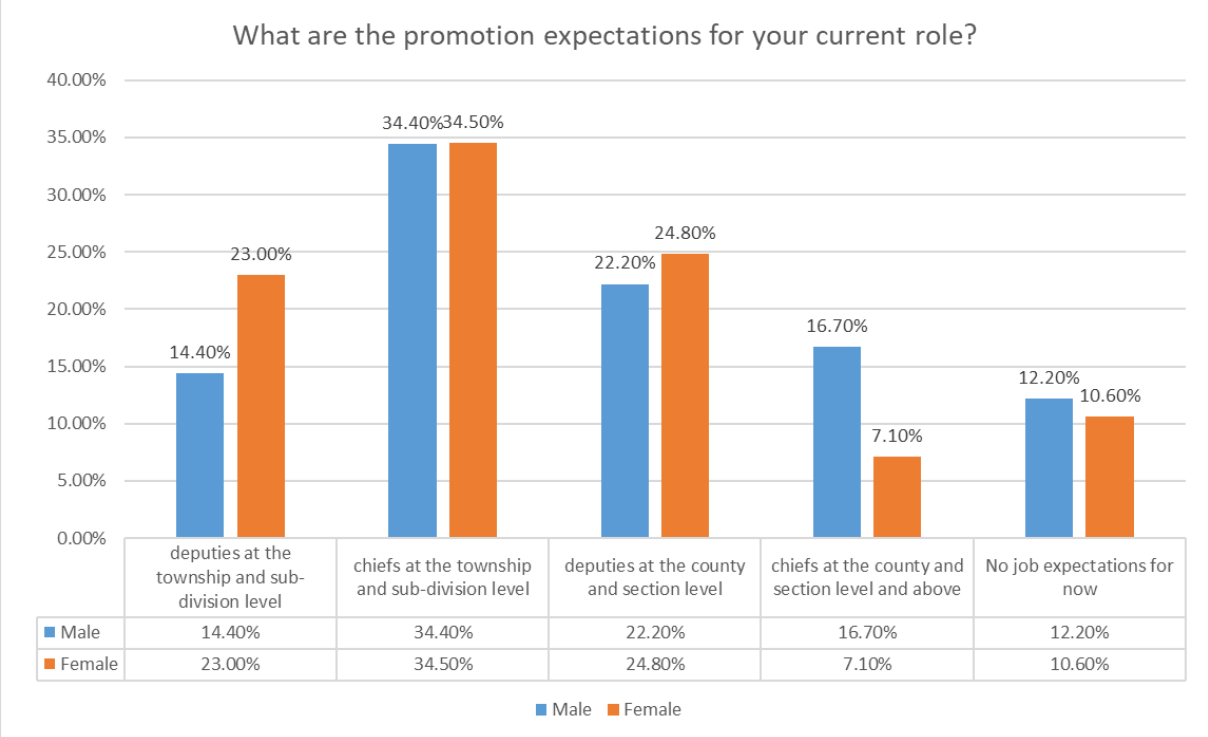
Table 4.15. Do you have a clear plan for your career?



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Male	16.70%	62.20%	15.60%	4.40%	1.10%
Female	15.00%	54.00%	23.90%	2.70%	4.40%

The marginalisation of women in power is often attributed to a lack of career goals and insufficient political ambition (Sun, 2010, p. 52). As shown in Table 4.15, the largest number of men chose 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree', 16.7% and 62.2% respectively. Although the proportion of women who chose 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' was not as high as that of men, it was also more than half of the proportion of women, at 15% and 54% respectively. This shows that most women in general have a very clear plan for their careers, although there is still some shortfall compared to the proportion of men.

Table 4.16. What are the promotion expectations for your current role?

