

## **Chinese Feminism in Action**

Feminist activities spontaneously emerged in the 1980s post-Mao China. In the past decade since the Fourth UN Conference on Women, Chinese feminist activism has developed quite rapidly in terms of its scope and organizational building. The China site of the Global Feminisms project mainly focuses on recording the development of major feminist non-governmental organizations. These NGOs have played prominent roles in advancing women's interests and consciously made efforts to build feminist organizations. A few officials of the Women's Federation are also among our interviewees as the relationship between the Women's Federation and the NGOs as well as the transformation of the Women's Federation are of important concerns to Chinese feminists. Here we highlight both feminist strategies in mainstreaming gender and feminist activism to empower women at the grassroots level.

### **Chen Mingxia**

**Chen Mingxia is a researcher at the Institute of Law of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. She is one of the founders of the Chinese Anti-Domestic Violence Network, the largest organization of the kind in China, and the current president of this organization.**

Take for instance, our anti-domestic violence project. From June 2000, we have worked on this project. This project encompasses fifteen small projects; one for example is an oral history and another concerns legislation. I do not work on the oral history project. This is one of our projects that fall under the umbrella of the larger anti-domestic violence project. They interview women for this project. In the interview process the interviewer and the woman who is the victim of domestic violence reflect on her experience of violence together. In the meantime the conversation enables the interviewee to reclaim her rights. Through the process she will not only be able to recognize that being a victim of domestic violence is not her problem--in the past these women often thought that they were to blame. Moreover she will be able to stand up and oppose this kind of violence. In the end, some people, who were interview subjects,

became volunteers for the anti-domestic violence program. Therefore I feel that this process tells us there is a very big difference between the two approaches: you stand in an observer's standpoint and research these women or you stand with them together to research women's issues. In this way we empower ourselves and we all raise our consciousness. This is our own process. I think this is an example.

Moreover, we also have held many trainings. For instance we have carried out trainings for victims and lessons for abusers. I think this process also involves introducing men to feminism or revealing to men how harmful domestic violence is. This allows him to recognize that actually he himself is also one kind of victim. What kind of victim is he? He lives in a kind of male-dominated society. This kind of masculinist culture and male control are harmful to men. They cause many problems such as the inequality between men and women, the notion that men are superior and women are inferior, and so on. After people see issues in this way, we can move towards a society of equality, of gender equality. That is the goal of our project.

I can talk about another example in our attempt to have some kind of intervention in the legislative process. I have participated in this work and I am one of the main participants. We came to realize that our laws must reflect the idea of gender equality. Take the female victim of domestic violence for instance. A woman who has been abused over an extended period of time takes matters into her own hands and kills her husband. How do you protect this kind of woman? How do you ensure that during her trial she has the rights that she should have and she receives a less severe sentence? Also for instance the application of theories like "oppressed woman syndrome" in our project will give us a gender perspective in our legislative process when we consider laws concerning evidence collecting, the definition of evidence, providing protection and stopping domestic violence. Thus we can propose innovative legislative ideas that have a gender perspective. We have already offered some suggestions on the anti-domestic violence legislation to the National People's Congress.<sup>1</sup> This draft was already submitted to the Tenth Session of the National People's Congress Legislation Committee. This kind of process and this kind of work are accomplished because we have employed such notions and feminist ideas. Therefore we could organize the experts and accomplish these actions. I think this is a good example. But in the past...I think the time period before the 1990s, we simply upheld the notion of "fairness and justice" for the abstract man in the law. (page 6) 4m

Our anti-domestic violence project began in June 2000. I could be considered one of the initiators of this project, but I was not the earliest organizer. I think that the initiator of this project was a group, which was composed of several people. Our initial participants were many people from different organizations. This brought together experts and scholars from the fields of philosophy, the law, sociology, social workers, medicine, journalism, psychology and so on. The people in charge of each sub-project were either scholars above an associate professor's rank or women activists. We gathered together to do the work of opposing domestic violence, which was carried out in 15 sub-projects. This project currently has already entered its second stage. I was a coordinator in the first

---

<sup>1</sup> The People's Congress is the legislative body of the People's Republic of China.

stage. The so-called “coordinator” is the person who coordinates all of the various people’s efforts. (page 8) **lm**

