



A Preliminary Assessment of the Global Pandemic on Women from a Marxist- Feminist Perspective-on the Example of China and United States

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Abstract: This paper explores the complex causes of wealth inequality in China, including historical economic theories, measures like the "common prosperity" program, regional differences, governmental regulations, cultural norms, and the impact of cultural norms. This study examines gender economic inequality in China, focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on women and vulnerable individuals. It suggests solutions for both Chinese and American governments, including education, employment opportunities, anti-discrimination laws, and support for female entrepreneurs to alleviate gender income inequality. The study explores the role of capitalism in income inequities, particularly affecting women. It highlights complex interactions between capitalism, patriarchy, and economic inequality, highlighting women's challenges in achieving financial independence and perpetuating gender-based prejudice. This analysis reveals the intricate factors contributing to income disparity in China, focusing on gender and capitalism's influence. It serves as a foundation for further discussions and policy recommendations to reduce income disparities and promote economic justice in China and beyond.

Keywords: Feminist, COVID-19, Karl Marx, Marxist Feminist, Capitalism, economy

Introduction

Impacted the global economy, causing job losses and remote work, particularly for women. This literature review evaluates the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic on women's jobs and income levels in the USA and China. According to Deryugina et al., the COVID-19 pandemic, like any economic crisis, promoted inequalities among different groups. Carli also agrees that there were winners and losers, as men and women were affected differently. The recession in the USA favored the male-dominated construction and manufacturing sectors. Therefore, men's employment is reduced compared to women's. However, according to Carli, based on evidence from

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surveys in China and the USA, women's employment and income levels have been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, women still faced significant barriers to work and advancement. According to Cardel et al., even high-achieving career women take on important domestic roles, including childcare. During the pandemic, women faced overwhelming domestic responsibilities and reduced access to domestic assistance, leading to mental health issues and decreased productivity at home and work. Almeida et al. affirm that females suffer more from anxiety, stress, and depression than men. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these risk factors, leading to frequent job loss and domestic violence for women in China and the USA.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted global economies, particularly in China and the USA, leading to income loss and high unemployment rates for women. A study by Dang et al. found that 24 per cent of women are more likely to be unemployed than their male counterparts, and labour income levels for women dropped by 50 per cent. This study also examines the impact of the pandemic on gender inequality in the USA and China. In this context, the questions raised here are: How has the pandemic affected women's income levels in China and the United States due to the COVID-19 pandemic? What is the Association between the decline in women's incomes and the male income levels due to the COVID-19 pandemic in China and the United States as assessed via the Marxist feminist lens? What are the impacts of the economic systems in China and the United States in influencing the income levels for women as a result of the pandemic?



1. Theoretical Background

Political approaches and economic systems differ in China and the United States. Interestingly, one cannot argue for the total capitalist or communist, although the United States has served as the core capitalistic economy (Crouch & Wolfgang Streeck, 1997). Capitalism is characterized by private property and unregulated wealth accumulation. Marxist theory suggests production is central to economic processes, with the bourgeoisie owning means of production. Workers provide labour but face inadequate wages. The class struggle between owners and workers is ongoing. A Marxist feminist approach views women's duties as exploitation, with unpaid domestic labour being a case in point. The coronavirus pandemic's impact on American and Chinese women will be assessed through this lens.

Marxist theory is associated with Karl Marx's view on the economy. The core of the feminist Marxist theory hinges on the works by Engels that assessed the interplay between private property, family, and the state (Engels, 1884). Feminist approaches argue that gender disadvantages women, as they are often denied equal opportunities due to biased perceptions and assigned tasks. This classification of women's roles is crucial in shaping gender bias, and unpaid and unrecognized labour, including domestic duties and sex work, is a significant aspect of gender inequality (Whitney, 2018). The struggles of a woman who is a housewife but does not have a job are equal to those of an unemployed person, although the housewife does not get any pay (Whitney, 2018). Thus, I argue that women's household duties are unrecognized and unrewarded. The discussion above shall apply in assessing the particular roles of women during the coronavirus pandemic, as seen in the United States and China.

Friedrich Engels reflects on the division of labour as a factor that helps explain the differences in the position of men and women in society (Engels, 1884). The feminist Marxist theory posits that men significantly influence the values and worth attached to work, with the discourse on the division of labour between men and women being the social foundation (Engels, 1884). The state's role was to protect the individuals and compel the people to support it through taxation (Engels, 1884). The author examines the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on women through a feminist Marxist lens, focusing on the capitalist approach that has been central to modern society's operations, particularly in the United States and China.

The Marxist-feminist perspective is a theory that holds that women are exploited through capitalist approaches (Aslam & Adams, 2022). The feminist Marxist theory highlights the disproportionate impact of capitalist strategies on women, particularly during the pandemic. The limited scope of women's responsibilities in American and



Chinese societies, as seen through the feminist Marxist theory, led to the expansion of the Stay-at-home mothers (SAHM) group, highlighting the gendered complexities of women's roles in these societies (Aslam & Adams, 2022). The Marxist feminists view the combination of mothering duties with one's professional duties as unfair to women who were forced to work from home during the height of the pandemic (Aslam & Adams, 2022). The argument indicated that the class struggle was an active factor in assigning women domestic duties.

