

A Study on the Organizational Functions of the Women's Federation: Its Progress and Some Reflections

WAN Suchun^{[a],*}

^[a] College of Humanities and Law, Nanchang Hangkong University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Objective reasons lie in the emergence of studies on the organizational functions of Women's Federation, which is a corollary of the evolution of organizational roles and social development, and the realistic demand for deepening reforms. After years of exploration, this paper probes into the organizational concept, types of Women's Federation's organizational functions, review how they evolved, and analyzes the influencing factors, through which the reform paths and methods are summarized and the crucial progress made in functional studies is sorted out. Based on that, this paper put forward some thoughts on the reform of the Women's Federation's organizational functions in the new era.

Key words: The organizational functions of Women's Federation; Research progress; Thoughts on the reform

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1. THE EMERGENCE OF RELEVANT RESEARCH

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi

Jinping at its core, guided by the principle of promoting the development of the party and the country, has aligned the reform of Women's Federation with the major framework of modernizing the national governance system and governance capabilities and deepening the reform of the party and state institutions. As such, the functional positioning of the Women's Federation was re-defined in the new era. Therefore, it is of paramount theoretical and practical significance to review the research achievements of the Women's Federation's organizational functions and reflect on its current reforms.

1.1 The Rise of Studies on the Organizational Functions of the Women's Federation Is a Corollary of the Evolution of Organizational Roles

According to Woman's Representative Assemblies and Articles of Organization in China, it can be found that the role of Women's Federation has undergone several cognitive stages, evolving from "women's mass organizations" to "mass organizations under the leadership of the Communist Party", from "social mass organizations" to "important social pillars of state power", from "mass and people's organizations" to "mass organizations, people's organizations, and important social pillars of state power". The roles have changed from single to multiple along with the continuous evolution, enrichment and development of organizational functions.

1.2 Research on the Functions of the Women's Federation is a Corollary of Social Development

When New China was founded, the foundation of women's society was weak, and the main demands of women's society were basically the same. At that time, the main manifestations of social contradictions were class struggles, and the main goal of organizational functions was to "liberate women's thoughts" which centered on breaking through the feudal ethics. In the initial stage of reform and opening up and socialist modernization, with

the unceasing advancement in a socialist market economy, globalization, information revolution, and science, manual production was no longer the main driving force for social operations, thus mitigating the “gender solubility”. Women’s society became increasingly autonomous, based on which “equality between men and women” was enshrined in the basic national policy in 2013. The new era has witnessed women’s more extensive demands for a better life. Not only did women have higher requirements for material and cultural life, but the requirements for democracy, the rule of law, fairness, justice, safety, and the environment also elevate. The functions of the Women’s Federation were further shifted to the pursuit of “women’s all-round development”.

1.3 Studies on the Organizational Functions of the Women’s Federation is a Realistic Demand for Deepening Reforms

Confronted with the new pattern and new demands of reforming groups and organizations in the new era, the Women’s Federation needs to solve all kinds of predicament and problems before its functions can be brought into full play. **The first problem is the growing tendency of losing connections with women in organizational functions.** To begin with, the hierarchy organizations are faced with grave involution, with the single work and activity method and the malady of “bureaucratism, formalism, aristocracy, and entertainmentization”. Secondly, with the salient “inverted pyramid” of the organizational structure, the connections with women have deteriorated. Finally, there is a credibility crisis in the organizations. The bridge link is partially absent and out of place, and formalism is observed in the work. **The second is the weakening of organizational functions.** On the one hand, the competition and cooperation among organizations are more challenging. Women’s federations’ cohesion with other non-governmental women’s organizations is relatively weak, and their role as a hub is still a crunch. On the other hand, organizational systems and mechanisms need to be completed, which entails them to further chime in with the systems of the party committee and government with clarified segregation of functions.

2. RESEARCH PROGRESS

Domestic research on the organizational functions of the Women’s Federation in China over the years has made a series of fruitful progress, mainly concerning organizational concept, organizational types of Women’s Federation, influencing factors, and reform paths.

