

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS:
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: CHINA

**Transcript of Zhang Li Xi
Interviewer: Shi Tong**

Location: China Women's College, Beijing

Date: June 2003

Translated by: Kim Dorazio

**China Women's University
No.1 Yuhui Dong Lu
Chaoyang District
Beijing 100101 China**

Tel: 86-10-84659006

Website: www.cwu.edu.cn

Acknowledgments

Global Feminisms: Comparative Case Studies of Women's Activism and Scholarship was housed at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Michigan (UM) in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The project was co-directed by Abigail Stewart, Jayati Lal and Kristin McGuire.

The China site was housed at the China Women's University in Beijing, China and directed by Wang Jinling and Zhang Jian, in collaboration with UM faculty member Wang Zheng.

The India site was housed at the Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women (SPARROW) in Mumbai, India and directed by C.S. Lakshmi, in collaboration with UM faculty members Jayati Lal and Abigail Stewart.

The Poland site was housed at Fundacja Kobiet eFKa (Women's Foundation eFKa) in Krakow, Poland and directed by Slawka Walczewska, in collaboration with UM faculty member Magdalena Zaborowska.

The U.S. site was housed at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan and directed by UM faculty member Elizabeth Cole.

Graduate student interns on the project included Nicola Curtin, Kim Dorazio, Jana Haritatos, Helen Ho, Julianna Lee, Sumiao Li, Zakiya Luna, Leslie Marsh, Sridevi Nair, Justyna Pas, Rosa Peralta, Desdamona Rios and Ying Zhang.

Undergraduate student interns on the project included Alexandra Gross, Julia MacMillan, Libby Pozolo, Shana Schoem and Megan Williamson.

Translations into English, Polish and Chinese were provided by Kim Dorazio, Cheng Jizhong, Kasia Kietlinska, Justyna Pas, Alena Zemanek and Ying Zhang.

Technical assistance was provided by R. Thomas Bray, Dustin Edwards and Keith Rainwater. Graphic design was provided by Elisabeth Paymal.

The project was initially supported by a University of Michigan Rackham Interdisciplinary Collaboration Research Grant. Additional support was provided by the College of Literature, Science and the Arts, International Institute, Institute for Research on Women and Gender, Women's Studies, Humanities Institute, the Center for South Asian Studies, the Herman Family Fund, the Center for African and Afro-American Studies and the Office of the Provost at the University of Michigan.

For more information, visit our website at <http://www.umich.edu/~glblfem/>

© Regents of the University of Michigan, 2006

Zhang Li Xi, born in 1953, is President of the China Women's University. She has been personally involved in many feminist projects since the early 1990s. With her strong leadership, the CWU created the first Women's Studies Department in China in 2001 and the first Women's Studies major in 2006. The CWU is affiliated with the All-China Women's Federation, and responsible for providing training to officials of the Women's Federation system nationwide. Zhang Li Xi's feminist activism in promoting women's studies in the women's federation has large implications for transforming the official women's organization.

Shi Tong (hereafter referred to as Shi): President Zhang Li Xi, would you please discuss in detail the process through which you came to accept feminist thought unconsciously and consciously? How did your background, including things like experiences when you were growing up, your personal life and your work affect this process?

Zhang Li Xi (hereafter referred to as Zhang Li): You indicated this is a process from unconsciously to consciously accepting feminism. I myself find it difficult to summarize the various phases, to say in which phases I was relatively unaware, in which phases I was rather aware, and in which phases I was actively engaged. I find it very difficult to categorize like this. But, when I really begin to think back about this process... it is probably worthwhile for me to reflect on things that have happened to me. A lot of things have affected me. I remember it was 1994...no it was 1995 on the eve of the Beijing World Women's Conference.¹ At that time in the country there were many professions, universities and many people who were quite interested in the Women's Conference. They all gave input and helped to prepare for the World Women's Conference, and especially the NGO forums. I remember in 1994, a feminist author from Hong Kong, surnamed Huang, came to Beijing. I remember at the time she invited a few friends together and wanted to write a book that addressed how people came to be involved with feminism. She found a few friends and together they talked about their experiences, their backgrounds and what they have learned from their experiences. She wanted everyone to reconsider and look back on their own experiences. I remember the book that she wrote. It is called *Reflections*. One evening, we were all together at her residence. I remember this very clearly. We were all together talking. As everyone was speaking, she was taking down what we were saying. At the time we felt her approach – recording everyone's memories and compiling them into a book – was novel. I remember at the time some friends were talking. Some had started to talk about what things or events had a big influence on them. Of course people addressed how some things affected them positively and others affected them negatively. For example one friend, when she was little she wanted to play basketball but she had to wear skirts. She felt that when wearing a skirt, she could not play. Therefore at the time she asked her teacher, "Why do girls wear skirts?" Her teacher said to her, "Girls must wear skirts; wearing skirts is pretty." She remembered clearly and said that she didn't like wearing skirts because they were not convenient. Running while wearing a skirt was strange and could expose her body. So she then did not participate in any sports activities. She felt, "Oh, why do girls and boys have to be different?" Afterwards one friend recalled when she was working for a company. Later one of her bosses from overseas came. He had a strong background in Women's Studies and he exerted a large influence on her, although she did not realize it at the time. Everyone discussed different things. However, they all

¹ In 1995, Beijing hosted the Fourth World Conference on Women. Representatives from 189 different countries agreed that inequalities between women and men have serious consequences for the well-being of all people. The conference declared a set of goals for progress of women in various areas including politics, health, and education.

discussed how they came to pay attention to women's issues and how they first got interested in women's studies. At the time they discussed many things. As my friends were talking, I was thinking, why were they all seemingly typical cases. For example, "I've come across that situation, I then was very interested in..." Or, "At that time I was wondering why women had to be like that...." Or, "This experience enlightened me..."

At the time I couldn't recall a turning point, from where I started to care about these issues. How did I first begin to get interested in women's issues? I couldn't recall a kind of inspirational event or a specific activity. Afterwards I thought about why this was the case. I suddenly discovered in reality I could not help but do women's research. I was compelled; I had no choice whatsoever but to get caught up in it. I was not necessarily willing but did not have a choice, and in the end had to enter this area of study. But I should say, I have no regrets and I have marched forward courageously. But I should say the first phase – if you divide it into phases – I feel I should start with my transfer to the All China Women's Federation's Women's Cadres Managerial Institute² in 1985. I entered this field of women's studies, but why? I had graduated from Beijing University in 1982 and then went to Lanzhou University to work. I was the first class of university students after China's Cultural Revolution.³ At the time I went to college while still receiving a salary. I remember very clearly that my salary was forty-four *yuan*⁴ a month. I already had been working for six years. At the time the government had set a policy that if you had worked at least five years, then you were able to attend university while still receiving your salary. I think this was because the background of our generation was special, since during the many years of the Cultural Revolution there were no university students. At the time when I went to university, I was already 24 years old. There were many people like me who had already graduated from high school many years ago; they were even older than I was and already had families. I think the policy at the time considered this group's special background. If people were not paid then they could not possibly attend university, because they needed to support their families. Under these circumstances, I received my salary. Prior to attending university, I had been working as a sent-down youth⁵ in Lanzhou. Afterwards I taught at a middle school for five to six

² The Chinese Women's University, affiliated with the All-China Women's Federation, is the only women's college in China. In 1949, a group of widely respected feminist activists and officials founded the New China Women's Professional School. Later it became the All-China Women's Federation School for Women Cadres. In 1984, with approval from the Ministry of Education, it changed its name to the All China Women's Federation's Women Cadres Managerial Institute and became the first independent institution of higher education for women. In 1987, the name was changed to the Chinese Women Cadres Managerial Institute. In 1995 when it moved to the current location and expanded in its scale, it was officially renamed as the Chinese Women's College. It has recently been renamed once again to the China Women's University. For more information, see www.cwu.edu.cn.