The Bolshevik revolutionary and theorist, Alexandra Kollontai, provided a view on the emancipation of women in the socialist perspective. Already in her first work, the *Social Basis of the Woman Question*, published in 1909, Kollontai pointed out that it is only possible to attain women's emancipation by means of abolishing capitalism, which she regarded as a basis for both class and gender oppression. She condemned 'bourgeois feminism' for paying attention to matters of the law as well as political battles but ignoring women's economic oppression. In her essay *Communism and the Family*, written in 1920, Kollontai supported the idea of state-sponsored child-care facilities and shared community housework and change of the nature of relations between people so that women might be liberated from servitude to family and home (A Kollontai & Holt, 1977).

Alexandra Kollontai was a Marxist feminist theorist of the early twentieth century and the first woman to act as a minister in the Soviet government. Many of her writings and her politics involved the freeing of women from both economic and sexual oppression, which would provide the socialist liberation of women. Kollontai's ideas on communal living, relationships, and reproductive work made her a Jane in the Marxist feminist tradition (A Kollontai & Holt, 1977).

Kollontai understood the Woman Question in a way that pointed out the fundamental problem of women's oppression as arising from the capitalist economic system and the subjection of women to the exploitation of voluntary domestic service. men proposed that it should not be just legal reform Women's liberation was criticized by the bourgeois feminists for failing to attend to the material realities of working-class women. However, Kollontai insisted that socialism was the only way for women and men to be liberated because it would resolve social inequity and sexual utopias, the sexual division of labor (A Kollontai & Holt, 1977).

Kollontai, however, looked into training women for sexual liberation in addition to economic independence. Public dining facilities, children's homes substituting communal kitchens, and the like—these ideas were laid out in her works, such as *Communism and the Family* (1920). She also debated the possibility of 'new relationships' in socialism in which relationships would not be dictated by a need to share a similar common economic parasite. These views on love, sexual relationships,



and passion as keys to personal emotional fulfillment and socialist revolution made Kollontai quite radical in the socialist movement, even as the revolution brought, for her, a questioning of family and marriage structures (A Kollontai & Holt, 1977).

Continuing the criticism of bourgeois feminism, another key Marxist feminist, Clara Zetkin, added to the arguments of the movement as she continually stressed the role of proletarian women in the socialist cause. Zetkin's speech entitled *Only in Conjunction with the Proletarian Woman Will Socialism Triumph* (November 15, 1896) was most relevant, highlighting the general need for women's emancipation to be wedded to the overall class struggle. Since women workers were excluded from trade unions and political parties, she championed their involvement in the trade unions and the formation of socialist parties. She also actively organized the International Women's Day as an emblem of the united women workers' movement (Zetkin, 1984).

Speaking in the speech *Only in Conjunction with the Proletarian Woman Will Socialism Be Victorious* (1896) at the International Socialist Congress in Gotha, Zetkin has provided a stern critique of bourgeois feminism. Hence, she claimed that middle- and upper-class feminism pitted its single cause the demand for the vote against the material oppression of working-class women. As it can be seen, Zetkin pointed out that these bourgeois feminists wanted to become a part of the reigning capitalist system as opposed to working towards the dismantling of this system. For example, according to Zetkin, socialism was the only way of attaining civil freedom since it does away with both class oppression and gender oppression (Zetkin, 1984).

It was the practical work performed by Zetkin for the women's movement. *C/O*, as one of the key figures in the decision to set up the International Women's Day campaign in 1910, is an annual event that focused on the fight for the rights of women and workers' unity. Zetkin insisted that women workers should be enlisted because the success of the feminist movement and of socialism depended on it. She formed a women's wing in her party, SPD, and started a newspaper called *Die Gleichheit* through which Marxist feminist ideas could be spread. Besides that, in the frame of the given organization, Zetkin contributed to establishing the connection between women and trade unions, most socialist parties, and the main focus for male and female employees (Zetkin, 1984).

She also discussed more specifics of women's experience within capitalist societies. She stressed the issue of dual dilemmas and talked about how working-class women deal with the dual issues of wage labor and family tasks. While on the Marxist view that the emancipation was to be achieved through class struggle, Zetkin also demanded that struggles for specific gender oppressions be placed central with issues such as equal pay, sexual harassment at the workplace, and lack of child care. Such



problems, she pointed out, demanded the special policies on the basis of the socialist program so that women could actively join the revolutionary struggles(Zetkin, 1984).

Despite the fact that Rosa Luxemburg did not have very many writings on women and their woes, her general anti-capitalist stance greatly influenced Marxist feminist theory. In her writings, like *Reform or Revolution* (1900) and *the Accumulation of Capital* (1913), Luxemburg pointed out that the capitalist exploitative system continues exploitation on various fronts, and this includes the exploitation of women's labor. Those views stirred feminist approaches to social change instead of implementing reformist approaches to changing the community's status quo (Luxemburg & Scott, 2008).

Contemporary Marxist feminism has built itself on these ideas as formed by the early feminists. For example, Silvia Federici has concentrated on the use of the wageless or unwaged labor of women under capitalism. In her influential book, *Caliban and the Witch: Sofia Federici Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), she asserted that the emergence of capitalist society was predicated on the witch hunt that underlined patriarchal ownership of female reproductive and productive labor power. Her essay, *Wages Against Housework*, published in 1975, is a plea for the condition of women wage workers and for the valuation of housework, as it is fundamental to capital (Federici, 2004; Federici, 2019).

The topic is, if we compare the US and China, how have women been affected differently by the pandemic? From a Marxist-feminist perspective, what are the new challenges arising, and what are the prospects for more liberation/ what do we need to consider as we recover and do so by focusing on how women have been impacted disproportionately?