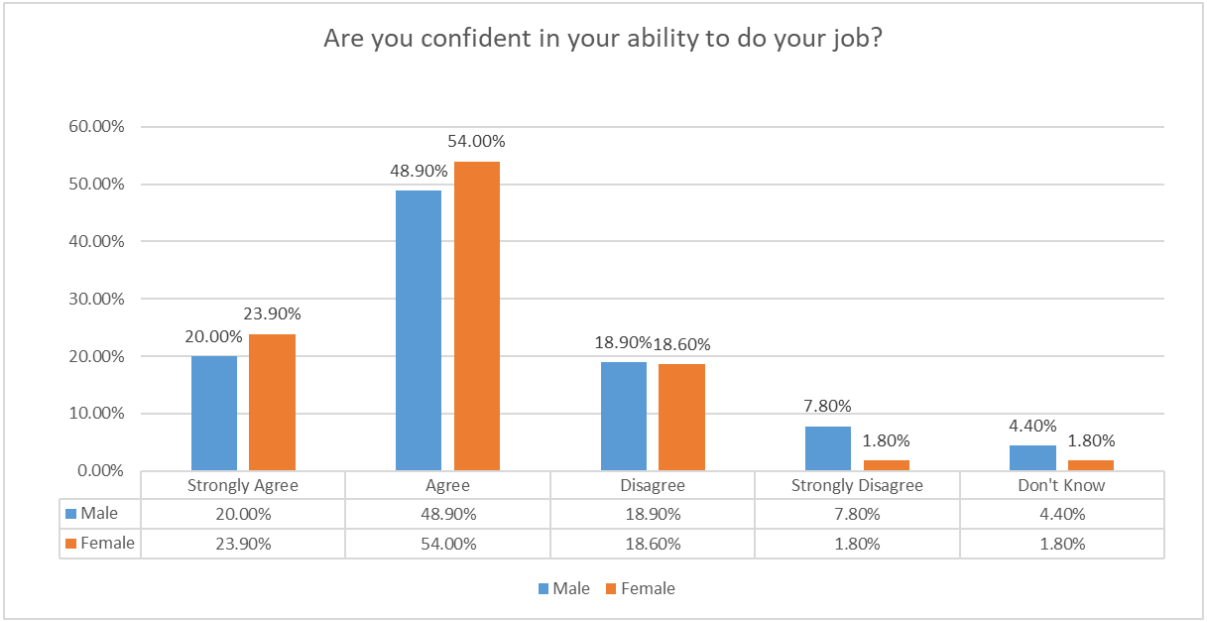


	deputies at the township and sub-division level	chiefs at the township and sub-division level	deputies at the county and section level	chiefs at the county and section level and above	No job expectations for now
Male	14.40%	34.40%	22.20%	16.70%	12.20%
Female	23.00%	34.50%	24.80%	7.10%	10.60%

According to Table 4.16, the majority of men prefer chiefs at different levels and the majority of women prefer deputies.

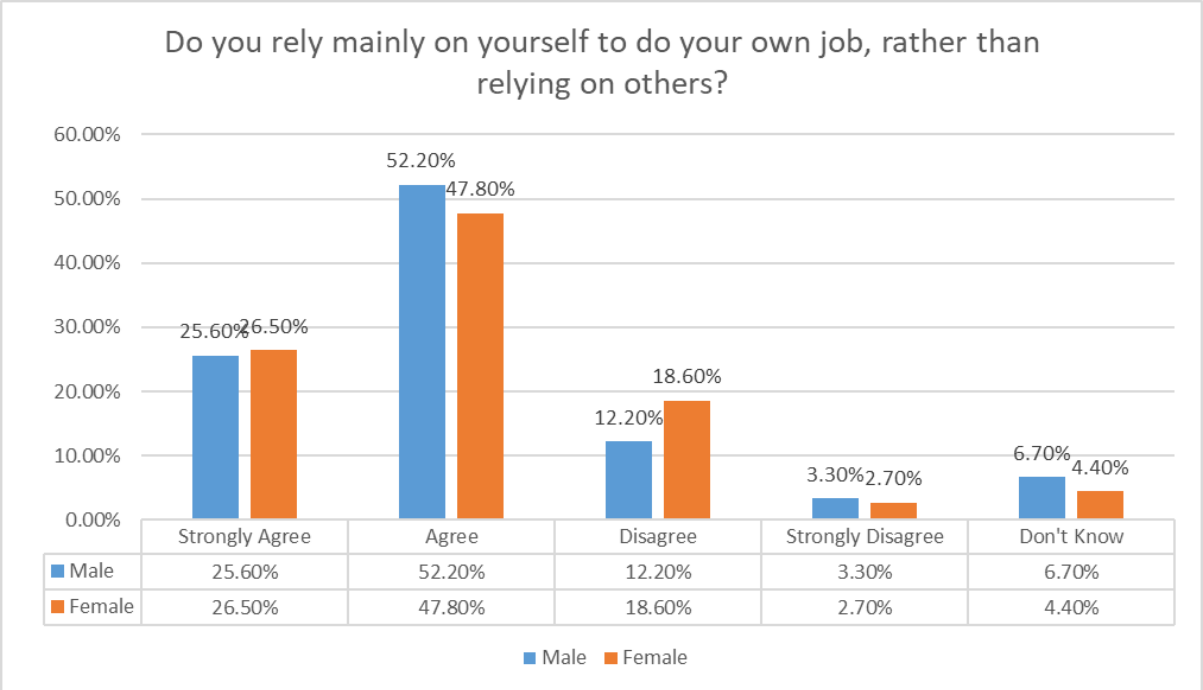
4.7 Confidence and Competition of Women Civil Servants

