**CHY4U Unit 4, Activity 4 - Timeline of Chinese Women’s Rights**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Event** |
| Ancient China | Confucianism’s emphasis on filial piety puts women in a subordinate position in the male-centred family establishing a strongly patriarchal view of women. Women are given little freedom in marriage and can be forced to be concubines. They have few educational opportunities. |
| 900s | Foot-binding becomes a common practice: young girls’ toes are bent under to make their feet tiny, thus leaving them immobile. Mostly among the elites. |
| 1861-1908 | Dowager Empress Cixi rules China from “behind the screen.” |
| 1902 | Late Qing dynasty reform makes foot-binding illegal (though the practice continues in reality). |
| 1910s and 1920s | May Fourth Feminist Movement coincides with the reformist May Fourth Movement that seeks to strengthen a weak and corrupt republican China. Mostly male intellectuals in the movement seek to strengthen the family by improving the position of women. Movement is limited to urban elites. |
| 1949 | Upon taking power, Mao Zedong and the Communists proclaim that women “hold up half the sky.” Article 6 of the country’s new laws says: “The People’s Republic of China shall abolish the feudal system which holds women in bondage. Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic, cultural, educational and social life. Freedom of marriage for men and women shall be put into effect.” |
| 1950 | Marriage Law states that women are to be free to choose their own marriage partner rather than have it arranged for them or forced on them. |
| 1950s | The divorce rate rises as women escape from “feudal” marriages. However, there is much opposition to this and some murders and suicides take place in reaction. |
| Late 1950s | Great Leap Forward (a push to revitalize the economy) encourages women to work. Many take on jobs on collective farms in kindergartens, nurseries, and dining halls. Women’s participation rates in the economy are at very high levels. |
| 1966-1976 | During the Cultural Revolution (Mao’s effort to re-radicalize Chinese society) women’s employment remains at a high level and many women participate in higher education. However, women’s issues are not a focus during this time. |
| 1978 | One child policy is introduced due to high fertility rates (average being around 6 children per woman). Women are often forced to abort second children or undergo sterilization. |
| 1990s | As part of its economic reforms, China closes many state-owned industries, firing millions of people; women are affected disproportionately. “Women return to the home” campaign emerges at the same time, and employment rates for women decrease. |
| 1990 | 74% of urban women of working age are working in the paid economy. |
| 1990-2010 | Education rates for women increase. In 1990, 36% of urban women have at least a secondary education, while by 2010 that has increased to 54.2%. For rural women the rates go from 6.7% to 18.2% over the same period. |
| 2007 | Government campaign stigmatizes “leftover women”, those women over age 27 who are not married. |
| 2010 | 60.8% of urban women of working age are working in the paid economy. |
| 2011 | Marriage Law is amended to reduce married women’s property rights. |
| 2015 | One child policy is ended. After so many years, the policy has been successful in reducing the fertility rate to around an average of 1.4-1.5 children per women. However, it has led to a very unequal sex ratio in the population (more boys than girls are born over a long period of time). |
| 2000s | Though women still work in high numbers, there is considerable job discrimination favouring men in hiring, promotions, firings, maternity leave, glass-ceiling, etc. In 2010, 48% of women surveyed agree that “a good marriage is better than a career.” 40.7% of men surveyed agree with the same statement. |
| Current | Women dominate in low paid agricultural work in the countryside. By contrast, few women reach high levels within government and the Communist Party. |

Sources:

Attane, Isabelle. Being a Woman in China Today: A Demography of Gender. China Perspectives. No.

2012/4. N.d. [https://**china**perspectives.revues.org/6013?file=1](https://chinaperspectives.revues.org/6013?file=1)

Fincher, Leta Hong. "China's Entrenched Gender Gap." *New York Times.*  May, 21 2013. *Global Issues In*

*Context*.

Li, Yuhui. “Women’s Movement and Change of Women’s Status in China.” *Journal of International*

*Women’s Studies.* Vol 1, No., 1, 2000.

<http://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1626&context=jiws>