2. How the Pandemic Affected Women's Income Levels in China and the United States as a Result of the Pandemic

2.1. Health and Well-Being for Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Fisher et al. found that while men had higher mortality rates from COVID-19, women experienced significant psychological effects, including peak stress and anxiety. Almeida et al. affirm that females suffer more from anxiety, stress, and depression than men. The pandemic has significantly impacted women's health, job loss, and well-being, leading to increased stress and reduced control. The closure of schools and the increased stress for primary caregivers have further exacerbated these issues, affecting both work and home productivity.



According to Almeida et al., most women reported feeling overwhelmed by having their family at home around the clock. Due to the health issues promoted by the pandemic, women lost their jobs or resigned to be full-time caregivers.

2.2. Familial and Relational Violence

Reports show that domestic violence escalated during the pandemic. Almeida et al. observed that women are more likely to be victims of gender violence than men. As the pandemic required people to stay at home as a safety measure, it wasn't the safe option for most women as their intimate partners violated them. As Fisher & Ryan, 2021 observed, there was a global increase in reports of violence during the pandemic. Online searches associated with domestic violence also increased during the pandemic. Crisis lines were also busy as they received more distress calls than usual. Women are susceptible to abusers exploiting quarantine rules to restrict access to resources or deny job opportunities, negatively impacting their income and career commitment. The expectation of women to stay home during their professional growth also leads to domestic conflict.

2.3. Domestic Responsibilities

Household responsibilities increased during the quarantine period. Women are generally the primary domestic caregivers, so most of the domestic burden falls on them. Fisher et al. reported that women reported an increase in domestic responsibility compared to men. Women also reported a decrease in work hours while men remained stable. In addition to handling domestic duties, women were also expected to educate their children, who were now home-schooling. Carli reports that two-thirds of students worldwide were affected by country-wide school closures, including in the USA and China. Domestic inequality affects women, causing them to resign from jobs to care for their families. Carli states that women dedicate fewer hours to career-related work than men. The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted women's income by replacing jobs with unpaid domestic responsibilities.

2.4. Working Online from Home

Among the things caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is the shift to working from home because of the quarantine rules. The result is that people had to work online from home and communicate with their colleagues via online platforms. According to Carli, women hold jobs considered essential; teaching, mental health services, and general health services. During the pandemic, most women were first-line in caregiving due to the nature of their jobs. Women with these essential jobs were protected from job loss and could work online from home.



However, as Carli reports, the rapid shift to working from home presented significant challenges for these women. Most women had no experience working online, which proved a serious threat to their jobs and income levels.

Additionally, these women reported that their domestic responsibilities made it difficult to assign adequate work time. The women cared for older people and children, who were equally distressed. Therefore, the women required more time to engage with them. Dang et al. report that women in the USA received less income and weekly expenses from their jobs than men. Therefore, even the women who kept their jobs felt the negative impact of the pandemic because of the obstacles they faced when working online.

3. The Association between the Decline in Women's Incomes in Comparison to the Male Income Levels as a Result of the Covid-19 Pandemic in China and the United States as Assessed via the Marxist Feminist Lens

3.1. Gender Role Beliefs and Expectations

Gender inequalities worsen during crises. According to Fisher et al., gender role beliefs are one of the promoters of inequality during emergencies. Women are believed to be communal and are a source of warmth and comfort for others; therefore, they are expected to be the primary caregivers. On the other hand, gender beliefs about men suggest that men are stoic and strong. Consequently, they should work outside their homes to provide for their families Fisher et al.. Classifying women's particular duties or roles based on gender is a critical aspect of shaping gender bias. Women's roles have expanded beyond domestic duties, with more thriving as career women. However, Fisher et al. noted that men's roles still adhere to traditional gender roles, with women still handling most domestic duties.

The COVID-19 pandemic oversaw the closure of most organizations, including childcare services. Employed women are left with no option but to handle their jobs and domestic responsibilities independently. Fisher et al. state that employed women are still expected to be productive while managing demanding domestic roles. Society does not recognize and appreciate that domestic duties take time and energy. It's almost as if women are considered one with domestic work, or they have in them the ability to handle them effortlessly. Mohajan asserts that according to Marxist feminist theory, the man represents the bourgeois while the woman represents the proletariat. The bourgeois, according to (Engels, 1884), determines the means of production as a leader or owner, while the proletariat is the employer relying on minimum wages. The man, as the bourgeois in the family structure, dominates his woman as he expects her to balance the challenging domestic and career



responsibilities or reduce career work and stick to domestic duties (Fisher & Ryan, 2021). Therefore, it is clear why women's income was reduced compared to men's.

3.2. Gender Segregation in Occupation

The COVID-19 pandemic has primarily affected women-dominated industries, such as hospitality, personal care, education, health, food services, and tourism, as they ceased operations to comply with quarantine rules. Women were affected more than men during the pandemic, according to Carli. Understanding gender segregation in occupation requires examining organizational theories and their placement of women as workers. Past recessions in the USA affected male-dominated industries. According to Seneviratne, organizational theory studies how social organizations, like companies, are structured and operate. Seneviratne asserts that social, political, and intellectual life is affected mainly by the organization of economic life. To quote one of Marx's famous phrases: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness." the sentiment is reflected in the post-COVID-19 pandemic as women suffer financially as they lose jobs "assigned" to them by the organizational culture.