Table 4.17. Are you confident in your ability to do your job?



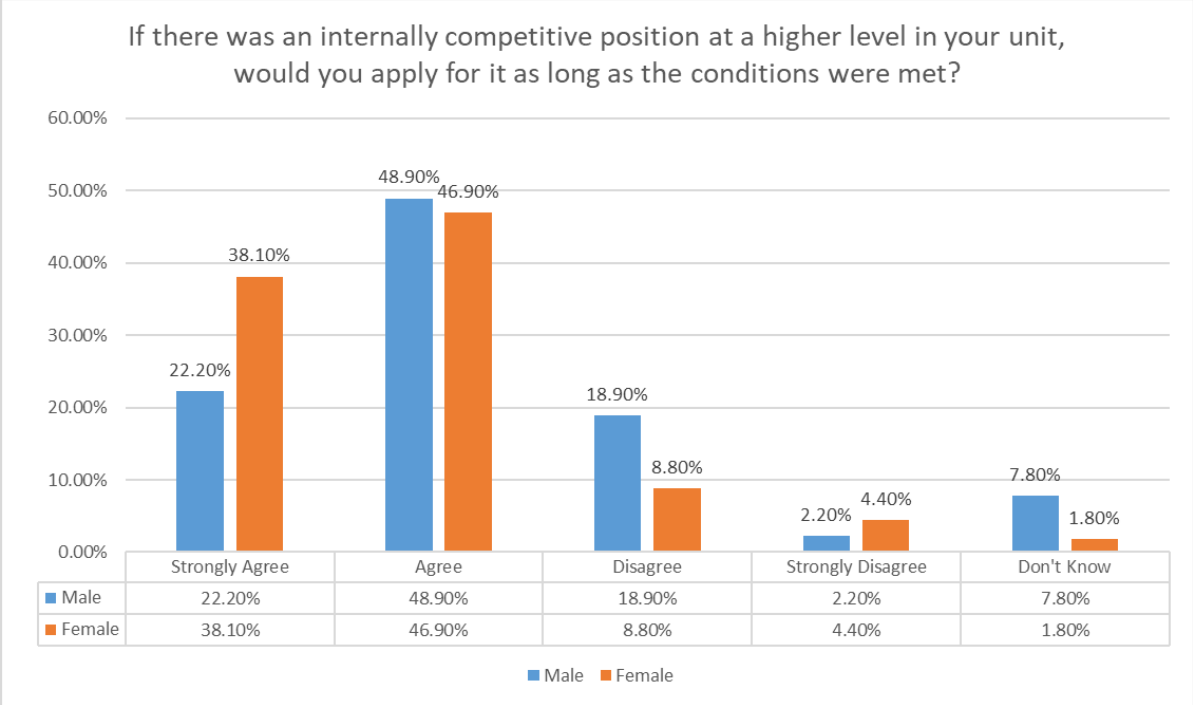
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Male	20.00%	48.90%	18.90%	7.80%	4.40%
Female	23.90%	54.00%	18.60%	1.80%	1.80%

Table 4.18. Do you rely mainly on yourself to do your own job, rather than relying on others?



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Male	25.60%	52.20%	12.20%	3.30%	6.70%
Female	26.50%	47.80%	18.60%	2.70%	4.40%

Table 4.19. If there was an internally competitive position at a higher level in your unit, would you apply for it as long as the conditions were met?