³ The Cultural Revolution (Abbreviation of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution), often dated 1966-1976. According to a Central Committee resolution adopted on June 27, 1981, the Cultural Revolution was carried out "under the mistaken leadership of Mao Zedong who was used by the counterrevolutionaries Lin Biao and Jiang Qing and brought serious disaster and turmoil to the Party and the Chinese people." This official view has since become the dominant framework for the Chinese historiography of the Cultural Revolution. During the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution, higher education was essentially closed down. Proper ideology was stressed over professional or technical competence.

⁴ As of October 2006, the exchange rate is 1 U.S. dollar ≈ 8 yuan.

⁵ During the Cultural Revolution, many urban young people were sent to the countryside and remote areas

years. Then I attended Beijing University. When I graduated from Beijing University, there was another government policy. People who had received salaries while attending university must return to the area where they originally came from. Thus, I graduated from Beijing University and returned to Lanzhou. Since I was a college graduate, my job changed and I did not work at a middle school any more. Instead I taught in the Department of Philosophy at Lanzhou University. At the time I taught classical German philosophy and the history of Western philosophy. I taught Fierbach, Kant and Hegel, these philosophers. I worked about another five years there. During this time, my husband and I lived in separate places. He stayed in Beijing after graduating from college and I went back to Lanzhou. My foreign friends have asked me why my husband and I worked in different cities. I said I was assigned to work in Lanzhou and that this was a very common phenomenon in China. At the time the government assigned where you would work. You then were supposed to go there and settle down. At that time we had a saying. Every person is like a screw on a machine. The Party assigns you to some place and you were supposed to be useful there. Therefore at the time in China, married couples having two different residences was very common. We had no choice in the matter. Therefore I was in Lanzhou and my husband was in Beijing. But after five years passed, I had an opportunity. At the time in Beijing a school named the All China Women's Federation's Institute for Women's Administrative Cadres had just opened. Initially it was only a cadre training school but afterwards it became a college with degree programs. The National Personnel Department – the department that administered residency permits – gave this school a set number of permits that the school could use to recruit faculty to Beijing. There were several conditions. First, the recruits from the provinces must be university teachers. Second, they must have the title of “lecturer.” The third condition was that they had to be the spouse of someone who was already in Beijing. Since I satisfied all of these conditions, I was then selected to work at this school. Therefore, if I did not come to this school, then I would not have a Beijing residency permit. I came to this school without a real understanding of what the school did. So, at the time I took my letter of acceptance and went to the All China Women's Federation to register. Because this school was affiliated with the All China Women's Federation, I asked many people teaching in universities: what does the All China Women's Federation do? Nobody knew much about the All China Women's Federation. Some people told me that they thought the All China Women's Federation managed the sub-district administrative units.⁶ I thought that I did not have any choice but to take this job since I wanted a Beijing residency permit. If I wanted to return to Beijing and if I wanted to be together with my husband – one family together – then I must accept this work. You could say that I had no alternative but to go to the Institute for Women's Administrative Cadres.

Thus, because of my job placement, I started to do research on women. I should say that I very accidentally, very unwillingly and very blindly entered this field. After I came to this school, I was not sure what I would teach since this school did not offer courses in the history of western philosophy and did not teach classical German philosophy. They

to help with local development. They are called the “sent-down youth.”

⁶ These administrative units, called *jiedao banshichu*, are governmental branches that manage local affairs.

did not have such things in their curriculum. At the time the department where I was placed was called the Women's Movement Department. There weren't any classes for me to teach because the philosophy class already had a teacher. Under these conditions, I had no choice. I had to choose a course to teach. Therefore at the time I chose sociology, which I felt was relatively close to philosophy. Thus, I began to teach sociology. While teaching an introductory sociology class, I started a class called "family sociology." When teaching family sociology, I inevitably had to be able to address family issues, such as conflicts between husband and wife, women's status, women's roles, role conflicts, etc. At this time I started to come in contact with and gradually came to understand feminism. After working several years – in these several years my work was relatively regular. I conscientiously did my teaching. However, I was not particularly interested in the work; it was only my income.

In this situation, I again came upon another opportunity. The All China Women's Federation was going to select and send two people to go to Canada to engage in advanced studies and participate in a training class called "Women Participating in Development." I submitted my application, passed the English exam, went through various selection procedures and at last I was selected. In September 1992, I went to Canada to participate in the training. At this time, I began to pay attention to issues related to women. While working within China, I had very limited materials. Therefore in Canada, in addition to participating in the training class, I selected a few classes to audit. For example, I took Introduction to Women's Studies, Women and the Environment, and Women and Health. I selected various classes that dealt with women's issues, like these. When I attended class, through my contacts with classmates, discussions and the exchanges with professors, I discovered Women's Studies was an incredibly wide ranging field of activity. I then discovered some issues that I had never paid attention to before and also some issues that I had never even thought of. For example when I was attending the Women and the Environment class, the teacher took us out onto the street in the evening. We were supposed to walk around and observe. For instance in a bar – what did you see? When you were walking in the streets what did you see? Why were the lights on in the offices? Who was working inside? At the time I did not think about it too much. But what many classmates said caused me to think in a new way. For example, many office buildings were lit. At this time it was after 9:00, almost 10:00 at night. The lights were on so people could clean. Who was cleaning? Everyone said it probably was many women cleaning. Why are there relatively so many women doing this kind of work? We started to ask questions and one by one we began to address these issues, going deeper and deeper. I felt these issues were really interesting. It was not merely some phenomenon that existed; my classmates wanted to discuss the reasons for this phenomenon. They also wanted to connect this phenomenon with the social structure, the social system and the social culture. At the time it caused me to think in a new way. I felt that year of study was really motivational to my career. I started to consciously pay attention to women's research and the domain of women's issues. Before going to Canada, although I worked at the women's college and paid attention to women's issues, I separated myself from it and thought of it only as work, as an income. Studying for one year in Canada was a huge inspiration to me. I think it was really a motivational force and laid a solid foundation for my entering this field.

So then at the end of 1993 I returned to Beijing. At the time Beijing already started aggressively preparing for the 1995 World Women's Conference. While at a women's symposium at Beijing University, I met an American student named Lisa⁷ who was teaching at Beijing University. We then began talking, exchanged business cards and so on. At the time she told me that they had established an East Meets West Feminist Translation Group. It was a completely informal small group. She asked me if I would be willing to participate. At the time I very happily took part in their activities. There I met many people who were interested in women's studies, women's movements or women's issues. I believe some of your interviewees this time had some experience in this group – for example Ge Youli,⁸ who at the time was this small group's convener. She was working at the Ford Foundation. She arranged our meeting place. Every week or sometimes every other week we talked to each other on the phone and discussed some issues there in the evening. At this time I actively participated.

