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Research on China's Women's Rights Protection Policy from the Perspective of the "Goal-Tool" Framework—A Case Study of the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests

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Abstract. This study conducts a case study of the "Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests of China" from the perspective of the "goal-tool" framework, aiming to explore the specific policy goals of China's women's rights protection policy in terms of eliminating gender discrimination, promoting equal participation, and combating violations, and analyze the mechanism for achieving these goals through policy tools such as law, social administration, and economic propaganda. The study adopts text analysis to systematically summarize and analyze the internal connection between legal provisions and policy documents. The study shows that although China has made significant progress in women's rights protection, policy goals cover a wide range of social fields, and the goal setting is clear, there are still deficiencies in the synergy of policy tools and implementation details. Further optimization and improvement are still needed in terms of the enforcement of the law, the improvement of social cognition, and the coordination between tools. In the future, further deepening of policies and optimization of tools will help to achieve women's rights protection and gender equality more effectively.

Keywords: women's rights protection; policy goals; policy tools; legal system

1. Introduction

The protection of women's rights is a core element of justice and equality in modern society and has far-reaching significance in national development and social harmony. On an international scale, gender equality is widely acknowledged as a fundamental component of human rights and serves as a key benchmark for assessing a nation's modern development. China also has a long historical background in this regard. Since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the pursuit of gender equality has become an important objective of social construction, where the achievements are most obvious lately. The realization of gender equality is very important to the Chinese government, and it has been working to promote women's equal participation in all areas of political, economic, and social life. The country is committed to eliminating institutional and structural gender discrimination and to protecting women's basic rights and development

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opportunities in important fields, including employment, education, medical care, and social security, through a series of systematic, forward-looking policies and regulations. However, despite some progress, gender equality still faces many challenges, especially in traditional concepts, social norms, and specific legal enforcement. Limited progress on gender equality has been made in numerous contexts.

In recent years, as the global dissemination of gender equity principles has accelerated, China has systematically advanced the legal framework for safeguarding women's rights, particularly through comprehensive amendments to the "Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests" and associated regulatory mechanisms. While substantial progress has been achieved in policy formulation and legislative frameworks, contemporary academic discourse continues to emphasize the persistent challenges in operationalizing these principles to address concrete manifestations of gender disparity within practical implementation contexts.

Therefore, it is of great academic value and practical significance to explore the synergy between the goals and policy tools of China's women's rights protection policy, especially how the legal system promotes the realization of policy goals in practice.

The core issue of this paper is to

1)What specific policy goals does the Law of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests aim to achieve? What policy tools does the government use to achieve these goals?

2)What achievements have been made in eliminating gender discrimination, promoting women's equal participation, and combating violations of women's rights and interests? What challenges are faced?

The correlation between policy tools and anticipations directly determines the actual efficiency of the implementation of public policy. Most current studies focus on the theoretical framework construction of policy goals, and few studies have explored in depth how to achieve these goals through specific policy tools, especially in a country like China with a special historical and cultural background, where policy implementation still faces many difficulties. Therefore, this paper aims to systematically explore the goals, tools, and practical application effects of China's women's rights protection policy through case analysis of the "Law of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests" and the "goal-tool" analysis framework.

This study mainly uses text analysis to systematically analyze the "Law of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests" and related policy documents to reveal the interactive relationship between policy goals and tools. Text analysis helps to deeply interpret the content of the provisions in the policy documents, the legislative ideas behind them, and the deviations in the actual implementation process [1]. By systematically sorting out the content of policy documents, it is possible to reveal the planning direction of policy goals, the implementation paths of policy measures, and then evaluate the implementation effects in terms of eliminating gender bias, promoting equal participation of women, and curbing the infringement of women's legitimate rights and interests.

Specifically, this paper will combine classic literature and the latest research results to construct a clear "goal-tool" framework, analyze the diversity of goal setting and the complexity of implementation tools in China's women's rights protection policies, and further explore the operational effects and challenges of these tools.