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Male	22.20%	48.90%	18.90%	2.20%	7.80%
Female	38.10%	46.90%	8.80%	4.40%	1.80%

Another explanation for the difficulty of women entering top leadership positions concerns women's psychological weaknesses. Women lack confidence in their own abilities when entering grassroots government (Sun, 2010, p. 52) and rely on men for their jobs (Sun, 2010, p. 52), thus being afraid to compete with men (Zhang & Jiang, 2007, p. 30). In this section, women's assessments of their competence, self-confidence, competitiveness and psychological weaknesses are examined.

As for Table 4.17, the data show that 68.9% of men and 77.9% of women are more confident in their ability to do their jobs. This demonstrates that female participants generally felt confident in their abilities, in contrast to past descriptions in the literature.

As shown in Table 18, 26.5% and 47.8% of the female participants chose 'strongly agree' versus 'agree'. This shows that most women are now relying on themselves to do their jobs and that total dependence on men is rare.

As Table 19 shows, women are more proactive in their attitudes towards competition. In the question 'If there was an internally competitive position at a higher level in your unit, would you apply for it?', 38.1% and 46.9% of female participants chose 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. In contrast to the male participants who chose 'strongly agree', the proportion of women was even higher than that of men. This result shows that Chinese women are changing their traditional gender roles and are no less ambitious and competitive than men in their pursuit of a career.

The explanation for this phenomenon is that the psychological factors that arise from the gender roles that women play are not innately determined but are a product of social life and change as it evolves (Bao, 2013, p. 72). Women can be as confident or more so than men when they have received equal access to education and equal access to government. The lack of women in leadership positions in public organisations is not due to a lack of competence or psychological weaknesses. On the contrary, the prerequisites for their entry into government organisations are a high level of education, clearer goals and aspirations for their career development, and confidence in their ability to do their job. At the same time, women are highly motivated and competitive in terms of job promotion. These characteristics have gradually become different from the traditional female gender roles.

4.8 Summary and Responses to the Research Questions

The following three research questions are largely addressed in this section.

1) Do women face barriers when seeking access to local government? If so, what are these barriers?

Women face barriers when seeking access to local government. In the results of the questionnaire, most people

identified the barriers as those caused by family factors, gender socialisation and gender norms, and women's lack of political ambition.

2) Does gender socialisation and gender norms have an impact on women's representation in government?

Gender socialisation and gender norms have a negative impact on the representation of women in government. Firstly, gender socialisation and gender norms construct a gendered division of labour that may lead leaders to believe that women will spend more time at home than men, and thus tend to promote men over women.

Secondly, gender socialisation and gender norms can result in sexism and stereotyping of women in grassroots government. This is mainly reflected in the distrust of women's leadership abilities. In addition to this, there is internalised sexism among women. For example, mothers of unmarried women who uphold gender norms, mothers-in-law of married women, and internalised misogyny among female colleagues can all have a negative impact on women's career development (this is analysed more in Chapter Five).

3) What are the career goals of women entering government at the primary level?

In terms of promotion expectations, most female civil servants want to be promoted to chiefs at the township and sub-division level. Women are mostly positioned at the deputy and virtual levels, with few opportunities for women in actual positions of power.

5. Further Discussion

To review the previous chapters, this study developed a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire, used online application 'Tencent Questionnaire' to make surveys, hang out the questionnaire by retweeting the online questionnaire into chat group through social media 'WeChat', and collected the data and result into 'Tencent Questionnaire', and 205 questionnaires were returned. The results of the questionnaire showed that participants did not strongly display sexism and the majority showed a trend towards gender equality. The majority of men were willing to share household responsibilities with their wives in family matters. Most women feel very confident in their ability to do their jobs and love what they do. However, this study found that internalised and unconscious sexism was more prevalent among women.

