

# We Should All Be Feminists—The Impact of the Protection of Women’s Rights on Economic Growth

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## Abstract

The impact of women on economic growth has been confirmed, but the impact of women’s rights on economic growth remains to be studied. In this study, the researcher quantifies the status of women’s rights and then uses the random effect model to investigate the impact of women’s rights on regional economic growth based on the panel data of 31 provinces and cities from 2010 to 2020 in China. The mechanism of the impact is analyzed in this study. Empirical results show that the protection of women’s rights comes with a promoting effect on economic growth, and the promoting effect in the western region is stronger than it in the eastern region. In order to maintain economic growth, women’s rights should be protected. Women, especially those in the central and western regions, should be encouraged to get an education, participate in political activities and get a job. The article is organized as follows: Section 1 provides the realistic background and research significance. Section 2 reviews the existing studies. Section 3 discusses the theoretical mechanism and research hypothesis. Section 4 carries out the empirical research. Section 5 analyzes the main conclusions and policy implications.

## Keywords

Regional Economic Growth, Women Rights, Equal Rights

## 1. Introduction

Every key node of economic growth experienced is accompanied by the leaping development of women’s rights. Economic growth seems to be inextricably linked with women’s rights. However, as women’s rights themselves, the impact of women’s rights on economic growth is somehow a neglected part of academic

research. As half of the social population, the female population was turned to be invisible because the early perspective of population economics tended to be de-gendering.

From the perspective of reality, women have undertaken responsibilities and strive for rights in all aspects of social life. With the development of feminism and the equal rights movement all over the world, more and more scholars are paying attention to female power in economic growth. The simple perspective of demographic dividend also gradually derives the perspective of gender dividend. Therefore, the role of women's rights in economic growth needs to be studied.

## 2. Literature Review

At present, research around the world on the relationship between women and economic growth mainly focuses on the impact of the realization of women's rights of working and the women's rights of getting an education on economic growth.

[Barin et al. \(2020\)](#) used the data of OIC Member States and found that in these selected sample countries, female employment had put a positive impact on economic growth. [Hilal \(2021\)](#) found that there was a U-shaped curve relationship between female employment and economic growth. The results showed that female employment inhibits economic growth at first. But when female employment reaches a certain level, female employment will promote economic growth. [Sehrawat and Giri \(2017\)](#) constructed human capital indicators based on the education and health status of men and women, and studied their relationship with economic growth. It was found that woman human capital was significantly positively correlated with economic growth in the long and short term. Moreover, according to this study, the importance of female human capital to economic growth will increase over time. [Tansel and Gungor \(2021\)](#) found that the increase in female education will significantly promote economic growth, while male education will not have a significant impact on economic growth. At the same time, empirical findings show that the educational gap between women and men in Turkey has a negative impact on output.

Research on the impact of women on economic growth in China is generally similar to research, focusing on the impact of the realization of women's rights of working and the right of getting an education on economic growth.

[Shi \(2020\)](#) examined the impact of women's educational human capital on regional economic growth based on panel data from 31 provinces and cities in China. The results show that compared with the central and western regions, the growth of women's educational human capital in the eastern region contributes more to economic growth. And when the distribution of educational human capital is uneven, the economic growth in the eastern region will also be more restrained. [Li \(2013\)](#) chose female human capital in Inner Mongolia as the research sample, and the results showed that the improvement of female human capital promoted economic growth by affecting household consumption. Secondly, the change in female human capital will affect female fertility and the human

resources of the next generation. At the same time, the narrowing of the gender education level gap is related to economic growth.

Lv and Yuan's (2021) research shows that, worldwide, the full realization of female employment promotes the economic growth of both developed and non-developed countries, but compared with developed countries, the realization of female employment has a more significant role in promoting the economic growth of non-developed countries. Zhang and Liu (2015) used Japan as a research sample and believed that there was a positive relationship between Japanese female employment and economic growth. Chen and Rong (2019) studied the relationship between female employment and economic growth based on the data from Northeast China. The research results show that there is a long-term stable relationship between female employment and economic growth in Northeast China.

In the current research, most of the research on the impact of women on economic growth is limited to the impact of the realization of women's rights of working and studying on economic growth. Few people have studied the impact of the overall realization of women's rights on economic growth. What's more, gender stereotypes are can always be found in current academic research. Roles of women as workers and consumers in economic growth are constantly weakened, their role as "mothers" in the family is strengthened, and woman influence on the next generation of human capital is excessively strengthened.

The marginal contribution of this paper is mainly reflected in the following three aspects: 1) the impact mechanism of the overall realization of women's rights on economic growth is analyzed and verified.

2) Using the application of the law of the People's Republic of China on the protection of women's rights and interests in the Chinese judicial documents network, and using micro court data, the degree of realization of women's rights in China is measured in this study.

