Richard Haddock:
Welcome to the *East Asia Hotspots Podcast*, where we invite you to join us for chats with experts and scholars from around the world to talk about contemporary issues in East Asia. I'm the lead facilitator, Richard Haddock, with the George Washington University. Support of this podcast comes from the U.S. Department of Education's Title Six Grant for East Asian studies at the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs.

Richard Haddock:
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Richard Haddock:
Through these podcasts, we want to encourage dialogue about diverse perspectives in East Asian studies. Check on our website at nrc.elliot.gwu.edu for all our podcast episodes and info about East Asian studies at the George Washington University. Now let's start the conversation.

Richard Haddock:
Welcome to our listeners. Thank you so much for joining us for another installment of our *East Asia Hotspots Podcast*. Richard haddock here, program associate with the GW East Asia National Resource Center. I am joined here today by our distinguished guest, Professor Yue Hou, who is the Janice and Julian Bers assistant professor in the social sciences in the Department of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania.

Richard Haddock:
Her substantive research interests include authoritarian institutions, business state relations, the political economy of development and ethnic politics with a regional focus on China. Her book, *The Private Sector in Public Office: Selective Property Rights in China*, examines strategies Chinese private entrepreneurs use to protect property from expropriation. In 2015 to '16, she was a postdoctoral fellow at Penn Center for the study of contemporary China. She received her PhD in political science from MIT and her BA in economics and mathematics from Grinnell College. Professor Hou, welcome to the show.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Thanks for having me, Richard.

Richard Haddock:
Let's jump right into it. This episode will focus on your latest piece, co-authored with scholars Xinrui Feng and Mingxing Liu, titled Underrepresented Outperformers: Female Legislators in the Chinese Congress. Now this article explores the performance of female legislators in China's National People's Congress with regards to gender affiliation or not with the Chinese Communist Party and other related dimensions. What inspired or motivated you to explore this important topic?

Prof. Yue Hou:
Well, I'm glad we're starting with motivations here because I do have a story to tell that didn't make it to the paper. When I was doing research for my dissertation, which later becomes my first book, I met quite a number of sub-national legislators, or to be more specific, local People's Congress deputies in China, who were also private entrepreneurs. In that case, most of the interviews that I did happened in their offices.

Prof. Yue Hou:
There were one legislator who no longer had an office space in her district because her company was relocated to another city. She proposed that she meet up with me at a coffee shop. When I showed up at the coffee shop, she was already there and she was working on a legislative proposal. Again, at the time, she was working in a different city, but because she was still serving the local congress at the other location, she had to fly back once a month or so to attend meetings, to see government officials, all at her own expenses.

Prof. Yue Hou:
By the way, I should mention that most of the local and national legislators are part-time, so this woman was a businesswoman. While I did meet many other legislators, both men and women who were very serious about their job as a policymaker, but this particular female legislator left a strong impression in me.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Later, I continued to cure it, wonder about whether there are any differences between female and male legislators in China. My dissertation didn't end up focusing on gender, so I decided to come back to it. In the paper you just mentioned, we are focusing on legislators' performance at a national level, comparing male and female legislators, instead of at the local level, which I studied in my book, mostly because we have better data at a national level.

Richard Haddock:
Looking at the main topic of underrepresented outperformers, in a broad context, what is the role of the National People's Congress in China's governance, and are there any key parallels or differences you see between the NPC and other legislative bodies in, let's say, democracies?

Prof. Yue Hou:
Right, so NPC is China's national legislature, as you said. Its members exercise state power by passing laws and regulations, as well as supervising the national government, the appointment, and dismissing government officials at a national level. There are local level People's Congress that are in charge of local affairs and local policy making.

Prof. Yue Hou:

I would say the key difference between the National People's Congress in China and other legislative bodies in the Western or democratic context is that there is no parties and politics in the Chinese context. The Chinese Communist Party, or CCP for short, they monopolize political power in China and set the agenda. Legislators are not elected by the population, but they are, quote unquote, selected.

Prof. Yue Hou:
One thing I'd like to point out is that the People's Congress is not a rubber stamp institution, as some observers might argue. Legislators in China actually provide a valuable platform that allows some interest representation and interest articulation. For example, a bill has to go through an inter-agency consensus building phase and later a leadership review phase before it could move to the floor for voting.

Prof. Yue Hou:
In the process, you could see that various agencies that have their own interests and individuals from different agencies and backgrounds, they are building coalitions in the process to advance their own policy agendas in the process. I guess we can come back to it when we talk about collaborations among legislators.