5.1 Unconscious Bias and Internalised Sexism Among Women

Internalised sexism is detrimental to the development of women's work in the government. Internalized sexism against women in the workplace is not only caused by men, but also by unconscious prejudice and discrimination against women themselves within women. This could be a form of misogyny. Misogyny is a cultural practice that maintains the power of the male dominant group through the subordination of women (Piggot, 2004, p. 21). Internalised misogyny shows up in many ways, including self-objectification (McKinley & Hyde, 1996, p. 209) and passive acceptance of traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Wang, 2020, p. 6). In my findings, female participants' female colleagues, female participants' mothers, and female participants' mothers-in-law are all at risk of unconscious bias and internalised misogyny against female civil servants. It is a tendency towards the maintenance of a patriarchal culture and the conformity to the subordination of women. This tendency to defend traditional gender norms and the identification of traditional gender socialisation can be an obstacle for women in their career paths. For example, some mothers will have lower career expectations of unmarried women and higher expectations of them in terms of marriage and childbirth (Gui, 2020, p. 1967). Some mothers-in-law of married women who reinforce gender norms may limit the labour force participation of married women (Khanna & Pandey, 2021, p. 2). This part will discuss how internalised sexism among women hinders women's career development.

Sexism by mothers of unmarried female civil servants can also have a negative impact on a woman's political career, as female civil servants may face pressure from their families to marry. In East Asian cultures, dominated by Confucian philosophy, family and marriage are highly valued for their reproductive functions. This is reflected in the fact that early marriage and childbearing are seen as an act of filial piety and emphasise that it is an obligation to parents and loved ones (Fei et al., 1992, p. 43). Those who remain single at marriageable age will encounter more prejudice and stigma, especially from women. As female identity in East Asian cultures must still be achieved through marriage, single women face more discrimination than single men (Gui, 2020, p. 1958). This discrimination against unmarried women stems first and foremost from their family of origin. As some of their mothers are bound by traditional gender role expectations, they fear that female civil servants are too focused on work and are less likely to be liked by men, get married, and have children as they get older. According to traditional gender norms, parents have different expectations of what boys and girls are capable of (Hand, 2017). Upon hearing gender-biased expectations, girls show lower motivation, which negatively affects their persistence and achievement (Eccles et al., 1990, p. 198). Therefore, as young people develop, they tend to meet the gender expectations of the wider culture (Yang & Gao, 2021, p. 1706). This is also true among female civil servants, where the parents of a female junior civil servant are more worried not about her career and promotion, but about whether she will miss the prime age for marriage and childbearing. This can reduce the

promotion mindset of some female civil servants and have a negative impact on their career persistence and achievement.

The gender bias of a married female civil servant's mother-in-law can also have a negative impact on a woman's political career if she needs to live with her mother-in-law. The role of married women's mothers-in-law in determining female labour force participation also has implications (Khanna & Pandey, 2021, p. 5). Mothers-in-law who reinforce gender norms may limit married women's labour force participation, and mothers-in-law who help married women reduce the burden of household chores may promote married women's labour force participation. Historically, Confucian principles and patriarchy are deeply rooted in East Asian societies (Jang et al., 2017). This historical phenomenon is mainly manifested in the fact that women are deeply influenced by the family and traditional marriage system of "patriarchal authority, marital authority, subordination to the husband" (Wang et al., 2020), where subordination to the husband means to live with the husband's family and to obey and be obedient to his parents. The mother-in-law, however, who has not been educated in the new ideology, becomes a reinforcer and champion of gender norms and patriarchy, thus making her daughter-in-law, even more, subject to gender norms (Khanna & Pandey, 2021, p. 5). As a result, mothers-in-law who reinforce gender roles can discourage women's employment outside the home by assuming that women are better suited to housework and childcare (Khanna & Pandey, 2021, p. 17). Mothers-in-law usually resent their daughters-in-law for being too busy with work and will accuse them of not taking care of their sons/daughters-in-law's husbands due to their busy schedules. At the same time, there are also some mothers-in-law who are reluctant to take on household chores for their daughters-in-law, believing that it is only natural for the daughter-in-law to complete these chores. Many of the female participants interviewed for this study were married women who were deeply constrained by the gender biases and norms of their in-laws. As a promotion in the civil service requires more time to attend to work and to relate well to leaders and colleagues, their mothers-in-law often restrict their commitment to work.