Therefore I feel that these projects were all very good, but I do not want to talk about what I, as an individual, have done, because as I said earlier, the founders of this project were a collective and there were several NGOs participating as well. From the very beginning we all felt that it was very important to emphasize coalitions between various NGOs. Many NGOs have joined in our network. We currently have already developed our network members in twenty-four provinces, cities and autonomous regions<sup>2</sup> throughout the country. Our network members include the Women's Federation, members of the Association of Legal Studies,<sup>3</sup> research institutions, and even members from local communities, such as the local police station, public security bureau, and the Bureau of Civil Affairs.<sup>4</sup> Therefore such a wide network system certainly has a very good influence on many levels of society. (page 9)**50s**

## **Liu Bohong**

**Liu Bohong is a researcher and the Assistant Director of the Women’s Studies Institute of the All China Women’s Federation. Liu Bohong has been the coordinator and leading participant of many feminist projects both in and outside the Women’s Federation system.**

I think in terms of Chinese cultural tradition, which includes academic policies and ideological control, China really has a unique history and its own special characteristics. China is not a Western democratic country; it is a socialist country where the party leads everything. Based on these circumstances, no matter if it is feminism (*nuxing zhuyi*)<sup>5</sup> or gender egalitarianism, in China this kind of work needs scholars who have conscience, ideas, and intelligence, and who can make strategies and ways of operating based upon our national conditions within a scope of what the government and society will accept. Scholars have many ideas and suggestions and everybody probably uses all kinds of different methods, and thus, their results may also be different. As for me, I am the vice president of the All-China Women's Federation’s Research Institute. Therefore I am one

---

<sup>2</sup> There are several “autonomous regions” in China, where ethnic minorities live.

<sup>3</sup> The Association of Legal Studies is a national organization in China. Its members consist of legal scholars and research institutions.

<sup>4</sup> The bureau of civil affairs oversees administrative management on the community level, grassroots organizations, relief and welfare programs, and services to the military, and so on.

<sup>5</sup> Both terms can be translated as “feminism.” *Nuxing zhuyi* is literally “female-ism” or “feminine-ism.” This translation emerged in the early twentieth century but reemerged in the 1980s. Some believe that this term has less political but more biological connotations than *nuquan zhuyi*. *Nuquan zhuyi* is literally “woman- rights-ism” Since *quan* can mean both rights and power, the term can be interpreted as the “ism” of women’s power and rights. In history, the Chinese Communist Party has defined *nuquan zhuyi* as bourgeois, because of the potential conflicts between gender struggles and class struggles. In contemporary China, this term is primarily used to refer to Western feminism and often conveys a negative image of a men-hating woman hungry for power. For this reason, many Chinese feminists avoid calling themselves *nuquan zhuyi zhe*. See Ping-chun Hsiung, Maria Jaschok, et.al, eds. *Chinese Women Organizing* (2001) and Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment* (1999) for detailed historical reviews.

of the administrative officials of the organization. One of my greatest responsibilities is to promote the research results in the field of women's studies so that they bring about the greatest degree of transformation that is possible. Therefore I do my best to find opportunities and channels that are acceptable within the existing structure to enable women's studies research to affect policy-making. When the government was working to revise China's Marriage Law<sup>6</sup>, I participated in this process as the representative for the Chinese Women's Research Society.<sup>7</sup> All of our suggestions were not accepted, but some were. Although very many of our opinions and suggestions were not accepted, we have made progress since in the past we would not have been able to be a part of this process at all. (page 11-12) [lm10s](#)

We call the project with the International Labor Organization the "3 + 1" program. The "3" refers to the three-party structure in labor organizing. In China this encompasses the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, the All China Federation of Trade Unions,<sup>8</sup> and the Chinese Enterprise Confederation<sup>9</sup>. The "1" is the All-China Women's Federation. We gave our own project a set goal. We hoped that through this project, we could shift our conceptualization of women's development from "Woman in Development" (WID) to "Gender and Development" (GAD). Our government and the Women's Federation have tried to solve the pressing, real problems faced by women. But they do not pay enough attention to changing gendered structures and systems. For instance, the Women's Federation has promoted activities such as "constructing good families with five kinds of harmonious relations", "two studies, two competitions", "women's outstanding achievements" and so on, including the empowerment campaign. All of these programs are carried out without changing gender relations and the structures. Also, in their work to help the laid-off women to gain employment again, they encourage these women to do service work in their communities. This places these women in non-regular employment. In the employment structure they are engaged in the lowest level of work. The Women's Federation's goals stop at meeting the government's goals of reducing the rate of unemployment and helping these women find work. However, no one has considered the deeper issues of social security, career development, women's decreasing position in the employment structure, and the traditional view that men should tend to matters outside the home, while women should be concerned with matters within the home. This kind of mentality still finds its way into programs for women's development. It simply adds women in development; it regards women as the object of development