Richard Haddock:
Another question about the NPC and its composition, so while the Chinese Communist Party, or CCP, holds a monopoly over political power, I don't believe it's the case that they're the only party represented in the NPC. Is that true, and what are the other parties, if at all, involved?

Prof. Yue Hou:
Right, so besides CCP, there are a number of democratic satellite parties. They represent sectors, for example, that are, I guess, educational elite likely to congregate in one party and agricultural interests are represented in another democratic party. Later in the paper, we're looking at how democratic parties, interests and individuals are represented in the National People's Congress.

Prof. Yue Hou:
That said, CCP is setting up the agenda. If a democratic party's proposal was inconsistent with CCPs interest, we wouldn't see a bill that's proposed by a democratic party's candidate eventually make it to the voting stage. That process is more difficult to observe because, in the data that we have, we can only observe results that already pass the first few phases. That is, we only see bills that already are vetted, so we wouldn't actually get to see the whole universe of legislative bills or proposals that could be coming from different parties. That would be a limitation of this dataset.

Richard Haddock:
I see. I bring that up, too, as we'll discuss later on, how non-CCP parties are factored into your studies on performance of legislators. Before going into that specifically, I also wanted to chat about what are the major historical trends and events with regards to female participation in Chinese politics and society, and

where does the CCP and the NPC fit in this broader context? How would you broadly characterize female participation in either the CCP or NPC?

Prof. Yue Hou:
Yeah, as we know, China is a socialist country and the one important finding in the broader gender literature is that women, in socialist contexts, seem to be doing better than their counterparts in that capitalist country, especially in the field of science, engineering, medicine, and other economic sectors. The People's Republic of China grew out of a communist revolution, where quite a number of female revolutionaries are still revered in the public discourse.

Prof. Yue Hou:
In CCP's political agenda, women's work has always been an essential part of its agenda. When we think about the earlier days in 1954, China passed its first ever constitution and the constitution grants equal rights to men and women. The chairman, Mao, who was the first leader of the People's Republic of China, famously proclaimed that women hold up half the sky. That was in 1955.

Prof. Yue Hou:
That was actually a pretty big deal. It was the first time that women's rights are formally recognized in the state. That definitely gave hope to millions of Chinese women, that they would have a say in a new China.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Let's fast forward to today's China, where men are still dominant in politics and in most of the other fields. In terms of politics, China's most important political body is the Politburo Standing Committee. That's the highest power of Chinese politics. There, we see no female politicians has ever made it.

Prof. Yue Hou:
One level below, which has the 25 member Politburo, the highest number of female representation was two. That happened in 2012 where two females have made it, but now the number is down to one. That's only one in 25 of the most powerful politicians.

Prof. Yue Hou:
When you look at provincial leaders, the numbers are a little better, but still not very good. Fewer than 10% of provincial leaders are women. The percentages are a little higher when we look at sub-provincial level, but they're nowhere near gender parity.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Back to the NPC that's the focus of this paper, women have consistently held up more than one fifth of our seats there even before NPC formally installed a gender quota of 22%. That was in 2008. So, Richard, you asked about other trends.

Prof. Yue Hou:

I guess I would like to also bring up female labor force participation data in China. On that front, China has been doing really well and I searched for data. The most recent data I could find was from 2010. In 2010, Chinese women's labor force participation was 68%. That number is actually much higher than even most of the western democracies, such as the U.S., whose number is about 59% and Germany was at 52%. If you compare other Asian countries, Japan was at 48% and India was at 29%.

Prof. Yue Hou:
There, you can see that Chinese women are really participating a lot in the labor market. I perhaps want to mention one more trend in the society, that is in the civil society, where in China, we observe a very vibrant me too movement starting around two, three years ago, maybe 2018. There have been a few quite high-profile me too court cases that have gained national attention.

Prof. Yue Hou:
The most famous case was this brave young woman named Zhou Xiaoxuan, who accused a national TV star of sexual harassment when she was an intern at his television station. Well, this case is still pending, but she has already become an important figure in the movement who encouraged more women to speak up. I know that many of my female friends are energized by her. I am very energized by her. I think she's fighting a really good fight and maybe a TV show should be made somewhere in the future.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Let me end this comment on that on the legal front. In 2020, China passed its first civil code, which expanded the definition of sexual harassment. Our data only covers the 12th National People's Congress, which was between 2013 and 2017, so it predates the me too movement. Based on our observations, it seems to be the case that policy makers are responding to public sentiments in China. We're going to continue observing what's going on between public opinion and the legislation.