Internalized misogyny among women civil servants can also be expressed by female colleagues or occur among civil servants themselves. In the Chapter Findings, the majority of female participants showed internalised misogyny characteristics in the relevant questions of evaluating gender norms and gender stereotype. It is evident that internalised misogyny is not only caused by men, but also by women. They reinforce a male-centred culture that devalues girls and women through inaction and horizontal oppression caused by internalised misogyny (Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1993). Female internalised sexism can be predicted by identification with gender norms and traditional gender roles (Bearman, 2009, p. 38). When identification with gender norms is at a high level, women are more likely to develop self-blame and at the same time be jealous of the abilities of other women and become supporters of a patriarchal culture. At work, such women are more inclined to rely on male leadership and to give men a top priority, which can also create situations of competition between women. Whereas, at the lowest stage of identification with gender norms, women are more likely to recognise this inequality and converge cognitively with feminism. Previous research surfaces that identification with feminists is associated with increased perceptions of sexism in society (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994, p. 514), dissatisfaction with the current distribution of power and status quo (Reid & Purcell, 2004, p. 761), and reduced sexism against women (van Breen et al., 2017, p. 6). Women who are aware of the harmful effects of traditional gender norms on women are more inclined to oppose practices that confine groups of women to the domestic sphere, female competition, discrimination against women and a male-centric cultural environment. In the questionnaire results, a large proportion of female civil servants believe that there is a tendency for female leaders to be unfeminine, contrary to the expectations of gender roles; that women are less capable of leading than men; that male leaders are more rational than female leaders; and that men and women specialise in different areas of work. This reflects the internalised misogyny and reinforced gender norms that still characterise female civil servants at the grassroots level in China. Internalised misogyny among female colleagues at work has a detrimental effect on the career development of female civil servants. Malicious female competition at work due to internalised misogyny can take the form of malicious gossip, social exclusion, zero-sum comparisons with other women, and women suppressing each other or bringing each other into a lesser position (Bearman et al., 2009, p. 32). There may be female civil servants who are jealous of their superior female colleagues, creating horizontal oppression that discourages female colleagues from assuming leadership and reinforces a male-centric culture that devalues girls and women.

In the questionnaire survey of women civil servants at the grassroots level, many participants went back and forth between traditional and modern consciousness when discussing their views on gender roles. The main manifestation of this is that many female civil servants feel that there are many barriers to female civil servants gaining a role in government, but at the same time question the ability of women to govern compared to men. This cognitive dissonance is caused by the inconsistent messages that society sends to women. Despite the massive entry of women into the labour market, Chinese society today does not have lowered traditional expectations of women (Gui, 2020, p. 1966), thus creating a paradox of role conflict and internalised sexism.

This is mainly manifested in the fact that traditional role expectations of women still exist for married women civil servants' mothers-in-law, unmarried women civil servants' mothers and some colleagues of women civil servants, so that women who deviate from traditional role behaviour are not recognised and might be subject to jealousy and gossip.

5.2 'Guanxi' and Social Connections

Gender segregation in the Chinese workplace often places elite men in the position of resourceful favour-providers, while others, especially subordinate women, are required to act as favour-seekers (Tang, 2020, p. 193). In this part, this dissertation argues that China's traditional patriarchal-dominated guanxi culture fundamentally reinforces women's subordinate status and may allow women to experience inequity in obtaining roles in the grassroots civil service.

Firstly, the nomination by leaders for the way of promotion is detrimental to the equity of female civil servants in obtaining roles in grassroots government. The nomination by leaders for the way of promotion is one form of guanxi culture, and as this can be linked to social interactions, it may expose grassroots female civil servants to unfair competition in obtaining government roles. The nomination of leaders is a way of promoting civil servants at the grassroots level of government, called 'democratic recommendation' (Tan, 2020, p. 18). This reflects the fact that the subjective impressions of leaders largely influence the choice of candidates for grassroots government. The way of promotion by recommendation by leaders in primary level governments can contribute to poor and unfair social relations (Wang, Ma, & Xia, 2022, p. 475) and promote corruption (Yin, Li, & Yang, 2022, p. 1), thereby exposing female civil servants at the grassroots level to an unfair working environment. In the grassroots government sector, the recommendation meetings between colleagues become a formalistic formality, and the recommended candidates are basically those chosen by the key leaders (Tan, 2020, p. 28). If female civil servants want to be promoted and to be appreciated by their leaders, they have to work in a high profile and show their ability and competence at work to be noticed by the leaders in order to be nominated. Recognition from colleagues is also important for promotion. After the leader has nominated the candidate, colleagues will then conduct an assessment for the nominee. A better relationship with colleagues will result in a relatively objective evaluation by colleagues, which will facilitate the promotion process. Conversely, a poor relationship with colleagues will result in poor evaluation and assessment, which will hinder promotion. Good relationships with leaders and colleagues are often maintained through social occasions such as dinners, drinks and gift-giving (Qi, 2013, p.312). Most married female civil servants are expected to perform dual roles, such as taking care of their families while doing a good job. As a result, many married female civil servants may be limited in their interactions with colleagues and leaders, therefore it may discourage their promotion at work.