Friedrich Engels reflects on the division of labor as a factor that helps explain the differences in the position of men and women in society (Engels, 1884). The feminist approach argues that gender applies as a tool to deny women equal opportunities based on biased perceptions and duties assigned to women. Mahajan states that both Marx and Engels consider the difference between men and women as social, not biological. Economy and organizational culture are the driving factors of race, gender, education, class, and religion (Mohajan, 2022). Men dominate work values and organizational culture, leading to patriarchal oppression and income inequality. As Marx and Engels explained, capitalism prioritizes economic production over social production, causing women to worry about future income. The pandemic has exacerbated this issue, particularly for women-owned small businesses, which typically earn less than men. This financial vulnerability, particularly among single women, is particularly pronounced during the pandemic.

3.3. Gender Differences in Time Use, the Role of Telecommuting, and Job Flexibility

Telecommuting provides benefits like increased work productivity; however, Carli states that men and not women experience the benefits of telecommuting. Therefore, the gender and the parental status of a person determine whether the home is a place of rehabilitation or added demands. According to Carli, telecommuting increased men's productivity while reducing women's work productivity as men perceived



working from home as restorative, but women experienced added demands. Deryugina et al. agree that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the productivity of working women as they observed that female academics in the USA and China reported reduced time dedicated to working. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women experienced more time pressure in balancing work and domestic roles than men. Both Carli and Deryugina et al. observe that domestic duties increased for women and men during the pandemic, but women experienced significantly higher pressure in managing diverse tasks. Cardel et al. also report that employed women faced significant career advancement barriers. Even women with advanced careers are expected to reduce their work hours to accommodate domestic roles.

Because of the quarantine rules, working from home is challenging as women share their homes with their families. Children and family at home negatively affect women's ability to balance domestic and professional work due to a lack of privacy (Carli, 2020). Additionally, women are less likely to get considerable help from their partners as they are expected to handle it (Cardel et al., 2020). When parents telecommute, mothers reduce their working hours to accommodate domestic roles, while fathers barely increase their time caring for children (Carli, 2020). Thus, there is a significant gender difference in how telecommuting promotes work flexibility. According to Seneviratne, Marxist feminism does not describe the capitalist economy concerning supply and demand, market forces, and exchange patterns but in Association with power and inequality. Marxist feminism seeks to alienate the oppression and exploitation of women workers caused by their gender.

The COVID-19 pandemic has subjected women to gender oppression and exploitation through unrealistic expectations to balance career work and housework. (Carli, 2020) asserts that telecommuting can have the adverse effects of reducing access to high-status jobs for women. The oppression and exploitation of women described by Marxist feminism are evident in 'family-friendly policies like parental leave and permit to part-time work. Such guidelines aim to help women keep their jobs but mainly reduce women's work advancement opportunities and income level (Carli, 2020). Given that these policies are designed for women and not men, they create a significant gender inequality in income as women experience a decline in their pay and work experience.

4. The Impacts of the Economic System in China and the United States in Influencing the Income Levels for Women as a Result of the Pandemic

4.1. The Economic System in the USA

The US economic system is a mixed economy with characteristics of both socialism and capitalism. The US economic system allows citizens economic freedom and



protects some private companies (Armstrong, 2020). Financial freedom promotes a free market and the use of capital. The US government promotes public good and achieves social aims by intervening in economic activities. The intervention involves licensing requirements to control parts of the economy like hospital care, education, and roads. According to Armstrong, in a dire economic situation, the US federal government intervenes to adjust the costs of borrowing money to support businesses. Mohajan asserts that pure capitalism favors a free market where individuals who own private companies provide all goods and services privately. Transactions are voluntary, and prices are determined by supply and demand. The US mixed economy allows government intervention in economic activities and a free market, allowing the government to impose regulatory requirements and licensing to restrict some voluntary transactions.

In addition to heavy taxation to discourage the use of certain goods, the government offers subsidies to support sectors like agriculture, utility firms, financial companies, and oil companies. Some sectors, like the food industry, are primarily affected by government policies as they must be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Producers of consumables and medicine must provide their customers with specific disclaimers. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has to approve consumables and medication before they get advertised. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), the Department of Labor (DOL), and the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) ensure that employers comply with their laws when compensating, firing, hiring, and issuing employee retirement income. The nation's economic system defines allocating goods, services, production, resources, and distribution. Capitalism allows a system where bourgeois industry owners produce goods and services, and workers work in the industries for money to buy the same goods and services.

4.2. Capitalism over Socialism; Gender Income Inequality as Evidence

Studies show that capitalism is more popular than socialism in America. In economically thriving countries like the US and China, capitalism is contributing to rise in equality. Women are most affected by inequality; this intensified during the pandemic.

4.3. Economic Systems in China

China's economic system is a socialist market economy, where the government controls the production, exchange, and distribution of goods, promoting private ownership and capitalism. This system aims to balance social welfare for community benefit with pure capitalism for profit. The government shares collective ownership



and aims to reduce income gaps by distributing wealth. The system is incompatible with freedom of choice, individual liberty, and democratic government. Socialist elements include public libraries, nationalized healthcare, and transit systems. Citizens subsidize communal facilities through tax payments. The Chinese system facilitates the production of enough goods and services to eliminate a demand-based market, discouraging wealth accumulation.

China's rising income inequality and widening gender gaps result from the administration's failure to maintain socialism in the face of the market economy. Despite rapid economic growth, gender wage disparity was minimal during the 1950s, when the government advocated for gender equality through equal employment policies (Iwasaki & Ma, 2020).