3) Considering the regional heterogeneity of the impact of women's rights protection on economic growth, this study examines the impact of the realization of women's rights on economic growth in the eastern, central and western regions.

### 3. Theoretical Mechanism and Research Hypothesis

According to the law of the people's Republic of China on the protection of women's rights, the whole package of women's rights are a group of rights composed of political rights, cultural and educational rights, labor and social security rights, property rights, personal rights, marriage and family rights. The mechanism analysis of this study will analyze the way women's rights promote economic growth through several basic aspects of this group of rights.

#### 1) Promoting economic growth by protecting political rights of women

In enterprises, female leadership traits have a positive supporting effect on team atmosphere and employee performance (Fan et al., 2017). In the society

which is a collection of enterprises and families, female leaders also play a similar role in social atmosphere and social member productivity. Moreover, female decision makers are more sensitive to the gender differences caused by implicit gender discrimination in the current rules. And it is easier for them to see other discrimination problems, create a more equitable social environment and achieve higher economic efficiency.

2) Promoting economic growth by protecting cultural and educational rights of women

The protection of woman cultural and educational rights contributes to the improvement of the quality of woman human capital and conceptual progress, which plays a positive role in promoting economic growth (Gao, 2020). At the same time, the realization of the right of education and publishing is conducive to the protection and dissemination of cultural ideas from the perspective of women, and increases the diversity and inclusiveness of social ideas. An inclusive and open social ideology is not only conducive to innovation which is able to promote economic growth (Li et al., 2015), but also conducive to creating a good business environment which is able to promote economic growth (Zhao et al., 2021).

3) Promoting economic growth by protecting working rights of women

Women's working rights and interests are mainly reflected in full employment of women. Compared with men's employment, women's full employment can be really fragile. And there is a tendency of "informal employment" for working women (Zhang & Song, 2018). Moreover, due to the current situation of traditional gender concepts, family division of labor mode, system reform and social welfare support, the overall quality of woman employment is low (Sheng, 2019). And woman employment has great potential to improve compared with men's employment. Therefore, improving the quality and quantity of woman employment will greatly promote economic growth.

4) Promoting economic growth by protecting property rights of women

The clarity of property rights is the premise of market transactions, and the existence of property rights is the premise of Pareto optimality. Since women account for about half of the total social population, the realization of property rights and interests of women is able to guarantee the realization of the clarity of the overall property rights in society, create conditions for social production to approach the Pareto state and promote economic growth.

5) Promoting economic growth by protecting personal rights of women

In today's society, due to the residue of feudal dregs such as "men are superior to women", "three obediences and four virtues", social problems such as "domestic violence", "gaslight", "PUA" have arisen. Therefore, women's personal rights have been greatly threatened. The realization of personal rights is really related to the stability of political society. Only by effectively protecting the personal rights of every citizen, especially women who are faced with more difficulty than men, can we ensure political and social stability and promote the role of

political stability in economic growth (Liu et al., 2018).

6) Promoting economic growth by protecting marriage and family rights of women

Whether women's marriage and family rights are fully protected directly affects the family education of the next generation of citizens. Only by protecting women's rights and interests in marriage and family can we ensure the smooth progress of family education. And it is good for cultivating the next generation of law-abiding and rational citizens, improving the quality of human capital. And it really helps to improve the quality of human capital which can be good for promoting economic growth. At the same time, women's marriage and family rights will also have an impact on women's labor rights, property rights and personal rights.

Based on the theoretical mechanism analysis and the characteristic facts of China, researcher puts forward the following research assumptions:

Hypothesis 1: The protection of women's rights will have a positive effect on economic growth.

Hypothesis 2: the positive effect of the protection of women's rights on economic growth varies in different regions.

#### 4. Empirical Research

1) Sample selection and data

a) Samples and data sources

The law of the People's Republic of China on the protection of women's rights and interests is a law enacted in 1992 that specifically protects women's rights and interests. According to the legal principle that the special law is superior to the general law, when court judges try cases related to women's rights and interests, they will give priority to the application of the law of the people's Republic of China on the protection of women's rights and interests, rather than the constitution that also stipulates women's rights and interests. Therefore, in theory, cases involving women's rights and interests can be collected from the China judicial documents network in accordance with the application of law. Therefore, researcher searches according to the legal basis and collects 11,277 judgments involving 31 provinces and cities from 2010 to 2020 from the Chinese judicial documents online. The data comes from the website of China judicial documents network, China Statistical Yearbook, the statistical yearbooks and Statistical Bulletins of various provinces and cities.

