

**From Heyang Model to Shaanxi Model:
Thoughts and Practice on Promoting
Peasant Women's Participation in Election
and Political Affairs**

On Strategies and Characteristics of
Contemporary Women's Movement in China

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Female Village Officials: Emergence of a New Group of People

Newly elected female village officials of
the 6th Village Committee of Ankang City in 2006



- **The emergence of this group is an achievement of the grass-roots women's movement of Shaanxi Province. The promoter behind it is a women NGO -- Shaanxi Women's Research Institute of Theoretical Studies on Marriage and Family**
- **The Institute was established in 1986 with a membership of over 120, of which 100 are committed long-term volunteers, and more than 20 are full time staff members**
- **Its major concerns are as follows:**
 - women's development in poor rural areas
 - women's participation in grass-roots management
 - opposition to violence against women
 - gender studies training and advocacy
 - NGO function building

Background

- **Low percentage of peasant women on the village committee; the number is declining**
- Nationwide, female members on the village committee: 16%
 - Female village committee directors: 1%
- Shaanxi: female village committee members: 9%
- female village committee directors: 0.6%
- **Inspired by India's policy intervention**
 - Revised provision No. 73 of the 2004 Constitution
- **Exploration of approaches to gender equality movement in the countryside after feminization of agriculture**

Process: 3 Phases

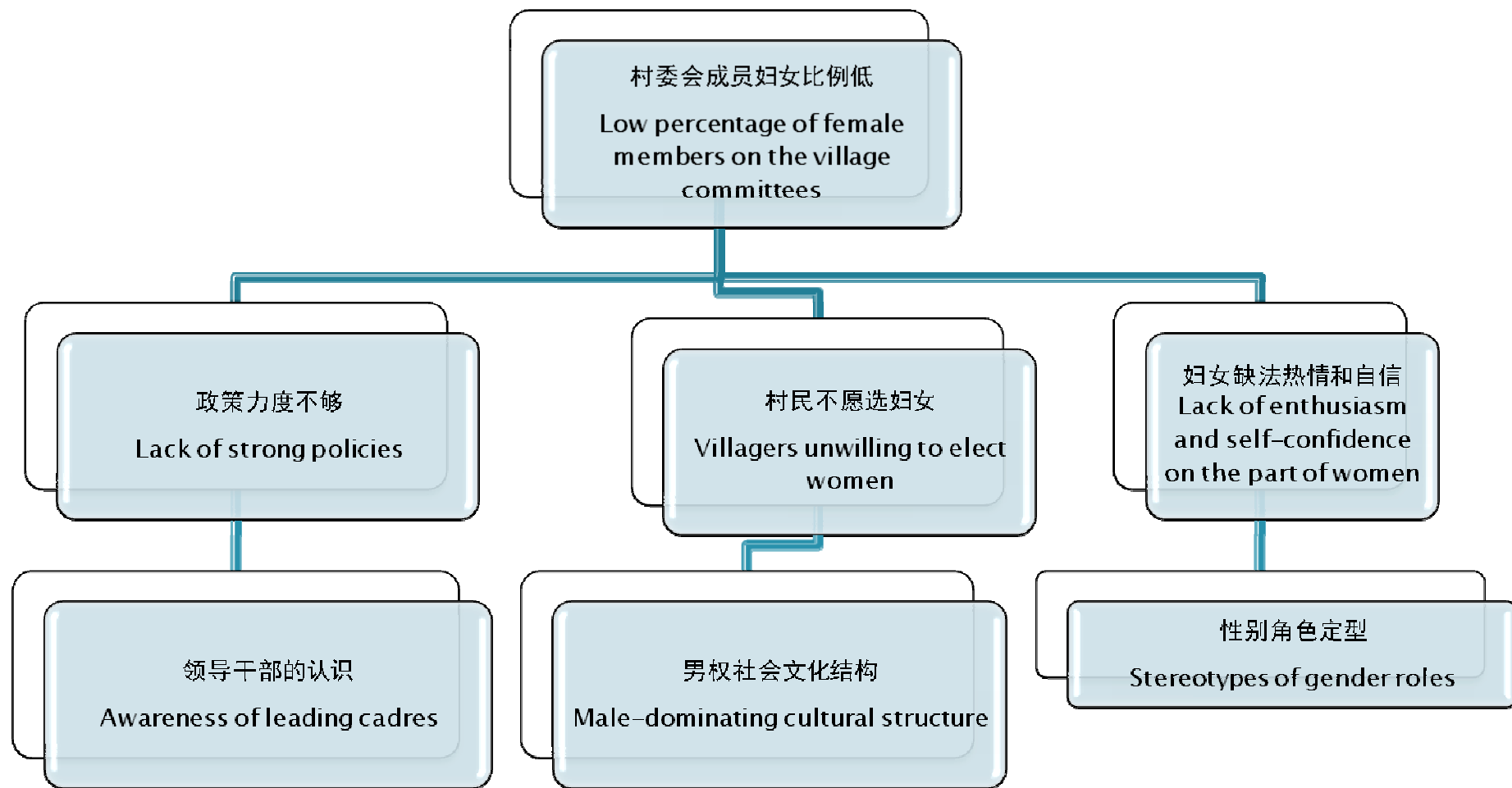
- ❑ 2004-2005: at the election of the 6th village committee, raise the percentage of female members, especially that of village committee directors (Heyang project-1st phase; Irish Embassy Project)
- ❑ 2006-2009: Constructing a new agricultural village with a gender perspective through developing the abilities of female village officials (Heyang Project-2nd phase; UNDP Project-1st phase)
- ❑ 2008: In collaboration with the Provincial Women's Federation, introduce the Heyang experience-1st phase so as to raise percentage of women in the election (UNDP-2nd phase; international plan-Pucheng Project)
- ❑ 2009-: Heyang Project-3rd phase: ...