2. Theoretical Basis

Public governance is centered on the formulation and implementation of public policies in any country. To develop policies that can help solve social problems, one should be able to clarify policy

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goals and choose reasonable instruments respectively. In their theoretical framework, Collins, Schicke, and Röder put forward that the "goal tool", as put forward by them, is a very important model for how the mechanism of policy implementation works [2]. Policy tools are the specific means to accomplish these objectives, and these policy goals point to the core problems that society will need to solve. The implementable high-level policies can be designed by reasonably matching goals and tools to solve real problems. In this framework, policy goals and tools are interactive and complementary [3,4]. The effectiveness of the policy design rests on the clear setting of goals and reasonable coordination of tools to jointly promote goals when different policy tools are employed [5].

Multiple aspects determine the summary of policy goals within the women's rights protection policy framework. The protection of women's security stands as the primary priority among all other goals, for example, preventing sexual violence, female genital mutilation, and human trafficking [6]. The second is to promote the participation of women in the political sphere and ensure equal rights to voting and participation in the political field with men. Other policy goals also implicitly involve equality in the economic field, i.e., the promotion of equal pay for equal work and equitable dealing with women in employment, career advancement, and other areas should be ensured [7]. Finally, the long-term goal is to achieve social equity and progress, promote women's equal participation in education and the labor market, and increase women's education level and progress [3].

The choice of policy tools is crucial for these policy goals to be realized. Richards divides policy tools into three categories: supply-oriented tools, environmental tools, and demand-oriented tools [2]. Hard measures, such as the development and construction of legal systems and administrative measures, are primarily supply-oriented and can directly protect women's rights, whereas the latter are among soft measures. For example, legislative measures such as Interests reflect the state's institutionalized and enforceable protection of women's rights and interests through legal tools and have played an important role in addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality. Environmental tools optimize the social atmosphere and adjust the public's perception of gender equality to create a social environment that supports gender equality. Public opinion guidance, media publicity, and educational activities are typical environmental tools that promote changes in social attitudes by changing the public's views on gender roles. Demand-oriented tools focus on meeting the social needs of women, especially tools that promote women's participation in social activities and political decision-making [7]. These tools further improve women's social participation by providing social support and helping women integrate into social and political life.

From a theoretical perspective, the "goal-tool" framework provides a systematic perspective that can comprehensively analyze the design and implementation mechanism of China's women's rights protection policies. However, the selection and implementation of policy tools must be dynamically adjusted in combination with the specific social and cultural environment. This adaptive improvement should not only respond to the dynamic evolution of social demands but also effectively address the challenges of various emerging social issues. Therefore, in the process of policy design, accurately selecting and flexibly using these tools is the key to improving policy effectiveness.

3. Analysis of Policy Objectives

The core goal of China's women's rights protection policy is to comprehensively promote gender equality in all social fields and effectively safeguard women's basic rights through legal, administrative, and social means. These objectives not only reflect the country's commitment to gender equality but also reflect the strategic approach to promoting social progress and social equity.

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The following is a detailed analysis of the objectives of China's women's rights protection policy, covering the protection of basic rights, equal political and social participation, economic equality, and social security.

3.1. Guarantee Basic Rights

3.1.1. Eliminate Gender Discrimination

Eliminating gender discrimination is one of the core objectives of China's women's rights protection policy. The policy requires the elimination of gender bias through legal and social reforms, especially in areas such as education, employment, and wages. The Chinese government continues to promote the revision of the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests and the Employment Promotion Law, and by clearly defining the illegality of gender discrimination, it strengthens the regulatory and protection functions of legal mechanisms in maintaining women's equality in the workplace. This requires not only the government to enact binding laws but also the implementation of the concept of gender equality in practical operations by all sectors of society. However, despite the continuous improvement of the legal framework, the influence of traditional concepts still exists, especially in rural areas and some traditional industries, where gender discrimination is still prevalent, and society's awareness and acceptance of gender equality are low [7]. Therefore, the goal of eliminating gender discrimination still faces great challenges.