Secondly, the way of developing connections like after-work social activities would be unfavourable to women. After-work social activities are one of the most important ways to build social networks in China, such as drinking and smoking (Cooke & Xiao, 2014). There is clear gender segregation in drinking habits, with men mostly preferring to drink white wine and women preferring to drink red wine (Kipnis, 1997). And drinking white wine is even more important in Chinese guanxi socialization as it plays a ritual role in cadre selection (senior local government positions) (Zhu, Knorad &Jiao,2016). This was also found in the Findings in Chapter Four. One participant in the text box found this drinking culture annoying and that she was always forced to drink with her leaders to get promoted. This reinforces the subordination of women and their dependence on male leadership, objectifying women as tools for accompanying drinks.

Besides, in China, smoking is also associated with relationship building (Pan, 2004), and smokers may be socially active as a hobby for people of high social status (Zhang, Wang, Zhao, & Vartianinen, 2000). However, in China, the vast majority of women do not drink or smoke (Cooke, 2005; Pan, 2004). According to statistics, the smoking rate in China is 50.5% for men and 2.1% for women ("China Smoking Health Hazard Report 2020"). Even in China, where the connection-building social activity of smoking and drinking is very helpful for promotion, it is not a healthy activity for women. Women have pressure to maintain their health and behaviour. For example, if a woman is trying to conceive, or is already pregnant, she may be particularly keen not to drink or smoke. As smoking during pregnancy can affect fetal brain development (Ekblad, Korkeila, & Lehtonen, 2015, p. 16). As a result, female civil servants who are willing to socialise may not be as strong as men in drinking and smoking and may be forced to accompany them. And women who are unwilling to cater to their leaders, and those who are restricted by their families from having time to socialise, are denied a fair chance of promotion. This creates a vicious circle that prevents grassroots women from gaining a fair share of roles in government.

Furthermore, the 'guanxi' culture is unfair to some specific groups of women. For example, lesbianism. Lesbians may not choose to marry men. This would prevent her from receiving career help from a high-status husband. As a result, she may not enjoy a fair promotion in the workplace.

5.3 One Child Policy and Elderly Services

In the result final questionnaire, participants identified family responsibilities as the number one obstacle to job advancement. And in addition to the usual, family factors such as pregnancy and childcare, many mentioned that they needed to take care of the elderly in their families and were therefore unable to do their jobs. Some participants mentioned that as an only child they had more responsibilities to take care of the elderly, which affected their working hours. This may be linked to the one-child policy enacted in China in 1980, which resulted in many people now working being only child of their parents. It is also a reflection of the fact that the weakness of China's elderly care facilities has increased women's domestic responsibilities.

The impact of the One-Child Policy on women's career development is only now beginning to be seen, as it has taken nearly a decade for only children to reach adulthood and enter the workforce. The one-child policy was a population planning program implemented in China between 1980 and 2015 to curb China's population growth by limiting multiple families to one child (Zhang, 2017, p. 141). While the one-child policy may have helped women's educational improvement (Wang et al., 2020, p. 643), it has not directly benefited women's access to roles in grassroots government but has also increased women's responsibility for the family and affected her work. As women are the primary bearers of family responsibilities in traditional gender roles, there is no real change at present, although there is a trend towards the idea of men and women sharing family responsibilities. Most female civil servants at the grassroots level are required to take on more responsibility for supporting the elderly due to the dual constraints of the one-child policy and traditional gender roles, making it more difficult to balance work and family, as can be seen in the questionnaire results.