b) Variable selection

The core variables of this study are economic growth (growth) and women's rights status (right). The explanatory variable is economic growth, which is measured by the per capita GDP growth rate. Each judgment secretary will commit a case of infringement of women's rights and interests. In addition, the incidence rate of female rights and interests cases per 10,000 people is calculated according to the permanent resident population of various provinces and cities. The higher

the incidence rate is, the higher the frequency of female rights violations is, and the worse the status of women’s rights is. Therefore, the opposite number of female rights and interests cases per 10,000 people is recorded as the status of women’s rights.

c) Because there are many factors affecting regional economic growth, this paper adds a group of control variables

i) Government expenditure (gosp): It measures the annual general public budget expenditure of each province and city.

ii) Technological progress (Tech): It is measured by the number of patent applications which was authorized by provinces and cities in each year.

iii) Human capital (HUCA): It is measured by the number of people which are urban units employed in various provinces and cities in each year.

iv) Capital stock (CAP): It is measured by the number of fixed asset investments in each province and province in each year.

v) Information technology (info): It measures the number of Internet broadband ports accessed by provinces and cities in each year.

x) Covid: due to the impact of COVID-19 at the end of 2019, there will be some changes in the production and lifestyle of provinces and cities from 2020, which will have a certain impact on economic growth. Therefore, add the dummy variable covid, and set covid = 0 from 2010 to 2019 and covid = 1 in 2020.

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
GDP growth rate	341	107.706	3.106	96.4	116.3
case	341	0.009	0.026	0	0.203
government	341	4718.797	2831.616	551.04	17484.67
internet	341	1847.927	1676.35	17.8	8653.23
workforce	341	540.002	392.783	22.21	2085.27
investment	341	17021.264	13263.877	462.669	59215.166
patent	341	53680.22	85603.864	121	709725
marriage	341	0.004	0.013	0	0.131
other	341	0.005	0.015	0	0.13

2) Empirical model setting

a) Linear regression model setting

In order to test the impact of women’s rights on economic growth, this study set up a linear regression model at first.

$$grow_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 right_{i,t} + \beta_2 gosp_{i,t} + \beta_3 tech_{i,t} + \beta_4 huca_{i,t} + \beta_5 cap_{i,t} + \beta_6 info_{i,t} + \beta_7 covid_{i,t} + \mu_i + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

right<sub>i,t</sub> represents the status of women’s rights of province I in year t. gosp<sub>i,t</sub> refers to the per capita GDP growth index of province I in year t. cap<sub>i,t</sub> represents the financial expenditure of province I in year t. tech<sub>i,t</sub> represents the level of

technological development.  $huca_{i,t}$  represents the number of labor population of province I in year t.  $cap_{i,t}$  represents the capital reserves of province I in year t.  $info_{i,t}$  represents the informatization degree of province I in year t. And the virtual variable represents the impact of COVID-19. It is 1 after 2019 and it is 0 before 2019.

b) Selection of regression method

In this study, Hausman test is used to determine whether the fixed effect model or the random effect model is used here for regression. The Hausman test is carried out on the model constructed in this study, and the test value is 6.19, P value is 0.1025, so the random effect model is selected for regression.

c) Full sample regression results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
VARIABLES	GDP growth rate	GDP growth rate	GDP growth rate	GDP growth rate	GDP growth rate	GDP growth rate
right	17.79*** (5.283)	16.50*** (5.034)	-26.08 (17.22)	72.14*** (24.52)	31.51*** (10.09)	25.21*** (8.824)
Constant	110.5*** (0.435)	108.8*** (0.566)	112.7*** (1.150)	109.7*** (0.560)	110.5*** (0.436)	110.4*** (0.436)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	341	132	99	110	341	341
Number of province	31	12	9	10	31	31

Note: the values in brackets are t-values or z-values, and the values in brackets are associated probabilities, \*\*\*, \*\* and \* represent the significance levels of 1%, 5% and 10% respectively. Standard errors are not clustered in the regressions.

The table shows the results of the full sample regression of the relationship of the protection of women’s rights and economic growth. The estimated coefficient of the explanatory variable is positive and significant at the 1% level. It indicates that the improvement of the protection of women’s rights will promote economic growth, and the deterioration of women’s rights status will inhibit economic growth nationwide.

d) Robustness test

i) The sample areas are grouped according to the three economic zones of the East, the middle and the west. Every group is regressed respectively.

Model (2) is the regression result of the protection of women’s rights and economic growth in the eastern region. The estimated coefficient of the protection of women’s rights is positive and significant at the 1% level, indicating that in the eastern region, the improvement of the protection of women’s rights will promote economic growth, and the deterioration of women’s rights will inhibit economic growth. Model (3) is the regression result of the protection of women’s rights and economic growth in the central region. The estimated coefficient

of women's rights is negative and not significant, indicating that protecting women's rights has no significant effect on economic growth in the central region. Model (4) is the regression result of the protection of women's rights and economic growth in the western region. The estimated coefficient of women's rights status is positive and significant at the 1% level, indicating that in the western region, the improvement of women's rights will promote economic growth, and the deterioration of women's rights will inhibit economic growth. At the same time, compared with the eastern region, the improvement of women's rights in the western region will play a stronger role in promoting economic growth.