I began to combine things that I had studied, things that I taught in the classroom and Chinese women's issues, and began thinking and reflecting. At that time I consciously began to take on the role of a feminist. For example sometimes when I consider my own problems, I often talk about the story of my own name. The way that Chinese people give children names is not the same as in the culture of other countries. When Chinese people choose the name for their child, implicit in their choice is a very profound expectation. Their name choice implies parents' expectations for the child, and parents' expectation for their child reflects the uniqueness of Chinese family culture. It is symbolic of the "patrilineal" tradition, a kind of family continuity, a kind of family blood line continuity. Another meaning is the important parental wish that their child will become successful. From the child's point of view, what is expected of them in return? Children need to support their parents in the future. Thus the parents and child both have expectations of each other. Parents hope that their children become responsible adults. After the children become responsible adults they can care for their parents after they become old. After all, China does not provide for most people in old age. Therefore under these conditions, naming children is a very special reflection of Chinese people's expectations for their children. My name is rather strange; my name consists of two surname characters. In China you usually only have one surname, which continues the father's blood line, I am surnamed Zhang and Li. Li is the surname from my mother's side of the family. Very few people have two surnames like me – especially in the 1950s this was rare. Why do I have these two surnames? Actually it is a long story. It is because my grandmother only had one daughter, my mother. She was married only one year when her husband died. Afterwards she did not remarry and they lived with my paternal grandmother. Soon after, the Anti-Japanese War began. At the time of the Japanese

⁷ Later, Lisa Stearns joined the Beijing office of the Ford Foundation to work on the preparation for the UN women's conference in Beijing.

⁸ Ge Youli, a feminist activist, is currently the China Country Director for the Global Alliance for Workers and Communities. Prior to this, she worked as a Program Officer at the United Nations Development Program on issues of gender equity, poverty alleviation, micro-finance and community development. She was also interviewed for the Global Feminisms Project.

invasion, my maternal grandmother's home town was in Hebei.⁹ She fled from Hebei to Tianjin, and from Tianjin to Henan, and then from Henan fled to Shanxi.¹⁰ The whole time they were on the run with other refugees, escaping the army and going from place to place, my grandmother had to care for my mother. When my grandmother began to tell her story it was very bitter – a woman with her daughter who had no support at all. They went different places and sometimes begged for food and sometimes she worked in factories. In the end they had many such bitter experiences. My mother married when she was twenty-three years old. My grandmother said that no matter who married her daughter, there was one condition. They must use the family's surname, Li. In her heart she had a wish – because she only had a daughter, this daughter must continue the Li family name. So there was this condition. At the time my father wanted to marry my mother, so my father accepted this condition and agreed to it but said Li must be after his surname Zhang. My grandmother then very willingly accepted this condition, because she felt the surname Li after the surname Zhang is natural. Because of this agreement, all of the children in our family had the surname Zhang Li.

Thus I felt that our family's boys and girls were equal because they used both my father's surname and my mother's surname. I felt this was equality between men and women. But as I became a conscious feminist, I realized that my name was the least “feminist” name and it was really a discriminatory name. In reality my name very typically reflected how Chinese women felt about their position in the family and what they recognized their role to be. Why do I say this? If my grandmother wanted to argue about a surname, shouldn't she have argued for her own surname? She was not surnamed Li; she married into the Li family. Her last name was Gao, but she did not argue for the surname Gao. This is because she married into the Li family so she thought of herself as a member of the Li family. Therefore when many foreign scholars discuss Chinese issues in depth, they have a common view. That is, when discussing Chinese societal issues, you cannot avoid talking about the culture of the Chinese family. Chinese family issues permeate every aspect of Chinese society, government and economy. Recognizing herself and her role as a Chinese woman, she did not have any doubt. First you should use the husband's surname. Second you should use the man's family name. She did not question this. My grandmother argued a long time for her husband's family's surname, but at the time, she already was apart from her husband's family for more than twenty years and had no connections to them whatsoever. She had independently supported her family. Yet, twenty years later, when her daughter was getting married, she still thought of herself as a member of the Li family. This typically reflects what Fei Xiaotong¹¹ proposed as the “differential mode of association” and Xu Lianguang proposed as the “father-son axis.” It reflects the Chinese family culture. This characteristic of family culture is that males are the nucleus of the family. What does male-centered mean? This is masculine rights; this is patriarchy. It is handed down from father to son, father to son. Other relations are also passed down. They are relations of dependency and

⁹ Hebei is a province in Northern China.

¹⁰ Tianjin is one of the biggest cities in Northern China. Henan province is the mid-west of China, neighboring the Shanxi province.

¹¹ Professor Fei Xiaotong (1911-2005) was one of China's finest anthropologists. His book *Peasant Life In China* (1939) made him famous in the English-speaking world.

subordination. Consequently this kind of patrilineal relation spreads. This then naturally manifests itself in the idea that men are superior and women are inferior – these kinds of relations between the sexes. Therefore at the time it was very natural, that I thought about this kind of problem....

Shi: What other problems did you pay particular attention to during this phase?

Zhang Li: At that time this group's concerns were extremely wide ranging. Because our group came from different fields, people had a wide variety of interests. It was informal and based on interests but not on rules. For instance we had members who worked in publications, factories, foreign enterprises and university professors, etc. We came from different places, and therefore we discussed different issues. But each time we tried to concentrate on one theme. Usually we had a person speak, and everybody then shared this aspect of her experience, and discovered the problems involved. For instance we discussed problems like that of university graduates finding employment, the problems of NGOs, the question of gender roles, etc. At that time we paid particular attention to representation of gender roles in the media. There was a broad set of issues that we paid attention to. So you could say that that our group, at the NGO level, later played a very important role. Therefore at that time I started to feel that I already started to consciously reflect on and discover problems. Actually when I discovered a problem, I would think about why it was the way it was and how it came to be like this. In 1994 I went to Shanghai to attend a meeting to prepare for the 1995 NGO Forum and organized a forum called "Women and Education." I was responsible for organizing a panel called "Women and Job Training" that targeted women without college degrees. When I went to register, I found that the registration person who had not seen me before, had assigned me my room. I grabbed my key and went to my room. At that time I discovered I was sharing a room with a man. So I went to look for the conference organizer. I discovered they simply had not paid attention to who I was. They had looked at my name and thought that Chinese people would not have chosen this name for a [girl] child. My given name is Xi and my surnames are Zhang and Li. Xi comes from the character for imperial seal. It was the emperor's seal and it is a character that denotes extreme authority. In most cases this character is used to name a boy, just like the name *jianguo* which means "building a nation." It is extremely rare for me to have this character in my name. Thus, they naturally placed me in the male students' dormitory. When I went to find them, they apologized, I cracked a joke and said if my name were for example, Zhang Huihua,¹² you would have prepared to place me in a girl's room. They laughed. Your name delivers a strong stereotyped message among Chinese people – they know about you when they see your name. Therefore I often make my students discuss this in the classroom. The students would say their names. Then they would discuss why these characters were used. The girls very quickly discovered that the characters that often appear in their names included those for rosy clouds, flowers, qin (a Chinese stringed instrument) and so on. They found that these characters usually were limited to beautiful, exquisite or cute things. We then discussed why we had such characters in our names, and why our parents chose these names for girls, and so on.