However, with government distrust and social instability, gender income inequality has escalated in recent decades. Despite many countries trying to move closer to parity, China's inequality has intensified, ranking 106th among 153 countries (Brussevich et al., 2021).

China's rapid economic expansion in the 1990s led to privatization and market-oriented reforms, resulting in a widening wage gap, particularly for women, who were more negatively impacted by these changes.

Gender income inequality in Eastern Europe is increasing, with women experiencing a decline in paid work hours. The private sector's growth has expanded income inequality, and gender equality policies' influence on wage decision-making and employment has weakened in the public sector (Iwasaki & Ma, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic worsened social inequalities, increasing income disparity and disrupting economic activities, primarily affecting women and their employment opportunities, leading to wage cuts, unemployment, and household hardships.

5. Reasons Behind Income Inequality in China

China's socialism dates to the 1980's era when the country called itself a socialist. During this period, China drastically transformed and experienced spectacular economic growth fueled by market expansion, middle-class society dwelling in urban China, and reduced poverty among China's residents. In 1992, China named itself a socialist market economy. Marx noted a period when political power would become socialist, suggesting that the working class would have supremacy and the economy would characterize state-owned and private-owned properties (Ross, 2022). China has such an economic and political structure. The theorist notes that the system has implications for income and inequalities. In elaborating on whether China is a socialist, Naughton judges the country based on four principles.



According to the author, a socialist government can shape economic outcomes and control the economy's resources. Secondly, a socialist administration controls the economy, shaping it to get desired results that differ from what a noninterventionist economy would provide (Naughton, 2017). Thirdly, the government oversees policies that promote goodwill, social security, growth, and pro-poor redistribution because it views itself as an administration that benefits vulnerable people (Naughton, 2017). Finally, a socialist government has mechanisms through which its citizens can participate and influence the government's social and economic policy.

China has drastically changed, dropping its old model of socialism when analyzing its current status using the four prisms. The country recognized that no economy would deliver the expected outcome and had a limited capacity to achieve much due to a decline in government tax revenue relative to GDP. Moreover, social service provision by the government in rural areas declined, leading to increased inequalities and the emergence of a new class of wealthy families.

The de facto privatization also contributed to some families acquiring riches and becoming more affluent than others.

President Xi Jinping introduced common prosperity, a phrase based on Marxism. Marx posits that common prosperity is a solution to inequalities in an economy that upholds socialism and a dominant state sector in the economy (Ross, 2022). China's dormant state sector led to minimal inequality but not long-term economic development. Common prosperity aimed to enhance the economy, improve living standards, and promote political stability. However, it faced criticism from the US, from the prominent figures such as George Soros, who described it as a tragic mistake (Naughton, 2017). The program, criticized by US and Chinese critics, would not address inequalities but could harm national security interests and contribute to common poverty. To alleviate inequality, the administration proposed promoting entrepreneurs and market competition.

Income inequality in different places in China, including inland, coastal areas, and rural and urban regions, has been explored widely in literature studies. Researchers note that income inequality variations in different regions decreased after the economic reforms in 1978. However, the disparity increased in coastal areas of the eastern part and developed faster than in cities in the western and central regions. Shen et al. 2021 attribute income inequality in China to fiscal decentralization, migration and increased city population, urbanization, labor mobility, geographical advantages/disadvantages, and decreased labor share. However, since 2005, China's income disparity has mainly been ascribed to regional variations across cities and towns and the urban-rural divide. Although, there has been a decline in the income



disparities between different regions like urban and rural. According to their study, Shen et al. note that lower rural-urban wage variations and government policies that benefit countryside residents have contributed significantly to the decline in income inequality.

Moreover, infrastructure investment in rural regions has positively influenced the wage gap. The essence of the socialist system in China was to eliminate exploitation and distributive polarization, enhance liberation and achieve overall prosperity (Wang & Klugman, 2020). The socialist principles have existed in China, written in books and memorized by the citizens; however, the country's presence and rising income inequality raise questions. Despite the socialist system emphasizing the equality of all individuals and protecting vulnerable groups, income inequality persists in China.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted various countries, including China, increasing income inequality. Low-income earners face financial hardships due to lockdown measures. Income inequalities persist, particularly for women and self-employed workers. Like working from home, lockdown measures have intensified gender income disparities, favoring high-income earners and males, primarily self-employed workers (Shen et al., 2021). COVID-19 has significantly impacted income inequality in China, particularly in areas with economic development. In rich regions, the pandemic led to longer social distancing policies and increased economic loss, reducing regional income disparity.

In poor areas, lower fiscal capacity and less preparedness resulted in job losses and wage reductions. Despite the socialist slogans emphasizing economic polarization, income inequality persists in China despite the country's socialist ideology in the constitution. Lei suggests that the wage disparity continues to escalate because the citizens tolerate or accept the inequality based on the nation's cultural norm of meritocracy and their optimistic anticipations of mobility.

Studies posit that there is a cultural custom that acknowledges distributional outcomes based on variances in individual merit. Besides, the public believes wealth and income equality reflect differences in personal value. The traditional Chinese political ideology endorsed the cultural perception reflecting different distributional outcomes, promoting merit-based inequality.

Individuals believe they can improve their lives or those of their generations by working hard, irrespective of their history or family background. Founding his reasoning on this basis, Lei argues that the traditional Chinese culture tolerates and supports inequality despite its socialistic principles.

