

# The Aged Women and the Civil Society

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## Abstract

Aged women have outnumbered aged men and the percentage of the rural aging population has been higher than the urban since the Mainland China became an aged society as early as 2000. The old people both male and female have been openly or secretly regarded as social burden although they are the main volunteers in rural or urban areas. The urban and rural community autonomy as well as the budding NGOs are the main channels to advance the democracy at the grassroots level but all of them progress slowly. Urban community autonomy has been distorted due to the continuously administrative reform, while community autonomy has been narrowed down to the procedural democracy in the election of the Villager's Committee. At the same time, the NGOs are characterized as youth-domination and floating beyond the geographical communities, which cause them to neglect the aged and the local communities where their offices are located. Most importantly, all of them seriously lack gender consciousness so eventually their ability to advance the civil society has been greatly impaired. This article will explore how the aged women are able to participate in the building of the civil society at grassroots level by a project assisted by the Research Center of Gender and Social Development where the author works.

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## Key words

aged women, civil society, community autonomy, gender

## **An Introduction to Aged Women and Local Democracy**

### **The Aged Women**

The Fifth Chinese Census in 2000 has shown the amount of people above 60 years old has reached 126,000,000 or ten percent of the total population, and those above 65 reached 86,870,000 or seven percent. These figures numbers are constantly rising at the average of three

percent per year. Women's average expected longevity is three years longer than men's and women are the overwhelming majority in the number of people above 70 years old. In addition, the speed of aging is faster in the countryside than the city for the rapid urbanizing and the migration of many rural youths as well as middle aged into the cities.

Although respect to the aged has been a long-term tradition, the aged people are commonly being openly or secretly discriminated as a burden in the China Mainland at present. Partly out of "the Theory of the Young China" during the May Fourth Movement in the 1920s, it encouraged worshipped the youth and depreciated the aged. The more direct reason is the exclusion from the market economy which has driven the aged down to the disadvantaged group with low prestige and less income. For the old women, the situation is worse for many of them had no paid jobs in their labor age days and logically without independent pension, so their lives are more likely to fall into poverty after their husbands die. It is hardly better for the old women receiving pension themselves for it usually is quite low for the unequal gender job division, gendered career stratification, and the feminization of housework and birth as well as caring.

The old women are the main labor of the volunteer work in the urban community. The same is in the rural communities since they often are the most enthusiastic participants of the folk art show usually without pay. In the countryside, the public service is seriously inadequate caused by the poor governance and the villagers' atomization, so the rural aged women's volunteer work is highly vulnerable. Although there is no exact statistics about it, the aged being the main volunteers has been proved by the research done by the Social Department, Civil Ministry of Taiwan (Zhang, 2007) and this author's field work. The implicit or open prejudice labeling the aged as the social or family burden, therefore, neglects the function offered by the old women.

### **Democracy at Grass Root**

The basic social order and power structure have been the disputing topic since the beginning of Chinese reform and opening-up in 1978. Deng (1993) and other scholars (Deng & Alexander, 1999) advocated the burgher society, which represented the benefit of the entrepreneur and

intellectuals, by contrast, the proletariat and the peasants were regarded as unqualified to be parts of the burgher society. Deng could not realize gender being a necessary perspective during the reconstruction of the new social order and insisted public power has no legitimacy to intervene in the private sphere. Fortunately, the frame of government-market-civil society proclaimed by Yu (2000a, 2006) and Z. K. He (2000, 2007) was different. Z. K. He (2000, 2007) has been widely accepted as the ideal social order in the Chinese future since the middle of 1990's. Since the civil society in the frame refers to the public sphere, the autonomic rural and urban communities have been expected to apply the two basic public spheres from where the bottom-up democracy is able to grow since the 1990s in Chinese Mainland (Zhu & Cheng, 1998; Zhou & Wang, 1999; Yu, 2000b; Lin, 2003). Although many of the male theorists are gender-blinded, some of them like Yu Keping and He Zengke have realized gender perspective is necessary for the civil society.

NGO, another key public sphere, develops rapidly in the recent decade in Chinese Mainland, covering education, culture, public health, labor, environment protection and legal aid etc., having amounted to 400,000 (The Civil Ministry of China, 2007). On the whole, the following three tendencies have characterized the development of NGOs in Chinese Mainland. (a) The NGOs are urbanizing for both the personnel and the fund are disproportional concentrating in the big cities. (b) The youths have monopolized the NGOs which is showed by the few NGOs devoting to the aged although the Chinese population has aged since 2000 and the old people over 60 years have amounted to nearly 20,000,000. (c) Most of the NGOs do not root in certain geographical regions and instead they float above the cities so that their efforts on advancing democracy have few chances to be constant or localized.