Richard Haddock:
That's all super encouraging to hear. I'm wondering, what are your thoughts on some of the organizational or individual drivers for some of these trends. For instance, in the paper, you bring up mass organizations such as the All China Women's Federation, so if you had thoughts on how organizations like the Women's Federation or others are moving the needle on this discourse in China.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Yes. Women's Federation is a very important state affiliated organization. You can say that it's part of the government agency, but it's not as powerful as you say, as compared to, for example, in the Ministry of Education or other more powerful ministries, Minister of Finance, for example.

Prof. Yue Hou:
They have been pushing things on the legal front. For example, the anti-domestic violence law was primarily pushed by the Women's Federation, but again, a lot of the newer trends that we observe happen really at a grassroots level, rather than the Women's Federation, which is a top down organization.

Prof. Yue Hou:
I guess there, we just see a lot of energizing young actors who really observe what's going on in the world and they are strategizing and they are mobilizing, borrowing from international experiences. There, I just see a lot of energy. I don't think it's as organized, but it's definitely gaining momentum.

Richard Haddock:
Turning our attention then, now that we've discussed some of the broader historical and contemporary contexts to underrepresented outperformers, and this article highlights the finding that female legislators, while holding a disproportionately small number of seats in the NPC, about 20%, are comparatively more productive than their male counterparts in sponsoring legislative bills, as well as developing cohesion or collaboration.

Richard Haddock:
The article describes three factors that will be helpful to discuss this more closely, the first of which is collaboration. How does collaboration matter in China's legislative process and why are women more collaborative than men in the NPC?

Prof. Yue Hou:
First of all, I would like to thank you, Richard, for reading our paper so closely. You're exactly right, that we argue that collaboration matters greatly in the Chinese congress, both mechanically and organically. First of all, mechanically speaking, for a proposed bill to be considered by the NPC, it requires at least 30 signatures from deputies, usually from the same province or the delegation of the sponsor.

Prof. Yue Hou:
The signature collection process is when coalition building is taking place. A second collaboration, which I think is more organic, usually happens cross province. For instance, if, Richard, you're from the Beijing delegation and I am from the Shanghai delegation, and we are proposing a bill together on anti-domestic violence law, we each collected 30 signature from our own delegation, but now we are joining forces to make it a bigger bill.

Prof. Yue Hou:
This type of inter-delegation, inter-provincial coalition building is very important because it requires broader support from different regional and bureaucratic interests. The size of the signature pool also sends a stronger signal to the NPC leadership and the party leadership that this is an important issue, so we are looking at this kind of collaboration in the paper.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Well, we cannot fully answer the question of why women are more collaborative than men, but we explore a few possibilities. One possibility is that women are more likely to discuss issues with and find

allies in other women, especially during NPC plenary meetings that happen annually, where everyone meets in Beijing for two weeks with very intensive interactions.

Prof. Yue Hou:
I want to bring up the example of Congresswoman Zhao Yongqiu, who served two terms in the NPC, now retired and wrote a book about her experience. This is very rare, I want to say, for politicians in China who write about their experiences.

Prof. Yue Hou:
We don't have many of those memoirs to draw from, but she did mention how women colleagues in her delegation woke up early together, they all stayed in the same hotel, to go dress for the big days, how they visited each other's hotel room at night to continue discussion, and they celebrated International Women's Day together, which is March 8th every year, which happened to be the same time when they meet together for plenary sessions.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Those are very interesting to read about, and those astounding experiences sometimes translate into policy collaboration, but I should also say that women not only collaborate with other women, they also collaborate with men at a higher rate.

Richard Haddock:
The second factor that the article highlights that affects women's participation in the NPC is the double quota effect of institutionalizing a quota for female legislators and a quota for non-CCP legislators. Could you explain what is this double quota effect and how it has made an impact on the types of bills or discourse that are produced and passed?

Prof. Yue Hou:
What's unique about China's legislature is that it has many quotas. Besides the gender quota that was set about at 22% for the 12th NPC, the NPC also features, for example, a quota on the percentage of democratic satellite parties that we just talked about, also including legislators who have no party affiliation. They, together, need to fulfill a certain percentage of seats because those quotas are not exclusive.

Prof. Yue Hou:
A female legislator who comes from one of the satellite parties or has no party affiliation could fulfill two quotas simultaneously. In other words, these women are tasked with carrying both gender diversity and party diversity, so multiple dimensions of diversity tasks. Our research finds that these women are more active than women from the CCP, mostly because they do not have to comply with their party's direction as strictly as Communist Party members.