The reason for this phenomenon may be that the overall economic development in the eastern region is better, the social atmosphere is more open-minded, the educational resources for women's growth is better. In eastern region, more women participate in social activities such as labor, study and politics, and the overall protection of women's rights is in a good state. For these reasons, the improvement of women's rights will not significantly improve women's participation in labor, education and political activities. Therefore, it has not produced the same driving force for economic growth as it in the western region.

ii) Regression by right type

According to the classification of women's rights, the sample cases are divided into marriage and family rights related cases and other women's rights cases.

Model (5) is the regression result of female marital and family rights status and economic growth. The estimated coefficient of the explanatory variable is positive and significant at the 1% level, indicating that at the national level, the increase in the protection of female marital and family rights will promote economic growth, while the deterioration of female marital and family rights will inhibit economic growth. Model (6) is the regression result of the status of rights other than women's marital and family rights and economic growth. The estimated coefficient of the explanatory variable is positive and significant at the 1% level, indicating that at the national level, an increase in the status of rights other than women's marital and family rights promotes economic growth, while a deterioration in the status of other women rights suppresses economic growth.

At the same time, the empirical results show that female marital and family rights have a greater impact on economic growth compared to other female rights because the impact of marital and family life on economic growth is divided into three aspects: on the realization of other female rights and interests, on the degree of social stability, and on the quality of human capital of the next generation.

First, the realization of marriage and family rights will have an impact on the full realization of women's labor rights, property rights, and personal rights. Secondly, the widespread violation of women's rights to marriage and family means that the social and political environment starts to be turbulent. Moreover, the realization of women's rights of marriage and family will affect the quality of human capital and the social climate of the next generation, thus affecting inno-



vation and economic resource allocation.

## 5. Main Conclusion and Policy Implications

### 1) Main Conclusion

First, this study tests the hypothesis that women's rights status has a catalytic effect on economic growth and the catalytic effect depends on the economic level. In the economically backward western region, the improvement of women's rights has a stronger effect on economic growth than in the economically more developed eastern region. Secondly, this study finds that the realization of women's rights in marriage and family will have a stronger contribution to economic growth than other rights. Due to the limitations of the sample size, the empirical results of this paper are only preliminary results. The specific characteristics of the impact of the realization of women rights on economic growth still need to be tested in further study.

### 2) Policy Recommendations

a) Encourage women to participate in social and political activities and discard feudalism.

To encourage women to actively participate in social and political activities, we should promote the abandonment of the traditional path of women's growth which includes "being raised in a harem" and "raising a husband and children". Economic activities need more women's perspectives, the country needs more women leaders, and multiple perspectives and ideas for economic activities in order to achieve the efficient use of economic resources and long-term stable economic growth.

b) Put more educational resources to women in poor areas of central and western China by proper policy

Political help is more efficient than family help and school help. In order to achieve long-term and stable economic growth, society needs a strong policy that can help every girl in poor areas to complete their compulsory education and thus increase individual productivity. Women in poor areas are often in extreme need of educational resources for which improving their years of education becomes a critical point for improving the overall quality of human capital in poor areas.

c) Protect women's labor rights, combat gender discrimination in the workplace, and improve the working environment for women

At present, female employment in China still maintains the characteristics of informal employment, flexibility, and instability. The most direct way to fully combat gender discrimination in the workplace and improve the employment environment for women is to advocate for male maternity and parental leave which transfers the costs of childbirth originally borne only by women to men and reduce the career disadvantages of women due to childbirth. Only when all women can compete fairly with men in the workplace can women's human capital be maximized and the quality of men's human capital is pushed to improve, thus

promoting economic growth.

d) Lowering the threshold of proof for various kinds of “spousal exploitation” to protect women’s marital and family rights

In legal practice, illegal transfer of property within marriage, marital rape, domestic violence, and other violations of spousal rights are common in divorce litigation cases, but due to the difficulty of proof, the victim’s complaint often ends in vain. Therefore, lowering the threshold of proof for these acts is conducive to the smooth dissolution of unhealthy marital relationships. Toxic and harmful marital relationships not only have the effect of hindering women’s professional life and affecting women’s labor productivity, but also have the potential to negatively affect the quality of human capital and social morale of the next generation.

e). Crack down on all kinds of personal crimes against women to create a safe and harmonious social environment

The first step of social unrest often begins with the prevalence of various crimes against the personal rights of women who are vulnerable to force. In order to maintain social stability and safeguard economic production, every personal crime against women should be severely punished to create a good and stable social environment for economic activities.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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