¹² The Chinese character "hua" in this name means flower and is often used in women's names.

For me, I felt in this way that I was different than other people. So in the field of women's studies, initially I did my job without thinking too deeply about the implications of my work. Later when I was in Canada studying, I started to accept western feminism theory and training. Then at the Beijing World Women's Conference in 1995, I thought I could use western feminist theory to discuss and reconsider some questions particular to China. I attempted to do some things that I could accomplish. At this time I felt that I had started to participate in this women's movement though my own initiative.

Shi: You said a moment ago that you are a feminist (*nuquan zhuyizhe*). What does this term mean to you?

Zhang Li: This is a rather academic question. First we can talk about the problem of translation, especially of the term "feminism." In fact in Chinese theoretical circles, the media and in everyday language there are two most common usages of feminism, *nuquan zhuyi* and *nuxing zhuyi*. When people translate these terms they have their own understandings of the concept and at the same time a certain identification with the concept. The translator's understanding of the concept will undoubtedly be influenced by her environment. Again, at the same time she will have to identify with this concept. When translated, this word will not be value neutral. It represents your identification with this concept and its implied meanings. Actually, as early as the 1920s during the New Culture Movement,¹³ this word was translated from western cultural theory. Some people called feminism *nuquan zhuyi* and others used the term *nuxing zhuyi*. However at that time this was not widely debated. It was not until the 1980s when many Chinese people came into contact with the theories of women's studies. Many people coming back from overseas and China's open door policy also allowed more and more people to come into contact with western theories. At this time everybody again started to discuss the translation of "feminism" (*nuquan zhuyi* and *nuxing zhuyi*). I think there are two rather distinct schools of thought. One group asserts that the Chinese term *nuquan zhuyi* more completely reflects the nature of the concept of "feminism" in the West. In addition to advocating the equality of the sexes, it also calls for actions and questions the societal behaviors and the social system. In addition it believes that women must challenge and take on subversive practices in order to realize true gender equality. But translators who use *nuxing zhuyi* as the term for "feminism" believe that the term *nuquan zhuyi* clearly represents the first wave and has the characteristics of feminism in the nineteenth century. For example, this includes striving for women's right to vote and reproductive rights, protesting and demonstrating. This view asserts that this concept of "feminism" represents how things were at this time. But, as feminism developed the second wave of feminism came about in the 1960s and multiplied. No longer was it merely a unitary movement – there was also communication and many different voices were heard. In this kind of situation, the term *nuquan zhuyi* could not comprehensively include all of the connotations of feminism. This is the first reason. The second reason for not using *nuquan zhuyi* is that they think this term would be easily misunderstood; it sounds "very strong." It sounds as if it is against everything, even unreasonably oppositional. I

¹³ The New Cultural Movement during the 1910s and 1920s was initially an intellectual movement that aimed to challenge traditional Chinese culture and promote a new culture, new social relations and new ways of thinking in Chinese society, especially about "science" and "democracy."

remember rather prominent articles by people such as Gao Huizhu and Chen Yiyun.¹⁴ But as for me, I approve of the translation of feminism as *nuquan zhuyi*. Moreover, I feel that these two translations of “feminism” are quite different. I also think that the translation itself certainly reflects the cultural context. At the same time, a person’s choice of terms also reflects the degree of identification that she has with this concept. As for the term *nuxing zhuyi*, what does it try to avoid? Of course feminists urge people to avoid misunderstanding, but on the other hand, my view is that precisely because you advocate *nuxing zhuyi* you have written off the special value of *nuquan zhuyi*. This value or special characteristic is the core of feminism. What is this kind of core useful for? It impels questioning and challenging the unequal social structure and culture. Women advocate gender equality. This is not merely a kind of desire or belief. More importantly it is a kind of movement. Therefore I feel that *nuquan zhuyi* should be used when translating the term “feminism” because it represents the true meaning of feminism. *Nuxing zhuyi* feminists have persistently asserted that this usage can create misunderstandings, but things that create misunderstanding are exactly the special characteristics of *nuquan zhuyi* feminism. Therefore the things that you try to avoid are exactly the things that should not be avoided. Consequently I advocate the term *nuquan zhuyi* because in Chinese culture, terms like female (*nuxing*), male (*nanxing*), man (*nanren*) and woman (*nuren*) already create a fixed impression. When you say “female culture,” “femininity,” “female characteristics,” people think of being kind and courteous and virtuous, the so-called “feminine special characteristics.” Because I think this is something that should be avoided, we should not use a term which has these connotations. Therefore I feel that using *nuquan zhuyi* can more accurately reflect the essence and connotations of feminism. It can better publicly advocate feminism and the things associated with it. It should publicly confront things which *nuxing zhuyi* feminists want to evade. Therefore, I approve of the term *nuquan zhuyi*. Of course I realize that every person has his or her own views and understandings. I feel some people believe *nuxing zhuyi* is a better reflection of the term feminism. I think this is an individual attitude.

Shi: How then do you see mainland Chinese feminism?

Zhang Li: Are you referring to the concept or the movement?

Shi: You can talk about the concept and the movement, if you would like.

Zhang Li: I think that it is very hard to say that mainland China has a feminist movement in the same way that western feminism has developed. Western feminism had a clear first wave and then a second. When we talk about the first wave, we can think of innumerable works, innumerable people who represented the movement, and representative points of view and activities. When referring to the second wave, we also can point to many typical things. But in China... Well, when you speak of a movement, it should be a very natural combination of theory and practice. I feel that it is really

¹⁴ Gao Huizhu is professor at the College of Law and Politics at Shanghai Normal University, P.R. China. Chen Yiyun is an expert on adolescent issues at the Institute of Sociology under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

difficult to say that China already has a feminist movement. I feel that is quite appropriate to say that China has a group of people who have feminist consciousness. They actively carry forth the feminist movement and actively take part in work to promote gender equality in society. When we talk about a movement, there should be a natural union between the theory and practice. But presently in China, when you speak of the feminist movement, there are not enough people who focus enough attention on putting things into practice, promoting various projects and tasks, or activities. But the research of the development of feminist theory and the usefulness of theory for the feminist movement is insufficient. I think this deficiency is a shortcoming. On the other hand, some people are deeply involved in feminist research, and I feel that some of their articles are written quite well. However, I feel that there are still some deficiencies in actually putting ideas into practice. Of course some times we have limited time and funds But I think that these people are not good at truly going down to China's grassroots level to discover the problem of sex discrimination, the problem of gender inequality and to make up for the insufficiencies and eliminate difference. I think these people have some flaws and that there is a distance between them and their subject of study. Actually, since 1995 I have continuously been advocating the viewpoint that researchers cannot be separate from activism and activists must also engage in research. I believe that combining them is possible. Activists consider doing research too abstract, too academic. We have to use many concepts –for instance, postmodernism, post structuralism, self, etc. It seems that as though if we do not use these new words, we cannot truly study this body of knowledge. Meanwhile, there are some researchers who feel that engaging in activities takes too much effort and the effects are rather slow.