Using cases from the rural and urban communities, this paper will explore the democratic processes in them instead of NGOs.

### **The Villager's Autonomy**

Since the end of 1970s, the agricultural production model changed from the People's Commune and the Production Team to the Household Contract Responsibility System in Chinese Mainland, which was created by the peasants themselves. The individual household's autonomy on

agricultural production called for the autonomy on the village affair, so in 1984 the villagers in Guozuotun Village, Guangxi Municipality initiated the Villagers' Autonomy to replace the centralization of the People's Commune and the Production Team. The Chinese Central Government soon accepted and pushed it all over the country. The Organic Law of the Villagers Community of People's Republic of China (P.R.C) was formally established in 1998 after the trial implementation for 11 years. It has developed the following traits in the nearly 30 years:

1. The villagers autonomy has been narrowed down to the election democracy after the Organic Law of the Villagers Community defines the autonomy as four-democratic-principles, i.e., democratic election, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision (Tong, 2007).

2. The Villagers Committee has been embedded in the contradiction between its double roles (Xu, 1997). According to the Organic Law of the Villagers Community, its principle duty is to enounce and protect the rights and interests of the whole village since it is elected by the villagers and correspondingly, it should be responsible for the voter. But on the other hand, being the agent of the Communist Party of China and the governments at all levels, it has to obey their wills and orders even if they conflict with the welfare of the villagers.

3. The election favors male villagers but marginalize female for the so called four-democratic-principles are seriously gendered bias. Although the director of the Women's Representative Federation has long been the rightful member of the village administration as early as the C.P.C launched the anti-Japan War and the People's War of Liberation during 1920-40s, who usually being the only female member of the village administration, are ironically excluded from the Villagers Committee as the rural democracy develops. The Organic Law reads gender-neutral for it prescribes every voter has the freedom to choose the committeeman (if you believe the "man" referring to the human being, not specific to the male), but the truth is the pervasive public and private patriarchy have systemically destroyed women's fair representation in the Villagers Committee from the start and during course of the election.

A woman has less chance than a man to be known by her villagers for the gender job distribution, which is usually regulates men in charge of the public sphere and women the private ones, especially when she has

to leave her birth village and move to her husband's village after marriage. Few villagers will get to know her for she always stays home for she has the sole burden and the full responsibility of caring for the babies. Of course, she can not get familiar with other villagers, either. Even if a woman had more chances to be known and to know others, there is much less possibility for her to assume the Villager Representatives or the heads of the Villager Groups, which are the key channels to build up the prestige and political experiences, for these have long been regarded as "men's thing." For example, women only reached 18 percent in the Villager Representatives and 19 percent in the heads of the Villager Groups in the total of 34 villages of the District Tangu, Tianjin in 2004, showed by the baseline research of the Civil Ministry's Project of "Policy innovation to promote the ratio of women elected in the Villagers Committees" (X. X. Wang, X. B. Wang, & G. R. Wang, 2004).

Men usually take active parts in the election, especially when there is much public resource in the village and may be embezzled. As agnation, faction, canvassing and further bribery often become the keys to be elected in many villages, women are disadvantaged. Firstly, the agnation refers to the ancestry of male's not female's. Secondly, women seldom form the sects because of being confined in the separate houses. Thirdly, canvassing and bribery need a lot of money and the thirst to power, which women usually lack when the abilities to make big money, political ambition, interest and techniques to participating political game have been monopolized by male. The common pornographic or quasi-pornographic social methods among men such as massage, karaoke and spa accompanied by young girls exclude women from the social circles and the messages and friendship circulating among them. The standards of good cadre such as being able to work overtime at any moment, are established according to men who are exempted from housework and women find they are very difficult to attain since housework and caring having been feminized.

As a result, the ratio of women elected to the Villagers Committee has long been under 20 percent since 1980s. For instance, the average women ratio in the Villagers Committees all over the country is only 16 percent, and the ratio of women as the directors of the Committees is even under one percent in 2002 (Qiao & Zhou, 2009).

Fortunately, women have some advantages over men in the election for some villagers are more willing to vote women since their fingers are usually more cleaner, by the contrary, so many male candidates are corrupt and blow the public fortune on beer and skittles.