2.1 Study on the Concept of Function

What is “the organization function of women’s federation”? The domestic scholars’ expressions are different from various points of view, which affect the

accuracy and comprehensiveness of the discussion to a certain extent. “Function”(the actions and activities assigned to or required or expected of a person or group), “function” (what something is used for), “responsibility” and “authority” are often used in parallel, and their accuracy is not exactly. Some scholars’ researches are unconscious of the functions of China’s national conditions and lack a grasp of the regularity; Some scholars focus on the study of the basic functions, but the overall grasp is not complete. These understanding of the connotation of the concept of the organization function of women’s federations leads to deviations of generalization or narrowing . The main reason for this situation is that the systematic research on women’s federations was rather late, and the connotation differences of related concept groups need to be reflected and the degree of theoretical perfection needs to be improved as well.

2.2 Research on the Types of Its Functions

Regarding the positioning and content logic of the organizational functions of the Women’s Federation, domestic research generally adopts an enumeration method to define them. As there is no consensus reached in the academic circle, the classification standards are various and diverse. (See Table 1)

Table 1
Types of the Organizational Functions of Women’s Federations

No.	Scholar (year)	Types of functions	Specific content of functions
1	Zhou Bo (2008)	Three	Basic, political and service functions. (Zhou, 2008, p.22)
2	Ch u Songyan (2014)		Administrative, representative, service and advocacy functions. (Xu, 2014, pp. 159)
3	Liu Jing (2015)		The social pillar of the ruling party, and the function of participating in social management and providing public services, representing and safeguarding women’s rights and interests, and bridging women’s organizations and other social groups. (Liu, 2015, p.20)
4	Sui Lin (2018)	Four	The function of serving women’s employment and entrepreneurship, safeguarding the legal rights and interests of women and children, improving women and children’s livelihood, and building family civilization, which can be summarized as entrepreneurship, people’s livelihood, rights protection, and building a better life for their families. (Sui, 2018, p.2)
5	Ding Fang (2012)	Five	Representative, participation, education, service, and networking functions; (Ding, 2012, p.15)
6	L o n g J i n g q i n (1997)	Six	Participation, education, representative, service, networking, rights protection functions. (Long, 1997, p.19)

2.3 Research on the Influencing Factors of Functions

The research on the influencing factors of the organizational functions of Women’s Federation primarily concentrates on the following four aspects: **First, the attributes of these organizations’ role.** Zhang Honglin points out that “in reality, Women’s Federation relies on the party and the government to provide labor, financial, material supports to accomplish various tasks, making it unrealistic for them at this stage to solely protect women’s rights and interests.” (Zhang, 2012, p.53) **The second is the transformation of the social structure.** Zhou Bo argues that the transformation of the economic system, the differentiation of women’s groups and the rise of women’s associations are factors that affect the organizational functions of the Women’s Federation. (Zhou, 2008, p.17) **The third is national modernization.** Chen Qiong states that the formation, evolution, integration and development of China’s Women’s Federation are boosted

by the construction of modern China and various social forces. (Chen, 2009) **The fourth is international power.** Wang Wen points out that China successfully organized the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, and especially a forum for women’s non-governmental organizations. This conference is of pivotal significance to the Women’s Federation. It is precisely due to this conference that the term NGO was introduced into China, prompting people to think about the identity of Chinese mass organizations and non-governmental organizations. (Wang, 2010, p.35)

2.4 Research on the Strategies of Improving the Functions

In response to the status quo of the organizational functions of the Women’s Federation, scholars have put forward three types of policy recommendations, which can be subdivided into empowerment, split, and large group reform models. (See Table 2)