However I believe that these two kinds of people should be brought together. My colleagues and I, especially colleagues who have common goals, have made such an attempt. For example, after 1995, in the Chinese Institute for Women's Administrative Cadres we established a group called "The Women's Consulting and Activity Center." Why was it called the consulting and activity center? At the time, we thought about whether or not we should do research. If we wanted to provide consulting and guidance, we needed to have things that had a theoretical component. But it also had an activism aspect. Could we unify theory and activism? Therefore at the time we had the women's hot line and a column that we cooperated with the *Worker's Daily*¹⁵ that focused on pragmatic aspects. We made some attempts at that time.

Then I had my own project, called "The State of Chinese Rural Women's Education." This kind of investigation came about because of the 1995 Women's Conference forum. At that time we did an investigation of rural women in twenty-nine villages. The first time that we did this project my colleagues and I, women from the Women's Studies department, we invested a lot of time and effort. We used the active participant method. That was the first time that we had used the active participant method. This was the first time we were going to do this project together with the people from the countryside. When we became more involved in the project we discovered very many problems. For example many women could not write Chinese characters. When we asked women to sign their names, they were unable to do so. Some asked if they could draw a picture.

¹⁵ *Worker's Daily* is one of the official newspapers in China.

For instance, one woman said that she raised chickens so she drew a picture of a chicken. Then we asked them to draw where their homes were. I remember clearly that we separated the men and women, dividing them into two small groups. I still preserve two of the pictures. The picture drawn by one of the women was called “my home.” This picture was of a traditional four walled Chinese courtyard (*si he yuan*). In the courtyard there were very many side rooms, the kitchen, the main room, the pigsty and the chicken coop. There were chickens running in the courtyard and a person was feeding the chickens. She had this kind of picture; this was her home. But in a picture drawn by a man of his home, I could not find his house in the picture. He drew the railroad, which extended in all directions, and Beijing and Tianjin. At that time he was living in Hebei. He also drew a fruit orchard, the pond, the county seat and stores. Finally he added a small dot. In that large picture, he said this little dot was his home. At that time I discovered that the concept of home for a man and woman are completely different. Through this project we can study why the concepts of home are dissimilar for a man and a woman. Through what type of education...when we are born we are the same. After we are born why do we gradually become man and woman?

We started to bring this kind of research into the classroom. We started to study the socialization process of men and women. What kind of influence does our family, our schooling and our society have on us? How does society turn a natural person into a man or a woman? In this project, I came to more deeply understand the reasoning behind Beauvoir’s saying that “people are not born men; instead they grow to be men.” So I felt that this project was not merely a practice oriented project – counting female literacy rates, female education levels, how many girls have enough money to go to school, how many females have the aspirations of going to school, etc. It was not only about collecting data and materials and organizing them.

I feel that attempts to understand the condition of women in the Chinese countryside – their ideas and wishes – and to examine the cultural system behind this kind of reasoning can be integrated in our work. I remember at that time we chose one group of people to attend the preparatory meeting for the 1995 World Women’s Conference in Beijing. For many of the women this was their first time to ride on a train, their first time to come to Beijing, their first time to stay in a hotel and their first time to see such a lively place. I remember at the time a woman said to me that she was astonished at how nice Beijing people were. After they left, we sat down and thought of the days that had passed. We had different kinds of feelings – for us the stress had been quite severe. We had brought them to Beijing; after they saw it, was it good or bad for them? We thought about this for a very long time. Some people might have immediately felt that it was not fair or was not equal. In their hearts they might feel a kind of unhappiness. Therefore did we do a good thing or not? We brought these women into this kind of environment and suddenly opened their eyes to so much. We really thought about this for a good long period of time. These are some of the issues that we later came across in the classroom and in our research. These kinds of activities provide lots of source material and a foundation for the development of the theory behind all of women’s studies. This was only a project and a small example. Actually afterwards we did very many of these kinds of projects and activities. Both these projects and classroom discussion really had a big influence on us.

Shi: In what areas does this kind of scholarly research concentrate?

Zhang Li: Something that I consider rather central to my work is marriage and the family. I think that for as long as I can remember, Chinese people have regarded marriage and family as important. Thus, people's views of their family and familial relations have actually gradually seeped into other aspects of society. Therefore I focus on marital conflict. Also I myself pay a lot of attention to women's health, mainly women's psychological health.

Shi: In what areas are all of your individual activities concentrated?

Zhang Li: My own activities? In my personal experiences, I went to a women's school and later it became the China Women's College. I was originally in this school and was a teacher in the Women's Movement department. Later I became the head of this department. Then the name of this department was changed to the Department of Social Work. It had an emphasis on women's work. I was also the head of this department. Then I undertook some administrative work for the college. Now I serve as the deputy vice-president. Throughout this kind of long process, I have never left my teaching post. My very many activities in this department have been carried out together with all of my colleagues who all have a common goal. For instance a big project that we worked on is putting an end to domestic violence and improving the condition of marginalized women in the community – for instance laid-off women workers and so on. We worked to create a marginalized community women's network, and offered support services. Moreover we have also done, for instance, community intervention models, how to establish models and so on. We have engaged in quite a few of these kinds of activities; these activities were quite large. I felt that these activities had two kinds of impacts. The first was to promote the development of woman studies inside our department and to train a team of people. The second aspect was to have a tremendous influence on society. For instance, we have done an integrated intervention project that dealt with domestic abuse in an area of Beijing. In this case integrated intervention is not merely a topic for study, and is also not merely research. In fact we looked at this community's program comprehensively including administration and the judiciary. Participants included all levels, such as government officials, police department and the judicial system, NGOs and families. We put all of these people together. Therefore I feel that this integration does not only have significance for research, and is not merely a research project. I think it has a positive meaning and encourages the development of the entire community, encourages the development of community-building in China and the entire Chinese effort to prevent domestic abuse.

Shi: You said a moment ago that feminist scholarly research and practice and also classroom teaching should be combined. What kind of changes did the union of these various aspects bring about in you personally? What useful things could you draw from this?