4. The current Villagers Autonomy overemphasizes economic development and seriously neglects the social capital and public products in the villages such as trust, reciprocal regulations and decision-participating, as well as the development of spiritual culture.

The GDP has been regarded as the only indicator to evaluate the Villagers Committees since they are the agent of the governing Party and the central and local governments, who are eagerly pursuing the economic modernization. The interest groups can not freely speak out their needs and wishes in the management, decision-making and supervision of the village affairs, for the villagers' autonomy has been narrowed to democratic election. There are few cultural activities besides playing "mah-jong," TV-watching or chatting. Because of the hierarchy between the urban and rural having deeply undervalue the countryside in Chinese Mainland, the villagers are usually self-contemptuous.

5. Women are still marginalized although the agriculture feminization is emerging, women have become the main population in countryside when many adult men immigrate into the cities. Worse of all, both the scanty women in the Villagers Committees and the women Villagers Representatives as well as the heads of the Villagers Groups may replicate patriarchy.

Over 12,000,000 young and middle-aged villagers, most of them male, migrated to the cities during the tremendous urbanization since 1978. The hierarchy between the urban and rural forces most of the villager to return to their villages to get married. Contrary to most male returning to the cities after marriage, most female stay at home for they have the sole burden of population reproduction. The orthrus of patriarchy and capitalism has brought out the phenomenon of youth-transferring mechanism, i.e., the capitalism will exploit the most productive youth of the young village girls and the patriarchy will burden them with unpaid housework and caring after marriage. One of the results is the agriculture, the least paid vocation on Chinese Mainland at present, has shown the tendency of feminization, in the total working women population, the percentage working in the agriculture field in

2005 mounted to 62.6 percent (The Social and Science Dept. of the National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2007). By contrast, only 22 percent of the total Villagers Committees has women members in 2008, the ratio of women directors of the Committees is still rather low, although it has been raised to ten percent in 2008 (Chen, 2009). Women in the Villagers Representatives, the heads of Villagers Groups and in the C.P.C are seriously under represented. Among the patriarchal atmosphere, it's not strange that the women villagers are marginalized and some of the women have internalized the patriarchal beliefs. For example, a few women assuming the Villager Representatives, the heads of the Villagers Groups or the committeemen are reproducing the gender inequality by refusing the two son-in-laws of the family, who having only two daughters, to register as permanent residences at the wives' village. It's against the patriarchal residence mechanism that wives should move to their husbands' residence. The more common patriarchal phenomenon is to deprive the women's compensation for the expropriated land in the excuse that they have moved to their husbands' villages, although their registered permanent residence are still at their birth villages and they should get the compensation according to The Organic Law of the Villagers Community of P.R.C.

### **The Urban Community Autonomy**

The Residential Committee is the political organ at the grass roots in Chinese Mainland cities. It emerged in the 1950s when Chinese government set up the unit system, the prevailing social spatial arrangement in the following 30 years and even longer, these not working in some units including self-employed people, housewives and other jobless were managed by the Residential Committees. At first, the committees were "the residential autonomic organizations" defined by The Organic Regulations of the Residential Committees ordained in 1954. It quickly turned from the autonomic organization into administrative areas after the People Commune come to the power after 1958 (Lin, 2003). The Organization Law of the Residential Committee put into force in 1989 and reaffirmed it's autonomic but it has become "a tap anyone can screw," meaning any government and its branch can assign tasks to the Residential Committees. The following has gotten the

Residential Committee into a corner. (a) It has turned from the autonomic supervisor into the executive branch of the governments and their departments. The continuous responsibilities appointed to it are heavy but without the corresponding right and interest. (b) The endless reforms of the Residential Committee have involuted. The Involution Theory was put forward by Geerts (1963) and Huang (1990), meaning the increase without development, Y. L. He (2007) borrows it to refer to the endless reforms of the Residential Committee have only touched the surface but not the ground. (c) The career feminization of the Residential Committee does not automatically bring out the rising of gender consciousness. Although women are the majority in the staff, its executive quality has made it to use women rather than serve them. (d) Most importantly, the Residential Committee could not satisfy the residents' needs and wishes since it is not autonomous. For instance, its members are appointed by the governments, the salary and welfare of the staff are paid by the governments. In one word, the urban public sphere develops slowly for the governing Party and its governments still dominate the Residential Committee, although it affirms the latter being autonomic again and again.