Another perception of the Chinese towards income inequality has contributed to its increased living standards. People believe that inequality posits a positive



connotation with better opportunities for upward mobility. While elaborating on this, the argument compares life during Mao's China when little inequality connected it to more poor people. Regardless of many people being poor, they would expect to eventually make some progress in their lives. Therefore, income inequality still increases since people support it, viewing it as a positive trend and posting new opportunities. Thus, how people perceive and understand inequality contributes to how they tolerate it. For example, in the Chinese context, people basing their argument on general mobility to support inequality believe they are more likely to move upward once they tolerate economic disparities.

Whyte argues that despite the socialistic history of China, income inequality's sharp increase in the country cannot be attributed to the rich getting richer while the poor people are becoming poorer. The substantial economic growth rate in China has played a role in increasing the wage disparity as it has raised the living standards of many people. A high percentage of the Chinese population has living standards raised above the internationally recognized poverty levels; thus, the country has fewer poor people (Whyte, 2012). However, the income of affluent people has been increasing faster than that of the less fortunate. Therefore, despite the economic growth in China lifting people's lives, it does that at an unequal speed.

6. Marxist-Inspired Recommendations for the China and US Government to Solve Gender Income Inequality

The wage gap between the rich and the poor has been growing in advanced economies, with measures like increasing women's labor force but little progress. The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted millions globally, leading to a global recession. The Gini coefficient increased, impacting women, informal workers, and youths. China also has high inequality in access to healthcare, education, income, and job loss (Wu et al., 2022). The gender wage gap, primarily affecting women, has seen a significant increase in revenue for the rich and a decrease in middle-class income, with a significant drop from 61 percent in the 1970s to 51 percent in 2019.

Ospina and Roser note that the representation of women in senior managerial positions reflects the persisting gender wage gap. The research outlines an underrepresentation of women in high-profile jobs with better pay. The proportion of women in top and middle management globally is minimal compared to their male counterparts. Marxist feminists relate the wage gap to expressing power relations between the working class and capital; thus, women getting a lower income is oppressive (Lopez, 2021). Besides, the proportion of women is lower in the income distribution, being underrepresented in the top income groups. Ospina and Roser



further suggest that gender inequality surges since women cannot control their income. In many places, women do not make income or household decisions regarding spending their money. Studies suggest education is a contributing factor toward gender wage inequality. The education gap between men and women reflects the wage differences, with men having higher education levels, thus securing well-paying jobs compared to their female counterparts (Wang & Klugman, 2022). Moreover, social norms across different regions influence the wage gap, such as the distribution of labor.

However, in recent decades, education has been viewed as less critical in elaborating gender income inequality, with industry and occupation becoming more significant in explaining the income variation. The characteristics of workers and their jobs contribute to the surging income disparity. For instance, job flexibility is a lying factor in the wage gap, with women being overrepresented in low-paying jobs since they tend to do more unpaid care work than men, like domestic chores. Therefore, women pursue careers compatible with family responsibilities, like childrearing. Thus, women search for more flexible jobs, such as shifting hours to accommodate other family responsibilities, and such positions have lower earnings per hour.

Governments across various countries have developed and implemented measures to reduce gender income disparity. Implementing such strategies can contribute significantly to decreasing gender income differences. Enhancing education for women is one of the strategies implemented in China and the USA, especially among low-income earners. For instance, the government has established programs that support the less fortunate in societies for children, especially young girls, to access education and health care. Conditional cash transfer is a vital initiative by the government to provide finances for low-income families to access education.

Thus, educating more women improves their skills and capacity to seek better and well-paying jobs (Blau & Kahn, 2017).

Similarly, programs supporting the USA's poor are essential to reduce inequalities, like Supplemental Security Income (SSI), housing vouchers, and Social Security Disability Insurance. Gender inequality in China can be decreased by sensitizing female education. In China, societies that prioritize boys' education, empowering more girls to acquire higher education would enhance their skills and consequently get better-paying jobs.

Governments in the USA and China should promote gender equality by encouraging more women to invest in education and skills development throughout their work lives.



Gender discrimination in employment contributes to wage disparity in China and the USA. Discrimination in this context involves senior positions given to men and wage rises and promotions. Gender discrimination in employment remains a widespread concern in China, with only a few females working. Discrimination in hiring contributes to the high gender gap, as many job adverts indicate a preference for men (Wang & Klugman, 2020). Moreover, some job postings reflect the sexual objectification of women, where they note specific physical characteristics that females must have to apply for the position. Due to prejudice and segregation, women tend to be left out of high-paying jobs due to the intense requirements. Again, the specifications limit females, leaving them with low-paying jobs or not working at all, thus influencing the income-wage disparity.

The Chinese government has reduced gender income disparity by emphasizing equal employment opportunities. The administration should enact an employment anti-discrimination law that entails different ways women get discriminated against and measures to be taken against employers involved in such acts. China's Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security and national institutions should eliminate gender-based discrimination in employment (Iwasaki & Ma, 2020). Likewise, in the USA, gender discrimination in the workplace should be prohibited.

Numerous federal laws protect employees from discrimination, including the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (Lopez, 2021). Although these laws protect employees, some employers still discriminate in the contemporary business environment, such as lack of childcare support that impacts working women.

Similarly, women can receive negative performance appraisals, affecting their salaries, like receiving pay cuts. The US government should, therefore, impose strict measures that do not condone any form of discrimination in the workplace. Moreover, institutions like Human Rights advocates should create awareness of employees' rights.