---

<sup>6</sup> Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China: Adopted at the Third Session of the Fifth National People's Congress on September 10, 1980, and amended in accordance with Decision Regarding the Amendment (of Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China) passed at the 21st Session of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress on April 28, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> The Chinese Women's Research Society (CWRS), founded in 1999 as a non-profit organization, is a national organization of scholars who are interested women and gender issues.

<sup>8</sup> The All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is a mass organization of the working class formed voluntarily by Chinese workers and staff members. Founded in 1925, it now has a membership of 134 million in more than 1.7 million primary trade union organizations. (source: ACFTU website)

<sup>9</sup> The Chinese Enterprise Confederation is a non-profit national organization consisting of enterprises and entrepreneurs. Its goals include protecting the rights of enterprises, professional disciplining, and services to enterprises.

and the development of women as a means of the government to realize its goals of social development. How do we transform our way of thinking about development issues to be people-centered and women-centered? How do we make women as the subjects of development? How do we change the gender structure, the system and the institutions as well as change the unfair divisions of labor and social roles when we promote women's re-employment? How do we achieve a new understanding of developing issues through these kinds of work? All of these concerns about women and development are included in our projects. Because the current conditions of society, culture, education, and also some systemic reforms in China have not achieved a certain level, we cannot all of a sudden achieve the levels promoted by GAD<sup>10</sup>. But since human society has already developed to the stage where GAD can be our goal, we should try to implement the high standards in GAD when we consider the issue of Women in Development. We cannot always consider these matters in isolation. This is one of the ideals of our project, but we are not sure to what degree we will be able to achieve this ideal. However, we continue to work hard at this. This work includes how to best convince leaders of the Women's Federation and the leaders of the three parties involved in the system. We are frequently asked to give lectures. When we give lectures we introduce our new research on such topics as how to use gender to analyze policies, how to change and improve policies, and how to bring gender into the mainstream, etc. This work is extremely tiring. Sometimes I will jokingly say, "This work is like leaving your own land uncultivated while plowing the fields for others." What I mean is that we do not have the time to complete any of our own projects, but everyday we still have to go to give lectures. Sometimes this conflict is indeed a problem. (page 21-22) 2m30s

## **Gao Xiaoxian**

**Gao Xiaoxian is the Secretary General of the Shaanxi Research Association for Women. This organization has focused on promoting rural women's development.**

From 1996 we started to carry out some projects. Especially after we carried out rural development projects, we entered the development area. We were... I think in the development area and providing services, our organization was different from the majority of organizations--most people in our organizations were scholars who had the ability to do research. We carried out our research... In terms of methodology we called our research "action research"; I learned it from feminist methodologies. Before we do a project we design a theoretical framework. Our projects aim to have some kind of intervention. During the process we continually evaluate our projects and make necessary adjustments. Finally in the end we have to evaluate the achievements of our work. This then further enriches our theory. This is where our Shaanxi research association is different from some pure development organizations. When we engage in countryside development projects we pay special attention to the question of gender and development; there is the issue of how to localize theories. We have made a lot of explorations and we have written a series of articles about this. In this area we promote the mainstreaming of gender. We have also provided gender awareness trainings for

---

<sup>10</sup> GAD, or Gender And Development, is a newer approach to gender equality in development programs. The Women And Development (WID) approach emphasizes "women" not "gender".

many organizations and international agencies. We don't have the statistics... I am not sure... But the other day they roughly counted and found that in the past several years we have given more than two hundred gender training workshops. (24-25) 2m