The aged women are one of the most concerned groups to the community for some of them are career housewives. What's more, many Chinese urban women have been laid off or have to retire even though they are only 40-50 years old and then many of their warfare will be distributed by the Residential Committee, and their most frequent social intercourse will concentrate on the communities. But neither their strong need nor the numerous volunteer work they assume is taken into consideration for the aged women feel it's hard to bring their voices into the community issues because of the Residential Committee is not an autonomous residential organization but a rather executive organ of the governing Party and the governments at all levels. At the same time, they often take the initiative to call for the governing Party's leadership since they have internalized the political model of "the mass needs the leadership of the C.P.C.," and some of them, especially the retired cadres, are soulfully attached to the C.P.C for they have indeed enjoyed the comfort, social affiliation and self-achievement under its leadership.

Apart the ineffectively involute reforms, some Chinese urban communities are trying real ones. For example, since 1997, Shanghai has

changed the former urban management system into the model of “two levels of governments and three levels of managements<sup>1</sup>” so as to empower the urban communities. Some urban communities juxtapose the Homeowners Associations and the Social Work Offices to enable the former and the governments to buy the services offered by the latter. But obviously, it’s still scanty that the governments will buy social services from the NGOs<sup>2</sup> currently in the Chinese Mainland. Most importantly, none of the reforms above have paid enough attention on the aged women, and in other words, these women still participate in the communities as free-labor but not as the subjects who have the chance to speak out their interest and push them into the decision-making. For instance, in the new model of the juxtaposition of the Homeowners Associations, which equaling to the directorate, and the Social Work Offices, which is similar to the executive organ, the tendency has shown that the male dominate the Homeowner Associations and women become the majority of the latter.

NGOs will promote the civil society in the urban communities to reform the Residential Committee, but it’s absolutely not the only way. NGOs have been recognized to play an important role in the building of the public sphere. But if the youths would still dominate the NGOs and discriminate against the aged including old women as social burdens or the pure objects to be protected, the NGOs may replicate the generational inequality. Their ability to root in a certain geographic communities so as to advance the democracy at the grass root will be weakened if they still are floating above the cities.

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<sup>1</sup> “Two levels of governments” refers to the municipal and district governments and “the three levels of managements” refers to the managements of the municipal, district and community level.

<sup>2</sup> The Service Center of Changshoulu Street Community, Shanghai, is the first NGO whose service was bought by the Putuo District Government in August, 2008. The Putuo District Government, therefore, became a candidate for the Fourth Innovation Prize of Local Government in China.

## Is the Aging Association the Dawn of the Rural Public Sphere?

The Villagers Committee is not regarded as the only channel to build the villagers autonomy or the rural public sphere for some scholars have realized the villagers autonomy could not be narrowed to the democratic elections and there should be many rural NGOs to create the civil society (Tong, 2007). The development of the villages has begun to be human-oriented instead of the GDP-oriented and should try to cultivate the social capitals such as trust, reciprocal regulation, shared decision-making and volunteer service. The Aging Association is one of the NGOs which should be greatly developed.

### The History of the Aging Association

The first voluntary Aging Association was founded in Gaozhai Productive Team, Jiangxi Province. The China National Committee on Aging (CNCA), which was set up in 1982, held the Experience-Sharing Meeting on the Rural Aging in 1991. Fifty six percent of the villages have built up their own Aging Associations and more in some provinces (The Project on the Capacity Building of the Rural Aging Association, 2006). But most of them are dominated by the Villagers Committee and the C.P.C Committee, so at best they are the Government Organized NGO (GONGOs). Most of them exist only in name except some in Zhejiang Province and Jiangsu Province according to the research of X. F. He (2006), Zhao (2007), X. M. Wang (2006), and H. L. He (2006). In the two provinces, especially near Wenzhou City<sup>3</sup>, the rural Aging Associations flourish, and are actively offering the aged welfare including distributing some money, fruits and food on holidays, holding entertainments, visiting the sick, and expressing condolence after old person die.

The Aging Association possibly is the main force to promote the rural democracy at grass roots since the aged has become one of the main rural populations, especially since the speed of aging in the countryside is faster

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<sup>3</sup> A famous city rapidly developing since the reform and opening up-in Chinese Mainland.

than it in the cities. But most importantly, it has to become automatic so that the old people in the villagers could decide their own issues and carry out their decisions instead of totally obeying the orders from the governments and the C.P.C. The following will explore both the possibility of the Aging Associations to promote democracy at the grass roots in gender perspective through five associations<sup>4</sup> assisted by the Research Center on Rural Governance in Huazhong University of Science and Technology (X. F. He, 2005, 2007; H. L. He, 2006; Zhao, 2007; X. M. Wang, 2006).