Female labor force participation is another recommendation that governments should enforce to reduce gender income disparity. Women's participation in the employment sector is crucial in reducing gender inequalities. World Bank Data outlined that in 2010, women in employment in China ranked first globally compared to men's participation in some developed nations like Greece. However, the number of working women has been declining, impacting the disparity in the wage gap. Moreover, COVID-19 has adversely affected vulnerable groups and women due to the distancing and operating home policies. The government should, therefore, strive to increase the number of women in the employment sector to bridge the gap in gender



pay. Again, studies note that the government should promote female labor participation, which is beneficial in eliminating wage disparity and maintaining sustainable future growth and development of the country's economy (Iwasaki & Ma, 2020). The government can also contribute to increasing female labor by enhancing their education and growing the service sector. In elaborating on this recommendation, Brussevich, Dabla-Norris & Li note that increased education attainment and growth of the service sector would be essential to increase women's employment, thus reducing the wage gap. Governments can also facilitate childcare services at workplaces, allowing many females to participate fully in the labor force. Women seek low-paying or informal jobs to create time for family-related chores (Brussevich & Dabla-Norris, 2021). Therefore, providing childcare access and support to working mothers could significantly reduce the wage disparity as they will be committed fully and concentrate on well-paying and formal jobs. The policies can include care infrastructure, direct provision of care services, public subsidies, and care credits.

Marx argues that inequalities exist where differences between men and women originate from competition between the laborers (Lopez, 2021). Therefore, using the Marxist perception, completion can be enhanced in the labor market, however positively, to ensure all individuals work hard to earn their income. Besides, encouraging business among women can increase completion in the labor force while decreasing income inequality. The US and Chinese governments should also focus on reducing the gender income gap by encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship among women. Women's entrepreneurship has been less than men's. Despite money being credited for all genders investing in entrepreneurship, the female gender encounters institutional and social barriers to accessing finances. The government can promote accessibility of the credits by women by strengthening laws that prohibit gender discrimination and ensure the availability of formal financing to vulnerable groups and women.

Again, spurring online commerce would be crucial to capture many women in entrepreneurship. The government can also invest in job creation programs to increase wages, train workers, and invest in infrastructure or programs to generate employment (Peterson Institute, 2019). Through businesses, women can generate wealth and, consequently, decrease the gender inequalities that exist.

7. Capitalist Impact on Women's Income; Women as a Class of their Own

Income inequality has advanced in most advanced economies, especially those with capitalist systems. Patriarchal societies characterize societies with oppression and marginalization of women, where power is often detained by males (Bruneau,



2018). Men dominate influential spheres like culture, economics, family, and politics. Women get exploited at workplaces and work long hours of free domestic chores. Gender role representation influences income earning, where women pursue flexible jobs to meet family demands.

Therefore, despite the efforts to compress gender wage inequalities, most countries, such as the USA, continue to experience a rise in wage inequality. Moreover, capitalism separated the family household from commodity production, furthering men's control over women and increasing income inequality (Ferguson et al., 2004). On the contrary, capitalism allows women to break from patriarchy by creating possibilities for women to join the labour force, earn an income, and become economically independent. However, due to the nature of unpaid housework, the labour of capitalism does not grant total women liberation, thus requiring feminists to join the working class to fight against income inequality and the impacts of capitalism on women.

Feminists critique domestic work because it is unpaid. Failure to pay women to do housework makes them devalued and dependent on men who occupy the meaningful spheres of public economic production. Marxist feminist theorists view this ideology as a contributor to gender income inequalities. However, some theorists suggest that housework is part of producing goods under households persisting under capitalism, thus giving men power over women's work (Ferguson et al., 2004). Other Marxist feminists view domestic work as a form of social reproduction of capitalism in that unpaid work contributes to more profits for capitalists.

Therefore, the sexual division of labor causes gender inequality, allowing capitalists to exploit women's unpaid labor.

Bruneau connotes that the development of capitalism has improved women's rights, especially in Western countries; however, the aim was not to free females from oppression but to maximize production, consumption, and profits. The researcher signifies that the progression of capitalism has broadly separated production places which are the enterprises, and the reproduction places, which are families. During the Industrial Revolution, there was an increase in production that not only divided people into classes but also two distinct groups of productive individuals (men) and unproductive people (women) (Bruneau, 2022). Industrial capitalism reflected women as housekeepers who performed unpaid work. The outstanding work of women contributed to the establishment of capitalist exploitation. Therefore, capitalism changed the traditional patriarchal family and transformed the image of a housewife. Capitalism supports the depreciation of household chores, which allows for making savings. The capitalist system involves women in an opportunistic approach to adapt



to economic fluctuations during economic prosperity; women are in high demand as the secondary workforce. However, employers incentivize women to retreat from the labor market in an economic recession. Therefore, capitalist society influences the income of working women, impacting gender income disparity.

To elaborate on this argument, Bruneau claims that capitalist states highly demand workers, thus seeking women who are paid less than men, reducing salaries when there is an economic downfall.

On the other hand, capitalist economies in prosperous times invest in social services to create job flexibility demanded by women overrepresented in flexible and part-time jobs. The tendency of capitalist states to reorganize the workforce impacts gender relations. While capitalism supports patriarchy relating to unpaid domestic work for women to maximize reproduction and profits, it also tries to eliminate patriarchy by providing possibilities for women to join the labor force. Therefore, capitalist systems presume women as disposable workers, which impacts their income and consequently creates wage disparity. Despite capitalism allowing women to work to become financially independent, some regions, like in the south, view women's work as lagging behind the economy (Bruneau, 2022). Although women have more significant opportunities to work with globalization, they have not improved since they remain disposable workers of big corporations. The exploitability and demeaning of women contribute to their exploitation in the workplace and income disparity.