1st Phase: Increase the percentage of female members of the village committee

Goals:

- **Through raising the consciousness and ability of peasant women to be involved in political affairs and improving the policy and cultural environment for them to participate in the village committee election, increasing female members in the village committee by 10 percentage points so as to reduce gender unfairness.**

Intervention framework: the logic of the framework is based on analyses of causes of the problems



Major Approaches

1. Raise the relevant government authorities' gender consciousness and encourage the adoption of policies with gender sensitivity.

- ✓ Sending out study groups to learn from other places
- ✓ Organizing training on gender consciousness
- ✓ Holding small policy appraisal meetings
- Results:
 - Production of 25 documents by Shaanxi's Party Committee Organization Department, Civil Affairs Department, and Women's Federation
 - For the first time in China, explicit request for a quota of female directors for the village committee to be elected (3-5 people)
 - Heyang county document requesting that every village and township has one female director for the village committee

2. Training of a women core group to enhance enthusiasm and confidence in women's involvement in political affairs:

10 such training classes were conducted in Heyang county and four cities: Hanzhong, Ankang, Xianyang and Weinan with a participation of almost 700 people

3. Mobilizing communities to create a social and cultural environment supporting women's involvement in political affairs and election

- √ Project initiation ceremony on a massive scale
- √ Creations of local operas for performing tours to villages and townships
- √ Distribution of publicity posters
- √ Publicity on bulletin board, broadcast, television and newspapers

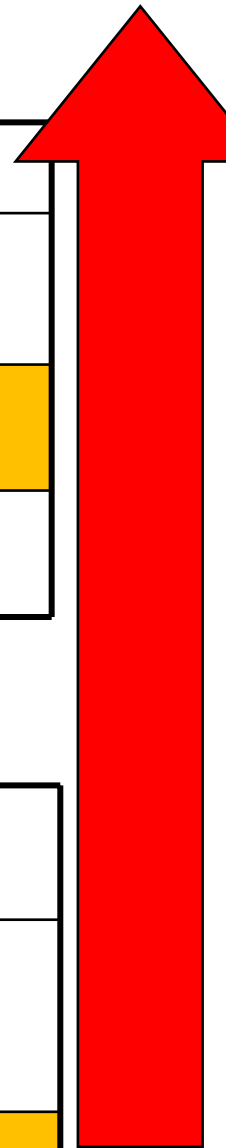
Achievements:

Results of women elected at Heyang county's 5th village committee election

Year	Directors of Village Committee			Members of Village Committee		
	Total	Female directors	Female %	Total	Female members	Female %
2006	348	20	5.7	1285	324	25.2
2003	351	0	0	1296	191	14.7

Results of women elected at Shaanxi Province's 6th village committee election

Year	Directors of Village Committee			Members of Village Committee		
	Total	Female directors	Female %	Total	Female members	Female %
2006	27015	291	1.1	105477	12817	12.2
2003	28634	184	0.6	123150	11061	9



2nd Phase: Raise the Abilities of Female Village Officials

- **General Goals:**

Provide support for the newly elected female village officials and help them to raise their abilities. Through them, advance the construction of new villages with villagers' full participation and democratic management, thus further strengthening women's involvement in political affairs as well as promoting gender equality and fair village administration.

Goal 1: Raise female village officials' leadership abilities and enhance their gender sensitivity;

Goal 2: Incorporate gender perspective and fair administration in the construction of new villages.

Major Approaches

- **Conduct a series of training :**
 - women's leadership training
 - village affairs administration training
 - training classes for village cadres on gender awareness and new village construction
 - participatory training on village planning
- **Create a platform for dialogue with the government**
 - Hold a forum on “female village officials and new village construction”
 - “On-site meetings among female village officials exchanging ideas on new village construction”
- **Set up small amount funds for financial aids and promote community development from a gender perspective and in a participatory manner.**
- **Establish female village officials associations**
 - two regular meetings each year
 - female village officials' “Bulletin”
- **Going out to the outside world to broaden female village officials' vision**
 - study groups to Yongji, Shanxi and Huaxi Village, Jiangsu
 - recommendation to participation in various conferences

◆ **Achievements:**

- Female village officials: emergence of a new group of people
- Female village officials become the leading force of new village construction
- Greater concern and support from the civil affairs and agriculture-related departments
- Women's federation becomes the “natal family” of female village officials

◆ **Characteristics :**

Women's federation plays the leading role with the cooperation of civil affairs departments and technical support by the research institution

3rd Phase: Publicizing the Heyang Model

◆ **Opportunity: Shaanxi 7th village committee election in 2008**

◆ **Major approaches:**

➤ **Creation of policy: document jointly issued by 3 government authorities with clear quotas stated:**

- 1 female committee member each for the party committee and village committee
- Female village committee directors constitute 5%
- One quarter of village representatives to the village congress should be women.