Prof. Yue Hou:

These non-CCP legislators are also more likely to bypass the influence of local government and the local CCP directions. Does this group produce certain types of bills? We find that overall, women are very well balanced in their interests. They not only care about gender issues, such as marriage, sexual violence, sexual harassment, children, but they're also more active in the economic and finance issues, rural affairs, etc.

Prof. Yue Hou:
As we discussed before, a lot of those satellites party members, they're highly educated and they work in the education sector. Many of the non-CCP delegates focus on issues related to education.

Richard Haddock:
Earlier, you were mentioning in the motivational example, talking to the part-time legislator that you met with, that she's a part-time legislator, an entrepreneur by trade. What do you see are various industries or sectors that might encompass more women legislators than other industries? For example, I think the People's Liberation Army has representation itself in the NPC, so is defense security or education or private enterprise particularly strong or well balanced with female participation?

Prof. Yue Hou:
Right, so PLA is a good example of less female representations. I think they have the smallest number of women. I'd need to go back to check the exact numbers. Individuals from the government sector and party leadership position, I think they are primarily men. That's because a lot of the top leadership positions are taken by men in the government and in the party.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Where we do see more female representation are sectors such as, we broadly call them public organization sectors, but that's a very big category or mass organization sectors. That includes hospitals, schools, NGOs. In Chinese, there's a very unique term called “Shiye Danwei.”

Prof. Yue Hou:
Those institutions are sort of affiliated with the state, but employees from those organizations are not state employees, so we combine all those people together and call those groups mass organization groups. That's really where you do see a lot of female legislators coming from.

Prof. Yue Hou:
In the private sector, I also want to say, China does send a lot of legislators or choose a lot of legislators from the business sector. There, I think we see a fair representation of women, but a lot of the CEOs, a lot of the business managers are men, so there we do not. I think that's an area where I can hope to see more female leaders in the future.

Richard Haddock:

The third factor presented in the article that contributes to female legislator productivity is female leadership. How has the development and presence of female leaders affected participation in the NPC, and how do you see female leadership growing either within the NPC or perhaps some of these other industries you mentioned, like the private sector, and how can that influence the legislature in China?

Prof. Yue Hou:
We did find that when a legislation or a provincial delegation has a female leader, female legislators from the same delegation are more likely to become a bill sponsor. Going back to Congresswoman Zhao's memoir that we just talked about, she did mention a role model, in fact. That was when she was working closely with a national female politician, whose name is Wu Yi. She was vice premier at the time.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Premier Wu came to her delegation and worked with her for two weeks. She was talking about how encouraged she was by the presence of such a strong and vocal female leader. That said, there are a very few female leaders in the NPC. Among the nine or 10 congressional committees there, only two were chaired by a woman and all delegations, all provincial delegations, including the PLA delegation, only 10% or 11% of leadership positions were taken by women.

Prof. Yue Hou:
On the leadership female leadership front in the NPC, there is a long way to go. In the business sector, there's still a long way; it's also a long way to go.

Richard Haddock:
Now this disproportionate productivity among female legislators, this outperformance, is it unique to the NPC in China? Do you see these factors you mentioned present in other legislative contexts around the world?

Prof. Yue Hou:
I would say that this finding is not uniquely Chinese. According to, for example, two American politics scholars, in the U.S. House of Representatives, on average, women sponsored about three more bills per Congress than men during the period of 1984-2004. In the Mexican case, there was a 2013 study where two scholars find that in the Mexican's Chamber of Deputies, women, on average, sponsored about 1.6 more bills than men.

Prof. Yue Hou:
In many studies in economics and political science, scholars have found a positive effect of gender quotas on female representation and candidate quality, but that's not universally the case. For example, in countries like Jordan, gender quotas did increase women's representation, but not the substantive representation and political power.

Prof. Yue Hou:

I guess another interesting comparison to have is to look at star politicians and in the U.S. right now, women constitute about 27% of all representatives in the House of Representatives, and not only do you guys have a powerful female Speaker of the House, they're also quite a few other high profile female legislators, such as AOC [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez], Ilhan Omar, etc. I guess we're all waiting for China's Nancy Pelosi or AOC to show up in the NPC.

Richard Haddock:
A brief question, too, about the administrative side of a governance in China. While this conversation focuses on the NPC and female participation in legislative bodies, do you see that there's any impact or trends with regards to how policies are implemented and whether female participation in the administrative capacity of China is changing, or is it largely separated that maybe female participation might be more robust in the NPC than it is on the administrative side of rolling out policies?