### **How to Select Leaders of the Aging Association?**

There usually are three ways to select the leaders of the Aging Association, i.e. appointed by the Villagers Committee, recommended by some people and elected by the whole aged villager, all of them having been monopolized by the male and excluded the female. The leaders usually are those who have assumed the cadres in the villages, or whose sons are prestigious for they are rich and willing to donate money for the public affair in the villages, or those returning to reside in the villages after retirement from their jobs in the cities, each of them are more possibly dominated by the males. Similar to the Villagers Committee, the Aging Association needs “the appropriate percentage of women” joining in, which eventually is minimized to only one. Taking the case of the Aging Association in the Yuchang Village in Honghu City, Hubei Province, there is only one woman of the five chairpersons and the same is in the 13 directors.

### **The General Activities**

The entertainments, the most common activities launched by the Aging Association, comprise watching the local folk arts, playing the “mah-jong,” playing the traditional musical instruments, sightseeing and so on. They also protect the rights and interests of the aged by mediating

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<sup>4</sup> The Aging Associations locate in five villages, namely, Guanqiao Village, Xinhe Village, Heji Village in the Country Shayang, Jingmen City, Hubei Province; Yuchang Village in Honghu City, Hubei Province; Dalixi Village in Country Lankao, Gansu Province (Wu, 2008).

between the aged and their children, persuading the children to support their aged parents, offering the needy old people financial aids, visiting the aged when they are sick, etc (X. F. He, 2006). So the prediction that the Aging Association will increase the social capital such as trust and reciprocal regulations has seemingly been proved, but the picture is different in gender perspective. The activities launched by the Aging Associations have been gender differentiated such as the male playing chess or dragon lantern which are believed to require intelligence and strength; the female taking the calisthenics and playing the yanko (a popular rural folk dance in China) which are believed fit to show the women's softness and beauty. Not to mention the mediations undertaken by the Aging Associations may reproduce patriarchy in the villages. For example, one Aging Association in the Qilihe Village, Hongta County, Hubei Province, "helps the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law becoming reconciled by its mediation (Lu, 2004)." In fact, the contradictions between the two women are likely rooted in the patriarchy that the male dominated Aging Associations would not change.

### **Is the Aging Association the Origin of the Rural NGO?**

The old people usually are the disadvantaged group in the present Chinese Mainland and the discrimination against them may suppress the reasonable needs of one individual old person. So when the old people organize the Aging Association and speak out their voices by the congregations, producing consensus and maintaining the social order, as well as promoting the trust and reciprocal regulations in the villages, their collective interests could not be easily suppressed. In addition, the villagers' lives and significances will be acknowledged through the performances exhibiting the planting, harvest and raising the livestock, which is greatly under valued in the hierarchy between the urban and the rural in Chinese Mainland nowadays.

The Aging Associations have offered the democratic training at the grass roots. It's difficult that the many rural researches have found the Villagers Committees or the C.P.C committees to hold the meeting for the total villagers. One simple reason is there usually is not large meeting hall to hold all the villagers, especially for the villages whose population is over one thousand. Another reason is the Villagers Committees or the

C.P.C committees often have to “buy” the villagers that attend the meetings, for it’s the two committees to set up issues instead of the villagers themselves and understandingly most villagers are no interested in them. The meeting for all the villagers is seldom since most Villagers Committees could not afford it. So it was very impressed when hundreds of old people were assembled by the seven Aging Associations assisted by the professors of the Research Center on Rural Governance in Huazhong University of Science and Technology. On the assemblies, the aged people practice the necessary methods and techniques of how to participate in the civil society including discussing in the groups, representation and speech.

In addition, one of this author’s prejudices, that the only duty of NGOs is to express the groups’ interest and intervene with the “serious” public affair by positively communicating or struggling, has been corrected by the Aging Associations. In the three villagers in Jinmen City, Hubei Province, there were always old people who would commit suicide each year before the autonomic Aging Associations were set up. Many old people have experienced many pleasures through the entertainments and communications launched by the Aging Associations, which is significant as it can help the old people acknowledge the meaning and dignity of the aging life as well as further to challenge the discrimination against to aging.

### **“Home”: An Urban Women’s NGO**

“Home” is one urban women’s NGO sponsored by the Canadian Department of International Development’s “the Project of Civil Society,” academically supported by the Research Center on Gender and Social Development of Tianjin Normal University during March, 2005 to February, 2006, located in Ziya Community, Xiyuzhuang District, Tianjin.