When did we start to move from development circles to non-governmental organization circles? That was in 2002 or 2003. At first we only paid attention to internally constructing our organizations. We only hoped this organization could continue to operate successfully. In 2003 with the onslaught of SARS... April 20 was probably the turning point of the crisis. The Health Ministry publicly talked about the pandemic. At the time we were doing a project in Shanyang. We realized we could not get around in town. We postponed a lot of our trainings. So we thought we could write some articles—we had been asked to write about our work. Eventually when we returned to Xi'an, SARS also appeared there. The media kept reporting the panic—here salt was sold out and there masks were sold out. We realized that SARS had transformed from a public health crisis to... we felt that if it was not handled well, it could become a social crisis. In this time, as an NGO how could we serve as a bridge between citizens and the government, mobilizing the people to work together with the government to deal with this difficult situation? We spent five days, an entire five days to formulate our plans. We planned, designed and found funding for a set of three big posters and posted them everywhere in all communities in Xi'an. These posters had a huge impact and were very beneficial. The media said that we handled a matter that the government should have been responsible for. I feel that during the crisis as an NGO, a feminist NGO, we generated... I think that society was able to see the strength of NGOs and the role that NGOs could play in society. (page 25-26) 2m15s

## **He Zhonghua**

**He Zhonghua is the Director of the Lijiang Research Association of Minority Women and Development in Yunnan. Her ethnicity is Naxi. Before her retirement, He Zhonghua was a researcher at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences and the Director of its Institute of Sociology.**

It was after the 1995 World Conference on Women when I especially felt the importance of women's participation in society. Thus, I applied for a project in this area at that time. This project investigated the participation and development of ethnic minority women in Yunnan province. That project involved more than a dozen ethnic minorities. So I went to visit many places. The investigation had a tremendous impact on me, both emotionally and intellectually. From this time forward, I could not help but become more engaged in this kind of work. I have basically invested all of my energy towards working on these projects. When I had any free time I would reflect on what I have felt and what I have realized during the process and then wrote them down. This is basically what I did in the process. For these two years, I have become more involved in these processes. I have also personally developed where I came to understand that we should not consider ourselves as the messiah. Instead, we should share achievements, experiences, and hardship with our sisters. I feel that we must look at things from their perspective; we should not be



condescending, right? This is extremely important. I really think that this is extremely important for my research. I have learned a lot in this aspect. 1m45s

In the last two years, I participated in the American Nature Conservancy's "Photovoice" project<sup>11</sup>. As for the original intent of the Photovoice project, it attempted to... The American Nature Conservancy and the Yunnan Provincial government collaborate to form a nature protection plan for the "Three Rivers Area"<sup>12</sup> of the northwestern Yunnan. This area was especially precious because of the diversity of animals and plants and its dense multiplicity of cultures. Many things that have already vanished in other areas of the world still exist there, in terms of both nature and culture. Therefore in order to make a plan, cameras were given to the local farmers. They decided what to take photos of on their own; we did not tell them what sorts of photos that they should take or not take. We told them the goals of the project. They would speak about their thoughts, their perspective, and what they wanted to say through these pictures. After we did this, in my gender perspective, I felt this was a part of women's capacity building. Moreover, it can also be considered as an attempt to enable women to directly participate in significant policy-making. This is the way that I look at this project. (page 9-10) 1m30s

## Zhang Li Xi

**Zhang Li Xi is the president of the Chinese Women's University, the only university that has established the department of Women's Studies in China. Starting from 2006 Women's Studies has been listed as a major on the university admission catalog.**

The China Women's University is then placed in this unique position. It both falls under

---

<sup>11</sup> **Photovoice** is an innovative community involvement concept which provides cameras and film to local people in order to document and communicate their rich environment and unique cultures. After selecting four to five villages interested in using Photovoice, The Nature Conservancy holds meetings to explain the project and selects volunteers from a range of ages in each village. Participants receive cameras, film, and basic photography training. Over the course of a year, they capture images of their everyday life and work, religious rituals, and family activities, with a focus on their interaction with the surrounding environment. At regular meetings, the groups share their photographs and discuss the issues and themes they illustrate. At the end of each project, copies of the photographs with their stories and themes are presented to conservation site planners, public officials, local communities and other stakeholders. The specific goals of the Photovoice Project are to provide: A concrete way for local people to record what they value about culture and nature and to define how natural and cultural resources can be protected. It is well-suited to remote rural areas where people have had minimal access to education and few opportunities to give voice to their own, unique perspectives. A chance for communities to shape policy. Villagers need a forum to have their voices heard, in order to increase their stake in the outcomes of conservation planning. A specific process to document natural and cultural resources in a rapidly changing China. For additional information see the Nature Conservancy homepage: <http://nature.org/>