The pressure on young people to take care of the elderly may also be linked to China's weak elderly care facilities. Although the government has been promoting social reforms in the elderly care industry and services since 2011 in response to the rapid ageing situation, the Chinese government still has many difficulties in meeting the needs of older people to age in place (Xiang et al., 2019, p. 53). According to statistics, 90 per cent of older people age at home with the help of relatives, about 7 per cent rely on community services, and about 4 per cent stay in nursing homes (Beijing Municipal Commission of Planning and Natural Resources & Beijing Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau, 2015). For most older people in China, formal long-term care is paid for out-of-pocket (Wiener et al., 2018, p. 176). The cost of long-term care is high compared to the level of retirement income of most people and affordability is an issue for many (Wiener et al., 2018, p. 194). As a result, care for older people is still largely the responsibility of family members (Feng et al., 2020, p. 1364). In this context of rapid population ageing and shrinking family size, adult children remain the primary caregivers for their ageing parents (Yang, Xie, & Li, 2021, p. 2). Adult couples, often, are expected to take on the responsibility of supporting their elderly, and the wife is usually expected to take a primary role in this care. In such cases, women's domestic responsibilities and burdens are reinforced, and it becomes more difficult for women to balance family and work. It is also indicative, on the other hand, of the need for services and policies relating to old age in China to be implemented and enforced so that the burden on working women's families can be reduced.

6. Conclusion

At a broader level, the motivation for this dissertation is to observe the barriers that female grassroots civil servants face in acquiring roles in government. To access what difficulties female grassroots civil servants face, this dissertation poses three research questions. To address the research questions, this dissertation created a questionnaire for primary local civil servants in China and conducted a pilot to ensure improvements to the questionnaire. Based on the returned data from the final questionnaire, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted, along with a broader discussion, to examine the barriers to female civil servants gaining a role in primary government.

In terms of socialised gender roles and gender norms, this study complements the existing literature on the negative impact of the presence of traditional gender norms on the acquisition of roles in government by female civil servants at the grassroots level by examining internalised misogyny and internalised sexism among women and traditional Chinese social culture 'guanxi'. Traditional gender norms cater to patriarchy and increase the subordination of women. From the perspective of internalised misogyny and internalised sexism among women, the mutual misogyny within female groups creates internal conflict among women, reinforces gender norms and increases female subordination, to the detriment of female civil servants' promotion and women's career development. From the perspective of the traditional Chinese social culture 'guanxi', the promotion of grassroots civil servants through recommendations by their leaders and drinking with leaders increases the inequity of female civil servants' promotion. In terms of family factors, in addition to childcare and pregnancy, this study adds the negative impact of caring for the elderly after marriage as an only child on women's job development, as well as the pressure of dual responsibility from the perspective of caring for the elderly in China's particular one-child situation.

Overall, the discoveries of this dissertation highlight the barriers to career development for female civil servants

at the grassroots level caused by internalised misogyny and increased assumption of family responsibilities and social inequities among women because of traditional gender roles and gender norms. From the perspective of female solidarity, the research of this dissertation aims to call on female groups to reduce the phenomenon of female competition and internalised sexism, to be considerate of each other, to allow the gender norms that bind women to be lessened, to develop in cooperation with each other and to reduce internal conflict. From a policy perspective, the research of this dissertation implies that policy reforms regarding the promotion of civil servants at the grassroots level should be more equitable and realistically examine nominees, rather than nominating from the crowd and catering to the leaders' preferred candidates. Finally, policymakers should also pay close attention to the special circumstances of women, such as pregnancy and childbirth. In addition to this, from the perspective of family factors, policymakers should implement more elderly care services for those who have only one child, to reduce the burden on the family for working women. The husbands of married working women should also share family responsibilities with women.

There are also limitations in the design of the questionnaire for this dissertation. In terms of investigating internalised sexism among women, no more detailed questions were designed to examine this. As internalised sexism among women was identified from the open text box and the survey's stereotypes of female leaders, it was not developed and refined in the related questions. Further research could have considered multiple situations to set the questions so that commonalities in mothers-in-law with internalised sexist characteristics could be identified and the reasons for internalised sexism could be refined. For example, do married female civil servants live with or without their mothers-in-law, and do mothers-in-law share household chores with their daughters-in-law. In addition, policies and regulations on promotion were not studied due to the limitations of the questionnaire for promotion in mainland China. Future research could investigate promotion policies based on this limitation and make strong recommendations for improving the invisible discrimination against women in China's grassroots civil service promotion policies. A fair promotion policy could improve workplace culture, allow for a reduction in relationship-maintaining gift-giving and escorting, and give female civil servants a fair chance to gain roles in primary government.

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