### The Main Activities of “Home”

(a) Setting up the local women team and Home based on the baseline research, round tables and interviews to find out the atmosphere of the community and the possible participants. (b) Building up the capability of the participants of Home by raising gender consciousness, enhancing the consciousness and ability to participate in the civil society, building the leadership, of the officers in the sub-district office and the members of the Research Center of Gender and Social Development, besides the open discussion among all the partners including the local women. (c) Promoting the civil society in the local communities by repairing public corridors, setting up the Dog-Owners Association so as to urge them to be responsible for their dogs, having the residential get-togethers on Spring Festival, International Women’s Day, Old People’s Day and National Day. (d) Editing *the Handbook of the Urban Women on How to participate in the Community Management* so that more people will increase the consciousness and capacity to participate in the civil society at grass roots. (e) Sharing the experiences of how the old women advance the local democracy at grass roots with more people in Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing and Nibo, etc.

### The Interactions between Memories and Spaces

Confucianism is interwoven with the collectivism of the Mao Tse-dong Time in the urban communities. On the one side, the Confucian social order that the respected should be treated differently from the inferiors has been consolidated since many residents have received or even internalized the dignity of C.P.C and humbleness of the masses, which hampers the growth of the civil society. But on the other side, the compounding of the two cultures will motivate the residents to break through the high walls between households and produce the shared autonomous public sphere because both confucianism and collectivism advocate the kindness and caring.

Before the setting up of Home, the old women produced the space by their sporadically voluntary assistances such as sewing and preparing dumplings for the blinded old women, encouraging the old women whose husbands are terribly sicken to live bravely. However, the space is basically personal but not public for the following two reasons: Firstly,

their scattered assistances comply with the traditional Confucian principles, i.e., the hierarchy of status according to the relatives and strangers, the senior and junior generations, the male and female, etc, which Fei (2006), a famous Chinese anthropologist and socialist, called *chaxu geju*. So the space built by them is confined in quasi-kindred in accordance with the individualistic view but not universalistic principle. Secondly, Home did not mobilize the resources beyond their own families before the setting up of Home. But it does not mean they have no consciousness and capacity for many of them have developed the necessary motives and skills to break through the private space and further create the public one during the long years of work.

In sum, there are three partners during the project. The participants of Home still imagined the space as a private in the beginning and the local government wished the space produced by Home to be subordinate to the government's authoritative space. The Research Center of Gender and Social Development expects that the local women can turn their imagination of the space from being private to public, correspondingly, they will upgrade their activities from that of charity (here meaning out of the simple goodness but not to disclose the social structures which perpetuate the hierarchy) to volunteer service (meaning to individual or collective voluntary help based on the independently consideration, whose principle aim is to remedy but not reconstruct the society) and further to governance (meaning the citizen actively participate in the public affair after autonomic incorporating the groups according to some ideals or interest, its ultimate aim being to reconstruct the society).

### **The Great Capability of the Old Women**

By the collection and choice of the issues, the establishment and fulfillment of a plan, the negotiation within and beyond Home, the strengthened trust and reciprocal regulations, as well as the promotion of the consciousness and capability to participate in the civil society, the old women's great inspiration and creativity have impressed on the sponsor, the members of the Research Center of Gender and Social Development and officers in the local government. Of course, the old women of Home have also learned a lot, as shown in the following words:

Only one new ideal or one concept will change people and the communities. (Zhang Zhiyu, age 63, person with visual disability)

I have never experienced such a great sense of achievement and I'm so energetic now! My granddaughter asked me, "Why are you so happy recently?" I answered her, "I would have been muddling along after retired, but now I have both learned new knowledge and developed the leadership, can I not happy?" (Wang Zhifen, age 61, former worker)

Home has built our leadership and raised the consciousness to participate in the civil society. (Mo Wenli, age 65, former primary school teacher)

## Conclusion

By exploring the rural and urban democracy at the grass roots through the examples above, several conclusions can be drawn. (a) The game will last between the governments trying to dominate the society and the citizen trying to build up the public sphere and the civil society, which will be inscribed into Chinese society at present and in the future. (b) The promotion and production of the civil society at the grass roots needs external financial, ideal and human aids, and at the same time, it's necessary to acutely prevent the replication of the hierarchy system such as patriarchy and elitism. (c) It's urgent to promote the democracy at grass roots in the millions of urban and rural communities, which in fact have been advocated by the Chinese Center Government since the late of 1990s and every citizen and NGO are responsible for building the civil society step by step.

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