3.1.2. Ensuring Personal Safety

Personal safety is another important goal of protecting women's rights. The Chinese government actively uses legal mechanisms such as the Anti-Domestic Violence Law and personal safety protection orders to prevent and punish domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and other acts that infringe on women's physical and mental rights through institutionalized means. However, although these laws have been enacted and provide legal protection to a certain extent, there are still many challenges in their actual implementation. Especially when the public's awareness of the law is insufficient and the enforcement is not strong enough, many women cannot obtain timely and effective legal protection when they encounter domestic violence [8]. Therefore, strengthening the publicity and implementation of these laws is the key to achieving this goal.

3.1.3. Education and Employment Equity

Promoting gender equality in education and employment opportunities is a key issue in China's women's rights protection policy, with the focus on ensuring that women have the same institutional protection and substantive opportunities as men in terms of education, career development, and salary distribution. The Chinese government has gradually eliminated gender bias in the workplace and education through legal amendments and the implementation of anti-discrimination policies. However, women still face many unequal treatments in higher education and the workplace, especially in promotion to senior positions [7]. According to a report by the World Bank, women's promotion opportunities and salary levels in the Chinese workplace are still significantly lower than those of men, especially in the fields of technology, finance, and management, where the gender pay gap still exists [9]. Therefore, the policy goals of education and employment equity still face great challenges in actual implementation.

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3.2. Promoting Equal Participation in Politics, Society, and the Economy

3.2.1. Improving Political Participation

The Chinese government has promoted women's equal participation in the political field through policy regulations, especially in people's congresses and government agencies at all levels, ensuring the proportion of women in elections. According to the Law on Deputies to the National People's Congress and the Government Organization Law, women must occupy a certain proportion of candidate seats in certain elections [5]. The core of this policy goal is to break the dominance of men in political decision-making and promote women's active participation in politics and public affairs. Although policies have been implemented to protect women's rights, women's participation in political decision-making, especially in local government and senior political decision-making levels, is still low. For example, in 2018, women accounted for only 22.2% of the leadership team members of public institutions nationwide [4].

3.2.2. Equal Pay for Equal Work

Equal pay for equal work is an important goal of protecting women's rights in China. The policy prohibits enterprises from practicing unequal treatment due to gender in salary, promotion, and recruitment. Promote the realization of equal pay for equal work by strengthening the supervision of enterprises and the enforcement of laws. According to the Labor Law and the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests, women shall not have their wages reduced or be excluded from certain occupations due to their gender [1]. Although pay equality has been achieved in some industries and enterprises, the gender wage gap is still significant in many fields, especially in high-tech and high-income fields [10]. The realization of this goal requires strengthening the supervision of corporate behavior and raising public awareness in practice.

3.2.3. Reproductive Autonomy

Reproductive autonomy is another core goal of protecting women's rights in China. The policy emphasizes respecting women's right to make autonomous choices on marriage and childbearing, especially guaranteeing women's decision-making power on birth plans. Through laws and social security systems, women are ensured not to be subject to external pressure in their childbearing decisions, especially the pressure of childbearing expectations common in traditional culture [10]. The protection of childbearing autonomy helps to improve women's social status and ensure their equal status in the family and society. Although the policy protects women's reproductive autonomy, in society, especially in some regions, traditional culture still has a profound impact on women's expectations of childbearing, resulting in women facing significant fertility pressure. For example, the total fertility rate in Guizhou and Guangxi is higher than in other regions, which is closely related to local cultural and economic factors [11].

3.3. Improve the Social Security System

3.3.1. Provide Differentiated Facilities

To meet the special needs of women, the government has set up facilities such as mother-child rooms and gynecological examination centers in public places, especially in large cities and workplaces. The construction of such facilities aims to provide necessary support for women during

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their menstrual periods and the postpartum stage, demonstrating the deep concern at the national level for women's health issues. However, in more remote areas, the construction of these facilities is still insufficient, and women still face the situation where basic health needs are not met in some public places.

3.3.2. Assisting Vulnerable Groups

China's women's rights protection policy also pays special attention to vulnerable women, especially the social security of elderly women. To ensure that elderly women have access to basic living security and medical service rights, relevant departments have been making efforts to establish a special assistance system. By improving the supply of medical resources and living security measures, the operational efficiency of the social security network has been optimized. Though this measure has been conducted positively, it has not balanced out the coverage and quality of services of social security in the country, especially in some remote areas, and the social security in some vulnerable women's groups still needs to be further strengthened.