Zhang Li: Because we worked together on many of these endeavors, it is very difficult to

say for me personally how I have changed. For an individual I think that is a continuous process of consciousness-raising. You become more and more sensitive to many problems. You increasingly feel that things are unfair. You get more and more excited and agitated. It is not merely the excitement and the challenge. You come to realize you must really actively take actions and make change. So, now in the Women's College, the women's studies department, the social work department, and also a few other departments such as the law department, we all advocate "Research and Action." This is the model of the union of research and activism. Training students with this kind of model has had a huge influence on them. So when our students go on the market to work and compete for jobs, this is one kind of comprehensive qualitative advantage that they have. For instance, regarding their own self-understanding, they are full of confidence in their abilities to be effective against the unfair challenges that may lie ahead. For example, when one of our students went to a recruiting fair, there was a sign posted that said "no female student interviews." There were very many university students in front of that sign. They looked, walked back and forth, and finally walked away. But our student stood in front of this sign, and then sat there. Then she asked the recruiter what kind of person the company was looking for. He described the type of person that he was looking for. She told him that she met all of the requirements that he had just laid out and then asked him why he would not hire a woman. He then asked where she had attended college. She said that she went to the China Women's College. "Oh," he said, "the students at your school are different." Our school's student said that writing a sign like this is not right and it violates the law. She said I could sue your company for posting a sign like that. This student then said, "I have met all of the requirements for the job, including my level of education and the skills that you require. Why won't you interview me?" Afterwards that person said I will tell my supervisor what you have said and ask my supervisor to discuss this with you. Therefore I think that this is an example to show that research and practice should be integrated, and the enhancement of the quality of teachers and students are related. Therefore it is very difficult to say, personally what obvious changes I have undergone during this process. I think I have changed because of influence from being in my department, from the school, and from the students who have graduated. These different levels of influence are all reflected in my change.

Shi: But what has influenced you personally?

Zhang Li: If you want to speak of things that have influenced me individually, I feel that I have experienced different things because I am not a pure research scholar. I am very willing to participate in some practical activities. Even though I am rather busy, for example, if I have a discussion topic, I really want to engage this deeply. I would go to do interviews, make an investigation, or go and see the issue at the most basic level. As for me, I am really willing to practice in order to take practical actions, and am really willing to use practical actions as a feminist.

Shi: You are the president of the China Women's College, the only official Chinese women's university. What administrative practices did you use to develop this schools' education of women? What type of changes did the school undergo?

Zhang Li: I have been in this position since March 1999. Before this, I also had a year of working as a specialized director of education. What does the “only” “official” women’s college have? These two adjectives tell of some problems. What does “official” imply? Actually it means that we are very restricted in what we do by the system. Unofficial schools have a lot of space to do what they want and quite a bit of leeway. However as an official institution, many government departments have all sorts of rules and influence on us. Therefore currently at many universities, they are not able to have a women’s studies department and are not able to develop a women’s studies curriculum, not have a genuine women’s research center and so on. They did not have the structure for this. Why is it like this? Because in universities, women’s studies does not have the status of a primary discipline¹⁶ or even secondary discipline. So it cannot be the same as women’s studies programs in other countries where they recruit undergraduates, master’s students and Ph.D. students. In China this possibility still does not exist. They have started to do women’s studies research in universities... Women’s studies in universities, this kind of atmosphere developed after 1995, but I should mention that it was voluntary. It has not received substantive, significant support from the administration. If for instance you are allowed to establish a women’s research center, often you do not have office space, the personnel, or the wages to pay them. You do not have access to very many resources. Therefore there are very many things that you cannot do and in fact you will definitely fail.

But in the China Women’s College, inside such a special school, there is an unusual environment. Why? Because the school is affiliated to the All-China Women’s Federation. The All-China Women’s Federation is China’s biggest NGO. Of course many people questioned the status of the All-China Women’s Federation as an NGO. Some people said that it was a “semi-NGO” because it is semi-official. People that ask if we are official or semi-official always have some reasons. For instance the personnel quota and the wages of the Women’s Federation all come from allocations of funds from the government. This is a fact. Although its funds are allocated by the government, we should also look at this from another point of view. The Women’s Federation does not have policy-making power. Therefore the Women’s Federation certainly does not participate in government policy-making, so it is only a bridge. The Women’s Federation only acts as a bridge. Because of this, the organization has a lot of space within which to work. Thus, the China Women’s College is then placed in this unique position. It both falls under 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”¹⁷ 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

¹⁶ The Chinese education system categorizes different academic fields.

¹⁷ “Four Selves” refers to self-esteem, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-improvement.

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 China 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 cannot 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 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 may 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. This social work department was the predecessor of what we called 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, this 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 focus on the operational aspect. Therefore in this kind of situation, we established a women's studies department. We recruited students for the women's studies department through the social work department, but with a women's studies focus. Therefore we used the loopholes in this policy to create a path away from marginality in order to develop women's studies. Through this method we were able to have the women studies department. First I was the education director, then the vice president of the school and then the president. I was the only president of an official China Women's College in the whole country. The first challenge to face was that our position didn't mean we actually 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 I also had a space for action. If you do not have this kind of space, it seems as if 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. It is similar to how we built the women's studies department that I talked about a moment ago. Then I gradually began to consider making some changes, not merely in terms of institution building but also bringing about some fundamental changes. We believe that this is quite essential. For instance, from a structural perspective we have the women's studies department and the social work department. As for the social work department, we said a moment ago that its focus was the female community. We also have the law department. What does our school's law department focus on? The Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women, but also children – women and children. Naturally it has its own characteristics. Simultaneously, add in the goals of the Women's Federation. Certainly at the same time we also add the feminist goal of gender equality. At the same time we need to be unified with the entire education system. Therefore I think that based on these circumstances, we attempted to make adjustments in departmental building.

At the same time, for instance, in the library there is a collection of feminist books. Soon we also will start a women's information and resource center. We wanted to make this center so it would become the country's biggest collection of electronic resources, where you could search on line for materials, and also the largest collection of source materials on women's studies and so on. We want to make it an interconnected body. I hope that we can provide China's largest, most complete and most easy to use feminist book collection. This collection would include every aspect of feminism. Now we already carried out some planning and have made adjustments. We are currently working on this.

Also the focus of the school's research supports topics that are related to women. This 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 – altogether we have nine departments and more than thirty different areas 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 class 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. 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. Moreover we also clearly see that students benefit from this aspect of their education. For instance, I just gave you that example of that student who was looking for work. She knew [that sign] was not right. Why? Because she had learned from this curriculum that sex discrimination is illegal – sex discrimination is present in advertisements and classified ads, etc. It even includes some work situations such as sexual harassment and so on. In our physical education class, we have a class called “Women's Self Defense.” It also teaches the students how to protect themselves– from the law, and from other's actions. Thus we have very many distinct aspects of the curriculum. All aspects of the curriculum revolve around our essential core idea.

Moreover, in the entire school, we really advocate the educational model that combines teaching, scientific research and practice. Looking at this from the bigger picture, this is a problem of how the school wants to position itself. Should it become a research institute, or a comprehensive university, or a university of high quality that focuses on undergraduate education? So we positioned the school in a way so that we would have special characteristics. For instance we sought to be special, not comprehensive, and chose quality over quantity. We also have some slogans in order to highlight the cultivation of young women with the spirit of the “Four Selves” and talented female students in different areas of study. According to this basic idea, in reality we know we have to reform the curriculum in the classroom. We have to advocate that students participate in practical matters. We have to advocate for teachers to do research. Trying to do this we realized we faced a very important problem of communication, between teachers and students and between society and teachers and students. This is a problem of building linkages. In this kind of process, some traditional ideas in the Chinese education process, such as the unquestionable authority of the teachers, the idea that if a teacher says something then it is right, and the idea that the students only listen and do not think, have gradually changed under our new educational principle. This is something that feminism indeed advocates – the idea that everyone is equal and everybody has opportunities. These ideas have slowly affected pedagogy, curriculum, research and practice. Therefore our students go out into society and engage in practical activities, for instance, being concerned for migrant workers' children and volunteering at mobile schools. Our students gradually have the sense that everyone should be equal and that everyone should have equal opportunity. Everybody needs to have self-respect, to be self-confident, to be able to support herself and to have the spirit of self-strengthening, working hard and self-respect and so on. This kind of spirit has slowly affected each sector of teaching.