Prof. Yue Hou:
Yeah, I think you're right. The female representation in the NPC on the legislative side is stronger than on the administrative side, because going back to the number of the provincial leadership, both in the government and in the party, female representation was about 10%. How does that translate to policy implementation and different policies at sub-national level? I have a colleague who's working on a paper that actually looks at a risk preferences between male and female politicians.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Her initial finding, I think, is that women are slightly more risk averse than men. When they implement policies, there are less aggressive. For example, in the land acquisition area, women will be perhaps more considerate in land taking practices and perhaps more likely to be more, I guess, supportive of individuals whose lands are taken. That paper, I think, is still a working paper, but I'm really looking forward to see what her finding is.

Prof. Yue Hou:
I think another project that I've talked to my colleague about is to look at the drinking culture in the Chinese governments. I think it has gotten a lot better after Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign. Before 2013, when you perhaps went to a dinner banquet, you did see a lot of drinking among government officials and entrepreneurs who are invited to those parties.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Now if you're looking at alcohol sales, they have gone down quite dramatically since 2013. Perhaps that environment would also make female politicians, female civil servants, to be more likely to enjoy those conversations, to actually talk more about policies.

Richard Haddock:
Yeah, and I actually wonder, too, how these behaviors or responses to these behaviors also affect women's participation in the NPC, such as building collaboration. That strikes me as if there's changes in

how connections can be made or meetings in or outside of committee can be processed between different members, I feel like perhaps the gender lenses can also inform how those connections are made.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Yeah, definitely. Informal culture matters a lot. Again, we do not have too many qualitative evidences to draw from, but according to that memoir, we read women like to talk about policy issues in the hotel room where they can feel cozy and at ease, where perhaps if their male colleagues are just drinking in the lobby or at a restaurant, you probably would imagine different conversations are going on.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Going back to the data, there are a lot of female/male collaboration going up. I think more work needs to be done to really understand what's going on behind those collaborations.

Richard Haddock:
Looking towards the present and future, what would you identify as the most significant challenge or challenges to women's participation in politics and decision-making in China, and what do you see are ways that individuals, mass organizations or even governmental bodies are addressing these challenges?

Prof. Yue Hou:
Yeah, so I guess so far I have been pretty positive to look at positive changes in politics and in the society, I have to say that the biggest challenge is patriarchy, but the good news is that people are fighting patriarchy everywhere. Women and their allies in China are learning from international experiences in the U.S., in Japan, in the Nordic countries, etc.

Prof. Yue Hou:
A more specific challenge, I guess, is that many women do not wish to be in politics nowadays. I think we just touched upon it. It is a taxing job, long hours, little pay and a lot of social events, and it is so male dominant. When I think about myself, I don't have any female friend who works in the government or who wishes to be in politics in China.

Prof. Yue Hou:
I'm sure political leaders in China also realize that women are productive in a legislative performances, and that they're productive, too, in other public and administrative positions. I would say that leaders in China should really try to incentivize women to think about a job or to really start a job in politics. Perhaps they should also try hard to find a Chinese AOC or Chinese star, so that young women and girls will be inspired and want to be in politics.

Richard Haddock:
That would definitely be a very positive and encouraging development. For scholars, students, and educators interested in the topic of female participation in politics in China or female participation in politics globally, what might be resources that you'd recommend for further study?

Prof. Yue Hou:
I do have a lot of recommendations, so perhaps I should just stick with China. In our earlier conversation, we mentioned Women's Federation, so I would like to recommend one book on the earlier waves of feminist movement and state led feminist movement in China. I really enjoyed this book by professor Zheng Wang from University of Michigan. The book title is *Finding Women in the State: Socialist Feminist Revolution in the PRC from 1949 to 1964*. I think that gives readers a good historical background of the scene.

Prof. Yue Hou:
On the contemporary period, a few sociologists are doing very great work on women in China. I would like to recommend Professor Yun Zhou from Michigan and Yue Qian from UBC. I think I'll send you the notes, the transcript.

Prof. Yue Hou:
In the news media, I enjoy works by Amy Qin from the New York Times. She has written quite a few interesting pieces about women's experience in the present day China. I think I'll add my recommendations with a podcast on a podcast. This podcast is in Chinese. It's called Haima Xingqiu [海马星球] and in English, it's called Seahorse Planet. The host is this badass Chinese feminist who now lives in Germany, and she interviews a lot of female leaders in different industries. I really enjoy listening to those female voices.

Richard Haddock:
Well, Professor Hou, thank you so much for such a rich and thought provoking discussion. I look forward to studying and tracking this issue more closely with your work as well as those that you recommended. Thank you so much for joining us.

Prof. Yue Hou:
Thank you, Richard. It's been a pleasure talking to you.

Richard Haddock:
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