4. Analysis of Policy Tools

As mentioned above, in practice, China's women's rights protection policy is implemented through a variety of tools, including three types of tools: supply-oriented, environmental, and demand-oriented. Each tool promotes the realization of policy goals at different levels and provides more comprehensive protection for women through the guidance of laws, social atmosphere, and response to public needs [12]. This article will analyze the specific role and implementation effect of these three types of tools from the perspective of these three types of tools.

4.1. Supply-oriented Tools

4.1.1. Revision of Relevant Laws

Legal revisions in supply-oriented tools are the basic means of China's women's rights protection policy. The Chinese government has continued to promote the revision of the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests and the Law on Combating Domestic Violence, further strengthening the legal regulation and crackdown on gender discrimination, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other infringements. The revision of these laws not only clarifies women's basic rights but also provides them with legal protection and relief channels. For example, after the implementation of the "Anti-Domestic Violence Law", legal protection was provided to women who suffered domestic violence, including emergency protection orders and judicial assistance [12]. Although the legal framework has been initially formed, in the actual implementation process, some places still face the problem of insufficient enforcement and insufficient legal awareness. Therefore, coordination and resource investment in law enforcement will be key in the future.

4.1.2. Public Infrastructure Construction

In addition to legal protection, the construction of public infrastructure is also an important part of supply-oriented tools. The Chinese government provides direct health protection for women by setting up public service facilities such as maternity rooms and gynecological health facilities. Through the implementation of the above measures, the physical health problems of the female group have been significantly improved, especially for women of childbearing age, women in the

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puerperium, and elderly women. Although the country has gradually improved public facilities in large cities and major public places, in some small and medium-sized cities and rural areas, public facilities are still insufficient and fail to meet the basic needs of some women promptly. For example, as of now, China's urbanization level has exceeded 67%, but there are obvious differences in infrastructure construction in different regions [13]. Such differences may lead to lagging public facilities construction in small and medium-sized cities and rural areas, affecting the satisfaction of women's basic needs. Therefore, it is necessary to increase investment in public facilities construction in these areas to ensure that women's basic needs are met promptly. Therefore, future policies should pay more attention to the rational allocation of resources, especially the support for vulnerable groups.

4.2. Environmental Tools

4.2.1. Media Public Opinion Guidance

Environmental tools mainly promote the popularization of gender equality concepts by shaping social public opinion and cultural atmosphere. The government actively spreads the value of gender equality and combats gender discrimination and behaviors that devalue women through mainstream media, social platforms, and public propaganda. For example, by rectifying bad advertising and prohibiting public speeches that insult women, the government has gradually created a social atmosphere that is conducive to gender equality. This kind of public opinion guidance is crucial to enhancing the public's awareness of the protection of women's rights and promoting the implementation of gender equality policies. Although the country has made some progress in promoting gender equality, there are still gaps in the awareness of gender equality in some regions, especially in the central and western regions and rural areas, which is mainly reflected in the coverage, frequency, and form of publicity. For example, about 41.7% of women and 49.1% of men held a positive or neutral attitude towards the traditional concept that "men should focus on society and women should focus on family", reflecting that the concept of gender equality has not yet been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people [14]. In addition, when shaping the image of women, the media tends to portray young women as "youthful and beautiful", while middle-aged women are mostly portrayed as "virtuous wives and good mothers" [15]. This stereotype may affect society's perception of women's diverse roles. Therefore, it is necessary to adjust the publicity strategy, increase the coverage and frequency of gender equality publicity, and adopt diversified forms, especially digital platforms and social media, to better spread the concept of gender equality and promote an in-depth understanding of gender equality in the whole society.