<sup>12</sup> This area is recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage. Consisting of eight geographical clusters of protected areas within the boundaries of the Three Parallel Rivers National Park, in the mountainous north-west of Yunnan Province, the 1.7 million hectare site features sections of the upper reaches of three of the great rivers of Asia: the Yangtze (Jinsha), Mekong and Salween run roughly parallel, north to south, through steep gorges which, in places, are 3,000 m deep and are bordered by glaciated peaks more than 6,000 m high. The site is an epicentre of Chinese biodiversity. It is also one of the richest temperate regions of the world in terms of biodiversity.

the guidance of the All-China Women's Federation, because it is the All-China Women's Federation's subordinate school, but at the same time it also is under the guidance of the Ministry of Education. This is because degree granting education in China falls under the Ministry of Education. So therefore we have two supervisory bodies. From the point of view of the All-China Women's Federation, we undertake the responsibilities of training women cadres, implementing equality between men and women, which is a basic state policy, advocating for the equality of the sexes and encouraging the spirit of the "Four Selves"<sup>13</sup> among women and so on. We take on these duties. Therefore this kind of women's research... for the All-China Women's Federation researching women's issues is a natural part of one's work. Because of this, we are different from other universities. I often jokingly say that if professors at other universities want to teach women's studies courses, it is like struggling for a bowl of food to eat. Since women's studies is not an established discipline, they have to fight for time and resources to teach. However at the Chinese Women's College, we do not need to fight for our bowl of food; what we do is teach women's studies courses. Therefore researching and studying women's issue at the Chinese Women's College is natural. But at the same time we also fall under the guidance of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education supervises the construction of our curriculum, the majors that we offer, and supervises the degree and direction of the development of the institution. In this way we are severely limited in what we do. For example you have a women's studies department-- we have established a women's studies department, but what degrees does the department of women's studies issue to the graduates? What diploma do they receive? I do not know. If you want to recruit women's studies undergraduate students, you can't. Why? Women's Studies is not considered a primary or secondary discipline. We cannot recruit women's studies students and therefore we can not give these students diplomas. Because of this you are absolutely limited.

But under this kind of situation, as for me personally, although you have challenges, you also have very big opportunities. This time I came by my work as a college president by chance. I could say that I am a voluntary feminist. I wholeheartedly identify with, accept, and approve many feminist viewpoints. These viewpoints, strictly speaking, adhere to the Women's Federation's viewpoints and moreover are the same as our state policy. In the end, our final goal is gender equality. At the same time I am different from other people; I am extremely lucky to have some authority. Because I have some authority, I can appropriately act within my scope to handle matters how I want to. So under these kinds of circumstances, we have established the women's studies department. The women's studies department is now independent from the social work department. The social work department was the predecessor of what we call the women's movement department. The women's movement department changed its name to the social work department because we wanted to bring women's work into line with the discipline of social work. Women's work is regarded as part of social work, but women as community, is the focus of the social work department. Therefore, the social work department's curriculum, discussion topics and research all center on the development of women. This is what makes us unique. When we established the women's studies department, we wanted to specialize in women's research to train researchers who could then go on to other institutions to do research. We wanted to have people with these abilities. But in the department of social work, we focused on the operational aspect. Therefore, in this kind of situation, we established a women's studies department. We recruited

---

<sup>13</sup> "Four Selves" refers to women's self-esteem, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-improvement.



students for the women's studies department through the social work department but with a women's studies focus. Therefore, we used loopholes in this policy to create a path away from the marginality in order to develop women's studies. First I was the director, then the vice-president of the college and then the president. I was the only president of an official Chinese women's college in the whole country. The first challenge to face was that our position didn't mean we had gender consciousness, that we consciously developed women's research, or that we carried on activities that promoted gender equality. Then when I became president, you could say that I had authority and at the same time I had a space for action. If you do not have this space, it seems among other university presidents, even though they may have this authority, they still are not useful. Sometimes the area under their control does not allow them to create their own space for action. I happen to have both the authority and the space. For me, this is an extremely good opportunity. I can do things that I want to do. For example, some university presidents also encourage and approve of feminism but they may not be able to carry out these things. There are some people who really approve of these ideas, but they cannot continue to carry them out. Therefore, from this point of view, I really was quite lucky. I could rather naturally unify my way of thinking, my ideals and my work. Also, the focus of the school's research supports topics that are related to women. The point was extremely explicit. Therefore, at the China women's college, your research proposal has to be relatively focused on women's issues, but any aspect of women's issues. Because we have a variety of departments- although we have nine departments and more than thirty different areas – women's literature - of specialization. These thirty different majors all can be related with women. You can study women's literature, women's health, kindergarten principals' gender training, etc. We bring together all of our areas of specialization with women's education. It starts in the curriculum but we have also started a required course for the entire school. This course is called women's studies. This course is not only a forty plus hour Introduction to Women's Studies. In fact in class discussions, we want to focus on the essence of this subject area. There are different topics-- for instance, women and society, women and health, women and employment, and so on. It immerses students in the context of different topics. In this way, every department - in this way you are a China women's college student and you must take this class. I think this is quite unique in the country.