The adverse effects of capitalism are evident in the age of globalization. Researchers note that more employment opportunities for women can help reduce gender inequalities. However, women remain vulnerable and exploitable at workplaces, impacting their income, hence the wage gap (Bruneau, 2022). In a capitalist economy, greater participation of the female labor force does not imply better working conditions but rather oppression of the females. Women are over 26 represented in informal, low-paying jobs and the agricultural sector associated with domesticity. Statistically, rural women, among people with low incomes in society, representing a quarter of the world's population, represent around 43 percent of the agricultural labor force (Deryugina et al., 2021). These individuals produce food that the privileged people use. Therefore, agriculture, being one of the most prominent women's employers, increases women's exploitation and income disparity. Despite playing a crucial role in the agricultural sector, women remain poor and face hunger challenges. Many do not own land access credits or make decisions. Therefore, patriarchy that existed before capitalism still exists today with capitalist systems enforcing it.

Even though globalization has created opportunities for more women to join the labor force, capitalist exploitation and inequality still exist. The reproductive labor that



capitalists supported in the past decades, indicating housework like cleaning, caring for, and feeding families, is still performed by women, especially people with minimal education, migrants, and people of color. Capitalism has failed to recognize domestic labor by measuring women's empowerment with their workplace influence. However, to be present in the labor force, they outsource domestic workers, often women, for a low wage. The onset of COVID-19 did not spare the wage gap, impacting working women. After governments put the lockdown measures, a category that gained fame was the essential workers, who were allowed to work. The less paid and those in informal sectors (women) lost jobs, and others received pay cuts. Moreover, the pandemic has enabled working and middle-class parents to discover how the domestic work they subcontract is in demand, yet they pay low wages.

Capitalism has brought significant changes in the economy and the lives of people. However, it poses challenges to society, with the primary concern being inequality, especially among vulnerable groups and women. Feminists condemn capitalism, claiming it leads to imbalance, where women are affected more than men (Cudd, 2015). Although Cudd supports a capitalistic economy, he also posits that income and wealth inequalities exist in such systems. The author signifies that income inequalities exist because people desperate to acquire wealth can use all means, even undignified activities, to gain wealth.

Moreover, gender income disparities occur due to the vulnerable nature of women. Females tend to be poorer than men and are more desperate to ensure the well-being of their children and housework, therefore failing to strive more for paid work. Again, the women can be desperate for more income due to the pressure from their unpaid work, compelling them to engage in undignified jobs like prostitution; thus, this form of inequality caused by the capitalist economy becomes a feminist concern.

Capitalist structures perpetuate patriarchy through language, stereotypes, and family structures. Laissez-faire capitalism is evident in most countries with government regulations (Kocabiçak, 2013). Individuals can pursue their goals, work hard and earn income. A capitalistic system alongside patriarchy gives women hope in acquiring economic and personal empowerment; however, a perpetual unequal (Deryugina et al., 2021). For instance, gender inequality caused by capitalism is evident among employed women with a low income compared to men.

Across different countries with a capitalist system, there are no equal wages for different genders. Women earn less than their male counterparts, with women from ethnic groups affected the most. For instance, Hispanic women in the USA barely make up 50 percent of what white men earn (Cudd, 2014). Women often get employed in



part-time and flexible jobs with less pay. Again, the capitalist system can be viewed as empowering women. Still, the exploitation and discrimination in the workplace based on gender contribute to inequalities. Women are underrepresented in senior positions and high-paying jobs; for instance, in artificial intelligence, only 22 percent of the professionals are women (Cudd, 2014). Therefore, despite capitalism creating working opportunities for women to empower themselves economically, it also poses a more significant challenge of income inequality.

Conclusion

China has more economic disparity than the United States. However, the epidemic made the situation worse. Both countries have mixed economies. However, while the US financial system is predominantly capitalist, the Chinese financial system retains socialist elements, even though significant aspects of its economy have transitioned to capitalism since the reforms under Deng Xiaoping. Despite the two countries' varying approaches, they were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, adversely affecting women. Chinese and Americans continue to experience income inequalities during and after the COVID-19 strike. The lockdown measures requiring people to work from home adversely impacted vulnerable groups like women and those working in the informal sector. The males who occupy senior and essential work positions have been working, while many employed women have been left jobless or working from home, resuming unpaid housework. Researchers show that the pandemic affected women in China and the USA by increasing unemployment rates and psychological well-being, worsening gender inequalities, and increasing domestic violence.

From the Marxist feminist lens, women have been disadvantaged, with men dominating all spheres of life, from economic to political. Since time immemorial, women have been tasked with unpaid household chores and low-paying formal jobs, resulting in gender income inequalities. The capitalist approach, which is common in today's economies, contributes to gender wage disparity as it not only provides possible opportunities for females to become economically independent but also supports patriarchy, with discrimination and exploitation at workplaces for working-class women. Both USA and Chinese economic systems have played a role in influencing income levels for women. Despite China's socialist history, gender income inequalities persist, with the citizens having a positive attitude towards the disparities. Recommendations for governments in China and the USA towards solving the gender income inequalities would entail education and empowerment of women, increasing the female labor force, curbing gender discrimination in the workplace, and encouraging women to engage in entrepreneurship. Therefore, the onset of COVID-19 did affect not only global economies but also had adverse impacts on women, leading to the rise in gender income inequalities.



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