4.2.2. Improve the Testing and Evaluation System

The effective implementation of policies is inseparable from a scientific evaluation mechanism. The Chinese government regularly publishes annual implementation reports of the "China Women's Development Program" and conducts systematic assessments of the policy implementation of local governments at all levels in protecting women's rights, thereby effectively strengthening the supervision and accountability mechanism for the effectiveness of policy implementation. Through these evaluation mechanisms, the government can promptly discover deficiencies in policy implementation and adjust and optimize. In addition, the public release of relevant assessment reports not only enhances society's attention to the issue of protecting women's rights but also encourages more social entities to actively participate in the supervision and implementation of

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policies, forming a virtuous mechanism for the government and society to jointly promote gender equality. In the process of policy implementation, local government protectionism may affect the overall effect. Taking rural areas as an example, women's rights and interests in land contracting and management rights and homestead use rights are often ignored, especially since land and homesteads are often registered in the name of men [16]. Therefore, in the future, coordination and cooperation between the central and local governments should be strengthened to ensure the implementation of grassroots policies and protect women's property rights and interests.

4.3. Demand-based Tools

4.3.1. Guaranteeing Rights and Interests

Demand-based tools focus on meeting the actual needs of women, especially how to provide timely and effective relief when their rights and interests are violated. To this end, the Chinese government has set up women's rights protection workstations to provide legal aid and ensure that women can quickly get legal support when they are violated by establishing "green channels" and other means. These measures provide practical protection for women, especially in cases of domestic violence and sexual harassment. Women can get timely relief and support through these workstations and legal aid channels. However, due to the uneven coverage of the workstations and resource allocation, women in some areas still cannot fully enjoy these services. Therefore, future policies should focus on improving the accessibility of these services and the equal distribution of resources, especially supporting remote and economically underdeveloped areas.

4.3.2. Promoting Social Participation

Promoting women's social participation, especially political participation, is another important aspect of demand-based tools. The Chinese government ensures women's voice and participation in political decision-making through elections and political system design. The policy requires governments at all levels and people's congresses to ensure a certain proportion of female candidates in elections, which not only increases the representation of women in political decision-making but also promotes women's extensive participation in social affairs. However, even though women's representation in elections has significantly increased, women's participation in high-level decision-making in the political field is relatively low, especially in some local governments and in important decision-making departments. To further develop this situation, future policies should alleviate prevailing gender barriers through institutional innovation and allow women to take part in higher levels of political positions. Policies should additionally promote social recognition of female political leadership, increase the number of leadership positions and decisions of women, and therefore increase the level of their engagement in public affairs.

5. Conclusion

Taking the "goal tool" framework, this study carried out a comprehensive analysis of the women's rights and interest protection law of China, "Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests of China," and dug into China's women's rights and interests' protection policy's goal setting and the selection and implementation of government policy tool. It turns out that China's women's rights and interests protection policy aims at various goals, which are quite clear, from protecting personal security, eliminating gender discrimination, and encouraging equal participation of women in society, politics, and the economy. The Chinese government has a macro policy setting that is

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consistent with comprehensive planning in promoting the field of gender equality. The goals are not only to eradicate gender discrimination and protect women's basic personal security, but also to achieve holistic social development for the advancement of women's participation with the same footing in all fields.

In terms of the selection of policy tools, supply-oriented, environmental-oriented, and demand-oriented tools have their characteristics and complement each other, providing all-around protection for the protection of women's rights. Supply-oriented tools provide basic protection for women through legal means, environmental-oriented tools create a social atmosphere that supports gender equality through public opinion guidance, and demand-oriented tools directly respond to the actual needs of women to ensure that women can get timely relief when their rights are violated. These tools work together to provide solid support for the realization of policy goals and promote the further deepening of women's rights protection. However, although the policy goals have made initial progress in the legal framework and some social fields, there are still many challenges in the implementation process.

This study focuses on the analysis of the policies of protecting women's rights and interests in China, but does not make comparisons among other Asian countries or other countries globally. Therefore, the applicability of the conclusion in the European or American systems needs to be further verified. Furthermore, this is a qualitative study of "goals" and "tools"; future research could explore whether these two are in alignment by applying quantitative methods, such as establishing the quantitative correlation between policy goals and actual effectiveness.

In summary, this study shows that although China has achieved certain results in protecting women's rights, to achieve true gender equality, it is still necessary to further strengthen the implementation of policies, improve the coordination mechanism of tools, and enhance the public's awareness of gender equality. In the future, improving the weak links in policy implementation will help promote the deepening of China's women's rights protection policies and further promote social equity and progress.

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