## **Li Huiying**

**Li Huiying is a Professor of sociology at the Central Party School, an institution that provides training for government officials of middle and high rankings. There, she is the key figure there creating curriculum on women and gender.**

In reality what we use is the concept of gender. Actually we used feminist discourse in our trainings for the Central Party School's leading cadres. This goal was reached in this way. I realized through this process that you can accomplish things by taking the initiative instead of passively waiting for orders. Working in this way will bring life some very fresh things. You could change yourself into a much more proactive person, a person with agency. I feel that in this aspect that feminism stresses activism. Feminism is not only a theoretical concept; it encourages you also to take action. For me this includes...in 2000...how we acted to introduce a gender curriculum, including Women's Studies classes, into the graduate program at the Central Party School. In 1999 we succeeded in getting the permit to create a M.A. program in the department of sociology. Now we could recruit master's students. At this time we thought about how to successfully bring gender training into the sociology department's graduate curriculum. So I proposed we create a subfield, "gender and public policy." In this way we could

recruit some master's students who specialized in gender studies. These seven or eight master's sociology students are required to take all of the courses. In this way we can introduce many gender theories to the students. I think that those of us who engage in women's studies actually have a very important responsibility to spread these ideas in China.

So at that time we wanted to do this. But we encountered the problem of explaining the meaning of "gender and public policy" to people, especially the concept of "gender." At that time the head of my department called me and asked me what exactly was "gender." She found the usage of the word "gender" was extremely new; she had never heard of it before. So I tried to explain this concept to her. I said that currently this new concept was emerging outside of China and this was a big intellectual tide in the world. Women's Studies courses were already being offered in a lot of different countries. So in this sense, if we could offer women's studies courses, we were going to lead the intellectual trend. At the time I felt that we were doing well. Because our sociology curriculum was new, we had to, as individuals, insist that we move in this direction, and insist on including the new Women's Studies courses. We had several rounds of debates about the question of whether this course was necessary and whether we should incorporate it in the curriculum. Fortunately, we had the women's research center and also a few teachers that were focusing their attentions on these kinds of issues. We became a powerful force that pushed for including Women's Studies courses in the curriculum. We tried to overwhelm them with the sheer force of our convictions. The number of teachers in our group definitely helped to convince people. So because of our persistence and hard work, we were successful in setting the required courses and the subfields of our graduate program. I believe that the reason we were successful was because of how diligently we worked toward this goal. In the traditional sociology curriculum there was absolutely no course like this. However after we took this action we were able to incorporate our courses. So up until this point, in the three classes in the sociology department, we have made them take women's studies classes. One of these classes is the master's curriculum, the curriculum for graduate students studying for a higher degree.

We also have graduate students who work as public servants and also take classes. They are all above a certain administrative rank. They can take some classes here and pass a test in order to attain credentials in sociology, however they will not obtain the degree. These people all currently work and are all leading cadres. In this two-year program, they take weekend classes. In class, we integrate social policies and the contents of gender theories. Another class that we offer is independent studying with advisors, available for officials with higher ranks who also work while attending graduate classes. They are provincial level cadres. Thus every six months they attend one session. "Gender and Public Policy" is technically an elective course in their curriculum, however they almost have to take this class. This is our "Chinese characteristic."<sup>14</sup> Although it seems to be an elective course, we actually make it required and insert the gender

---

<sup>14</sup> *Zhongguo tese* in Chinese. It literally means "Chinese characteristics," often appearing in official language to describe the uniqueness of Chinese experience and their exploration in Chinese socio-political policies. Li Huiying here uses it jokingly.

contents into the program. So now we currently have students studying gender in several classes.