Table 2
The Reform Model of the Organizational Functions of Women’s Federations

Reform model	Author	Main views
Empowerment	Liu Qunying	Underscore the fusion of group members and expand the coverage of women’s federation organizations participating in social management. Highlight the cohesion of women’s social organizations and extend their reach in social management. (Zhang, 2012, p.53)
	Mi Ruixin	Establish the Women’s Federation in non-public economic organizations. (Zhou, 2008, p.17)
Split	Ministry of Women’s Rights and Interests of Jiangsu Province	It tentatively proposed to grant six rights to the Women’s Federation, namely, the right to speak and inquire, to review and question, to criticize and suggest, to investigate and arbitrate, to prosecute and appeal, and to evaluate and assess. (Chen, 2009)
	Chen Qiong	“Set up a coordinated governance mechanism for women’s issues: At the national level, through the separation of party and government functions, Women’s Federation are grouped into women’s organizations within the party. Through the separation of the government and social organizations, place the National Working Committee on Children and Women under Women’s Federation back to the formal governmental gender department. At the social level, through social autonomy, treat Women’s Federation’ group members as social groups, where individual women voluntarily form or rejoin various organizations, becoming non-governmental organizations in a substantial sense. In this way, women’s organizations within the party and governmental gender department constitute the political power of women’s organizations, and various non-governmental women’s organizations form the social power of women’s organizations, thus realizing a relatively stable power structure. (Wang, 2010, p.35)
Large group	Sui Lin	“Break the pattern of ‘self-governance in group organizations, establish a large group work model, explore group organizations to carry out overall institutional reforms, so as to gather forces to integrate work functions, and build a sound working platform” (Liu, 2011, p.22)

3. REFLECTIONS ON REFORM

Against the backdrop of the new era, further research and investigations on the organizational functions of the Women’s Federation need to adopt new perspectives, new visions to meet the new requirements, for which deepening a new round of group organization reform is indispensable.

3.1 The Connotative Logic of the Organizational Functions and Positioning of Women’s Federation in the New Era

In November 2018, General Secretary Xi Jinping, approaching problems from a big picture perspective, repositioned the organizational functions of Women’s

Federation in the new era as “leading, serving, and connecting”. The leading function is the primary function, as providing direction and faith is the political guarantee of Women’s Federation in the new era; the serving function is the core function, which reflects the essential attributes and unique values of Women’s Federation and offers a solid social foundation; while the serving function is often fulfilled by the political attributes of the leading function and relying on administrative system mechanisms and resource advantages. The connecting function is instrumental, that is, building a hub-type communication platform. The leading and serving functions are merged with each other in the connecting function to realize a

balanced cycle of “input-output” in the political system. The triple functions constitute the functional positioning of the Women's Federation in the new era and jointly support its actual operation.

3.2 System Construction to Optimize the Organizational Functions of Women's Federation in the New Era

For the reform of the organization's functions of Women's Federation in the new era, we shall combine it with the current national conditions and bolster the external system. **First**, in terms of the leading function, deepen the development model of “Women's Federation led by the Party”. The party committee shall attach more importance to the issue, institutionalize and normalize the funding bottleneck of Women's Federation, and accelerate the formation of a modern social organization system with functions featured in the separation of the government and social organizations, clearly defined rights and responsibilities, and self-governance by law. **Secondly**, in terms of the serving function, we shall strive to ensure that women are developing at the same pace both economically and socially, incorporate the “women” variable in the national development indicators, empower them to protect their legal rights, build a harmonious and inclusive social culture, and create an international environment conducive to women's development. **Finally**, in terms of the connecting function, we shall focus on building a hub for Women's Federation, enhancing the advantages of the political system, and optimizing the organizational structure; integrating and organizing social networks, cultivating the strength of social organizations; consolidating the organizational position platform, and making good use of the “women's home.”

3.3 Mechanism Construction to Optimize the Organizational Functions of Women's Federation in the New Era

The reform of the organizational functions of the Women's Federation in the new era requires strengthening its own organizational construction and improving the construction of internal mechanisms. The current management structure within the Women's Federation is not holistic, with overlapped functions and challenges for administrative management. Therefore, it remains a practical problem in the reform of organizational functions regarding how to form a reasonable division of labor mechanism among the organizational systems and establish an operable and characteristic assessment mechanism of the Women's Federation. It is necessary to further straighten out the internal functional structural relationship of the organization. **Second**, underpin the relationship between the Women's Federation and women's social organizations We shall make efforts to empowering women's groups, to lead and integrate the

value pursuit of women's social organizations, and to form a social synergy that is upward, benevolent and united. We shall also step up cultivating and incubating female social organizations and enable them to take root in society and become critical assistance for the Women's Federation to connect with women.

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