Therefore I think that I am rather lucky to be in this kind of position where I have two spaces, the feminist space and space within the structure of formal education. In this way, our school is unique in China. We have implemented a women's studies curriculum – the only institution of higher learning to have a women's studies department. So we integrate research, practice and teaching into one body with the hope that we can provide support to other universities and a very good environment for foreign scholars who come to China to conduct research on Chinese women. So as the deputy president of this college,

I personally have worked very diligently to promote this aspect of our school. But I should also say that I had a very good opportunity and the space for action to carry out my work. Compared to other colleges and universities it is much smoother and much easier to do our work. Of course, other administrators in this school did not all consciously accept the ideas of feminism. But we all had the will to make this school special. What kind of special characteristics? These characteristics are based on women's studies research. Because of this, everybody rather easily accepted my general design and ideas. Therefore, in carrying this out for some years – since the school became the Chinese Women's College – from 1985, no, from 1995 when we officially changed our name, to the present, we have increasingly clearly highlighted our own special characteristics. We have more and more famous women's studies researchers and some quite well-known women scholars. Thus, also we have more and more influence on society.

Shi: What difficulties then did you have in this process? For instance were there any conflicts between your feminist values and the All-China Women's Federation's organizational values or the values of other officials at your school?

Zhang Li: These existed all the time, but of course it was not only conflicts of feminist values. In any kind of situation conflicting ideas always exist. However, the issue you raised is a rather important one. When for instance you stipulate the required courses in other disciplines, you face resistance. The fine arts department students say, "Why do I have to take a women's studies class?"; the nursing department students ask "Why I do want to study a class in the women's studies department curriculum?"; the fashion design department students say "Why do I have to take a women's studies class?" People question this. Their curriculum has already given them 1,600 hours of class time. If they add on additional class hours, they simply will not fit in their schedule. Originally there are very many courses that they are required to take such as public theory classes and fundamental courses for their major. This is because the Ministry of Education sets some courses, which are compulsory. So they feel as if they already have to take so many classes and then the school adds another. Therefore in each department I must talk to the head of the department; there has to be a process. On the one hand I clearly establish with everyone the importance of the women's studies curriculum at the Chinese Women's College. If at the Chinese Women's College you do not cultivate students with gender consciousness then we have not fulfilled our responsibility to them. From the point of view of the All-China Women's Federation and the China Women's College what is our goal? We must cultivate students who have the spirit of the "Four Selves." This should be reflected in our curriculum; this is a necessity.

On the other hand, I use some administrative methods, demanding that the students attend a women's studies class. I ordered the implementation of this required course in women's studies and thus it was pushed down to the lower levels. Therefore everybody had no alternative but to accept this. After several years, opinion has changed. After every course is finished, we all have an evaluation which includes student's feedback and opinion of the class. Department heads and students were all quite satisfied with this group of teachers' courses – the content was quite good, the students' feedback was

positive, the teacher's lectures were quite good, and their basic skills were good. Thus, students liked these classes. Moreover the teaching methodology for these classes – the basic idea and students' interactions, communication, participation – students thought that all of this was extremely interesting. They especially liked that they could express their opinions. Therefore students all really welcomed this curriculum. Every time we do an evaluation of the course, basically students have commented that it was outstanding. Thus currently everyone has gradually come to accept this kind of curriculum. Therefore I had these kinds of obstacles (that I talked about above).

Moreover I think these kinds of obstacles are not initially obvious. It is not deliberate or intentional but the result of a difference in ideas. For instance when we are promoting the special characteristics of the Chinese Women's College some people said: "Right, right. We should have a special character. As you can see some girls have no education on how to carry themselves, how they should stand, sit and walk in a lady-like way. We should teach them how to wear clothes, teach them how to have a good image..." As for the question of women's image, as a feminist, I have never had the idea that people should have disheveled hair and dirty faces, and not take care of themselves or be extremely messy. But, we cannot train students according to how everyone thinks women should behave or act. This would mean that the Chinese Women's College had failed, right? But in this kind of situation, when discussing these things with some of the leaders and teachers you sometimes have a conflict, a conflict of ideas. Everybody wants this school to have special characteristics and believes that this school must advocate the "Four Selves" and that women should have their own goals for cultivating themselves. But when actually putting these things into practice, you may discover that you are talking about two different matters. Actually you are doing two different things. Therefore I think in this aspect, there is still much work to be done. Often there is a conflict of ideas, differences, and the intersection of the two. Everyone should try to work together to accomplish these things, but this does not always work. I think that you must go through this kind of process.

Moreover, from the point of view of the All-China Women's Federation, they are after all a bridge that connects the party and the women's populace. Therefore to a very great degree, we definitely have to carry out the party and government's resolutions and policies. Because of this, sometimes I feel that in some concepts problems may emerge. But at this time we need to pay attention to our understanding and approach. The "equality of the sexes" and "gender" are two typical concepts. Beginning in 1995 everyone began using the concept of gender. Everybody knows the concept of gender, and they also know the differences between sex and gender. They also know that the term "gender" has its own history and know gender theory advocates a kind of equality of the sexes. They also know gender itself challenges the social system. Therefore people have come to understand the concept of gender more. The Chinese government, women's organizations and many people do not use this word consciously. Because the United Nations documents use this term in an attempt to bring gender consciousness into the decision-making level, when the Chinese government or Women's Federation formulate plans and suggest we must bring gender consciousness into decision-making, it is very natural to introduce this topic. As soon as it is introduced people start to ask what