➤ **Enhancement of training**

- Entrusting Women's Research Institution to compile training materials and design posters
- Allocating 50,000 to 60,000 yuan to each prefecture or city for its training fees
- Entrusting Women's Research Institution to organize trainers and send them to key counties of different prefectures or cities of the whole province to do training for leading cadres of civil affairs departments, village committees and township governments as well as women's core groups sent by villages and townships
- Bringing the initiative of all-level cadres from the women's federation to full play and soliciting support from the party committees and governments at all levels.

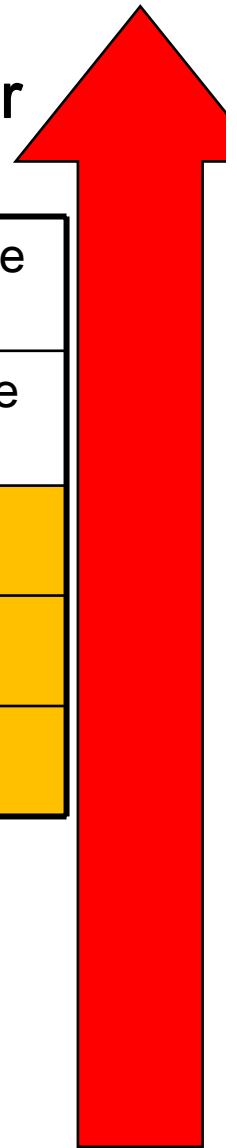
“No. 1 Leaders Project”

Achievements:

- Obvious increase of female village officers in number and percentage in the whole province

Year	Directors of Village Committee			Members of Village Committee		
	Total	Female directors	Female %	Total	Female members	Female %
2009			2.1			
2006	27015	291	1.1	105477	12817	12.2
2003	28634	184	0.6	123150	11061	9

- Understanding of the importance of women participating in election and political affairs by government officials and women's federation cadres at all levels is enhanced.
- An atmosphere is created showing concern for peasant women taking part in election and political affairs.



➤ **Only when women participating in political affairs reaches a certain number, can they exert an impact—the importance of critical quantity**

- **Critical quantity: the “Action Program” states the goal is that women should constitute 30% in decision making institutions at all levels.**

- **Critical quantity is the lowest goal we should achieve.**

➤ **Policy is necessary, but if it were not for the revision of the “Organization Law on Village Committees,” the effect of policy is limited.**

➤ **There is no direct relation between economic development and percentage of women officials elected.**

➤ **Planned intervention is an effective approach to raise the percentage of women’s participation in political affairs.**

Problems and Challenges

- Limited impact
 - still a small number, a big gap from the critical quantity of 1/3
 - little contact with the outside world
- Low rate of being re-elected to the same position
 - Shortage of “village officials” and competition more intense
 - Relations between the village party committee and village committee
 - black holes in the village’s financial management
 - double roles: work pressure and family relationship
- It is difficult to incorporate gender perspective in the management of village affairs.
 - pressure of promise to run for village official position
 - lack of sensitivity and understanding of gender equality
 - confronting the male dominating culture, women are small in number and meager in strength
- Public involvement of ordinary women in political affairs is still a problem.

Design Ideas for 3rd Phase

- **Continue to raise the abilities of female village officials and strengthen the functions of the female village officials association (training organized by the community, policy advocacy, dialogue and negotiation, IT and networking technique, etc.). Expand the influence of women village officials so as to enhance community administration and gender equality.**
 - Help improve women's organization in the community and develop channels for women's involvement in community affairs.
 - Raise the abilities of women representatives to the People's Congress to participate and discuss political affairs.
 - Strengthen the functions of female village officials association.
 - Set up a networking platform for female village officials to communicate with and support each other.

Thinking: Characteristics of Contemporary Women's Movement in China

- **Feminists' awareness and activism**
- **Initiative of women's NGO**
 - Global vision: gender sensitivity; analysis and intervention framework
 - Sense of mission
 - Close contact with communities and women: effectiveness of intervention
 - Responding to experience of domestic issues
- **Alliance of different women's organizations : develop advantages of each organization**
- **Make use of the resources in the existing system in a creative way**
 - Incorporating feminist issues into the mainstream discourse : equality between men and women is a basic state policy, building a harmonious society, constructing new villages.....
 - Promote creative policies
 - Make use of government's financials
- **Interact with global gender equality movement and support each other :**
strategies for mainstreaming gender; provision of resources