So I think that we are integrating research and teaching, like this. During this process, a lot of...well, you are facing this kind of situation: on the one hand, in order to understand what gender is and what feminism means, you have to skim through a large amount of foreign books and materials. On the other hand, you have to consider the best way to present this information so that Chinese students will accept these ideas. What exactly is the situation in China? Gender theories are always located where Chinese and Western culture collide with each other.

Thus, I feel that one of the great things about feminism is that it can give you a broad space to think. Feminism includes many different streams of thought and many different points of view. Thus, I believe that this is really inspirational for us. In terms of the concept of gender, I think it can be analyzed on many different levels. Discussion of gender often brings about the question of whether you can bring these western ideas to the Chinese situation. I believe that it is absolutely necessary to bring some of these international feminist ideas into Chinese culture. Especially important are the foundational theories and basic methods. By "theory" I do not mean western theories. Associating "theory" with the West is...well, this way of thinking itself already treats China as isolated. In reality feminism in the Third World, in developing countries, is very popular. I am talking about this kind of internationalized feminisms. In the past, feminism has actually theorized experiences of women in many different countries. I believe that in this sense, feminism is very open, and feminism itself is constantly developing and changing.

When you come to know these theories and then teach them in a class, you should not only teach others' ideas as they are. It is better to take these ideas and make them relevant to the Chinese situation. So when we teach feminism we always need to consider how to meld the two together and how to decide what to teach. Moreover, currently, as feminism develops in China, this also involves rethinking western feminisms. Well, now, I feel...I am thinking that Chinese feminism from the early 1990s to the present, for the most part has been a period of translating and borrowing outside theories. This has been a continual process and it is very necessary, since if you do not introduce foreign works and theories, you may never really understand what other people are doing and talking about. So we must bring them in. Only by doing this can you then begin to compare. You have to see which theories are universal and which perhaps have to be adapted to the Chinese situation. I think Moser<sup>15</sup>... she talks about "triple roles." She asserts that developed countries and developing countries are not the same. In most developed countries the sexual division of labor is strongly evidenced: men are in charge of external matters, while women are in charge of the home. However in developing countries being a woman does not imply only one kind of role. Most of these women do not only stay in the home. Women in the Chinese countryside are definitely like this. So many women's studies scholars have gone to many different countries to do research.

---

<sup>15</sup> Li Huiying is referring to Caroline Moser. Her article is titled, "Gender Planning in the Third World" and can be found in Wang Zheng and Du Fangqin, eds. *Selected Works on Gender Studies*. 1998.

They then discover that there are different phenomena in different areas of the world. In China, an agricultural country, I think there are many phenomena that clearly reflect the differences between the developed versus the developing countries. For example, in the West there is often an emphasis on the sexual division of labor. Why? Because it is everywhere in life. But scholars don't pay much attention to the marriage system, patrilocal system. However in China the institution of marriage, especially in the countryside, is very common. Moreover the patrilocal marriage system has enormous impacts on many rural Chinese women. It affects the problems of land allocation and education. Many people think since when women get married they become part of the man's family, it is not worth it to spend so much money educating women. In this way women's education is connected to the institution of marriage. If you look at western feminist theories they do not often address some of these issues, since generally the man and woman form a new family separate from both sides. In addition in most western countries the urban population is very large while the population in the country has shrunk greatly. However, China's population is still largely rural. Thus we face different problems or issues than these western countries.

So I think during this process you can see that while we are borrowing from the experiences of others, we are not mechanically imitating these other countries. Instead we take these concepts and ideas to analyze and understand China's situation. (page 18-21) 9m

Chinese feminists, as these short excerpts illustrate, are generating significant social, political and cultural changes in this era of rapid transformation in China. Attempting to both transform official institutions from within, and develop women's own organizations to empower women at the grassroots level, Chinese feminists demonstrate their deep awareness of the constraints and possibilities of contemporary Chinese political culture. With various strategies and diverse activities, Chinese feminists have made it clear that women are agents of social change and gender equality is not to be excluded in any vision of China's modernity. Global feminist agendas have provided valuable inspirations to Chinese feminists who take joining global feminist community as a necessary part of the age of globalization.