exactly is this thing called gender. Why do we say gender? I remember at that time a Chinese leader asked me, “China has never not advocated ‘equality between men and women.’ Right? ‘The equality of men and women’ is a basic state policy of the Chinese Communist Party that has been carried out for fifty years. Everyone knows of the equality of the sexes. It is deep in the hearts of the people. Now you want to use words like ‘gender consciousness’ and ‘gender blindness,’ and so on. Why do you have to use a different set of language?” He did not mean that he did not agree with us. He meant why don’t we use the concepts that everyone already accepts, understands and already knows. Why don’t we express our ideas using these words? At the time he really caused me to think in a different way. I think this actually may be a solution to many debates that we are having now. Actually in some debates we cannot be too rigid. We cannot say my way is of course the only way. If you do not agree, I cannot do it or I will not do it. Then nothing can be accomplished. Therefore because of this kind of situation, I actually discovered that sometimes you can discuss new issues within a previously existing framework. In fact when I think of the similarities and differences of gender and the equality of the sexes, I feel they share many things. You cannot say that equality of men and women and gender are completely different concepts. You cannot understand it this way. I think the equality of men and women – advocating the equality of the sexes – has been a basic state policy and the Communist Party of China has done this for many years. You cannot deny the work the Chinese government and the Communist Party has carried out. I think at the very least, no man dares to say, “I am a male chauvinist,” or “I am like this.” Why? Because everyone thinks that “male chauvinism” is a derogatory term and is not a good thing. Why isn’t it a good thing? This is the result of education. This is the genuine result of the process of education of the equality of men and women that the government has carried out. A man can only tell you, “I certainly am not a chauvinist; I respect women.” However, he may then turn around and say, “But the woman should make food, should take care of the child. If the woman does not take care (of the child), who would...?” He very naturally turns his words around but he cannot wear “the chauvinist” hat. This is a result of education from the Communist Party of China. But an incident has inspired me. That is, at the time when we did gender trainings, there was a researcher from the social science institute. We discussed during the training that we must have a standard to measure the degree and the environment of equality of the sexes. We have to have a standard. If you do not have a standard how can you speak of equality? But what was this standard? Actually this standard was a standard set by men. Therefore when you are saying that women are not equally treated and that women must participate in government more, what is your standard? Your standard is that participating in government is in the domain of men. Now women must enter this domain. Now women are not equal because men occupy ninety percent of the seats. Therefore we must increase the proportion (of women). Increasing the proportion of women in government is then equality. But in our discussion I said I thought actually this is not true equality of the sexes. In fact, when you use gender as your analytical framework, you can see this is not right. What we actually must do is not increase the ratio of women. What we must do in fact is gender equality. I said that the standard is based on a male standard. Then this woman from the social science institute at this training session asked me – So when we throw away the male standard, we no longer have a standard; what is our standard? At that time I really thought this was a problem.

We did not have a standard; what was the standard? In fact there exists a framework; the standard is the male standard. If you get rid of this standard, what standard would you use? Actually we must create a new standard in order to make everyone truly equal. If you say that this domain is only for men and increase the ratio to make equality of the sexes, then this would be unfair to women. This fundamentally violates the basic principles of Aristotle, the fundamental principle of fairness – “people of the same rank should receive the same treatment, and people of different ranks should receive different treatment.” If you put people of different ranks together and force them to be equal, inequality will forever manifest itself.

This incident really inspired me to think in a new way. Therefore I started to think about how some of our concepts certainly did not need to be absolute or definitely like this and definitely not like that. In the process of promoting equality of the sexes, there are very many things... For instance a Party leader gave me an example. I criticized that governor and told him that he was a male chauvinist, and did not promote equality of men and women. That governor said “Oh, but I do not want to be chauvinistic. I certainly must correct this. ... I have to try to correct this.” If I told him that his problem was gender blindness, he would not really understand what I meant. He wouldn’t understand what we were talking about. I definitely feel that there is a problem of understanding and conceptualizing “gender” and “the equality of men and women,” these two concepts. But looking at this from another angle, actually we can see, the concept of “the equality of men and women” is known and accepted by everyone. But for the concept of “gender” to achieve this and its effects to be even evaluated, it will be an extremely long process.

Therefore I think in this process – let’s return to what you just asked a moment ago about obstacles to carrying out this process. When I am carrying out some of my own ideas, actually it is these kinds of problems – the kind that you cannot see. But there are differences in ideas. I think in these aspects, I have truly encountered some difficulties. It is really different. Since I am not a pure scholar, I cannot say a question should only be discussed as an academic question: if you agree, then agree; if you do not, then drop it. As for me, I also have a position as an administrator. As an administrator I also have rules to follow. If I do not observe these rules, then my choice is either I give up or I insist on my ideas and other people give up on me. Therefore in this kind of situation, to a very great degree, I truly have encountered many difficulties. But, I feel lucky that at the same time I have these two areas where I have space to work. Therefore I think in carrying out women’s studies research, in taking feminism as a basic idea in the foundation of complete educational reform – doing these things has been a rather smooth process.

Shi: What has affected you most profoundly or deeply?

Zhang Li: Are you saying feelings of overcoming obstacles?

Shi: In all aspects – in all aspects of your work, what has affected you in a profound way?

Zhang Li: I feel, to return to the basic overarching topic, working in China's only official women's college, I believe that if you want to accomplish things under this kind of system, you must have a dual identity. Otherwise you will not be able to do many things.

Shi: Then what kind of outlook do you have for yourself and the college? What do you hope the future brings?

Zhang Li: Actually I have just said it. For example, as the leader of this college, I currently work with other people to establish this school as a top rate institution, a women's college that has special characteristics. The college has this kind of self-identification. But, what is a "top rate institution?" We need to work together to explore its meaning. For example, as a college president, I want my students to easily find work in the job market. You want the students to have the ability to go out into the job market and in addition to their technical abilities – for example a law department graduate would need to understand legal knowledge, clothing design department students need to understand colors, cutting garments, etc. – apart from this, I hope the students who graduate from our school are able to become a new force in the women's movement. They should consciously and unconsciously promote gender equality and take this as their personal responsibility. This is one special characteristic. Another special characteristic is that the school positions itself within the women's community, because I feel that you cannot abandon this space of operation. Under the auspices of the All China Women's Federation, I carry forth the goals of this organization and position ourselves in alignment with the women's federation's position in the women's community. I feel the goals of the women's federation and our goals are the same, because we all want to achieve a kind of equality. How we accomplish this is up to us, but our goals are consistent. We cannot give up this special characteristic of our school. Therefore, other departments, research activities and practical activities are all concentrating on the women's community. We want to actively foster young women. For example, currently we have offered the first class for graduate study in women's studies in cooperation with Hong Kong Chinese University and the University of Michigan. Our vision is to be the first institute in China to obtain the right to confer a Master's degree in women's studies. Why don't we recruit students for a bachelor's degree? During our study in the past two years, I realized that as an administrative leader of a university, I still certainly must consider the issue of students finding employment after they leave the college. Undergraduate students only with a women's studies degree would still find it relatively difficult to find employment. Therefore I thought that we should first focus on graduate education. Another goal is what we just talked about. In addition to developing students' characters so that they have gender consciousness, and developing our women's studies department so that it can confer a master's degree, our greatest hope is to make China's largest and most complete women's research center. It would have an extensive collection of texts, and various electronic resources, and every kind of information. In the future, this largest research center will provide an invaluable service for the college, and at the same time, it will provide service for both domestic and foreign people who have interest in women's research. We are preparing to begin construction next year of this new library and we hope to complete it in two years. If we are able to complete it, we are thinking of building a museum in our new research center. The museum will be on the

first floor of the library. If we can realize this plan, I will feel this is one thing that is very meaningful for me. I have wanted to do this for several years.

Shi: What plans do you, personally, have for the future?

Zhang Li: I do not have any specific plans, I hope that after completing these several years of administrative work, I will be able to return to the department and be a relatively good teacher.

Shi: Finally, can you talk a bit about the development of feminism on the mainland, its past and its future? What kinds of difficulties will the development of feminism on the mainland face and what kinds of efforts need to be carried out?

Zhang Li: It is very difficult to summarize this question. Actually, I also thought about this question, but I still feel it is rather difficult to answer. I feel that we can divide it into levels. The first level concerns the sphere of academic research. I feel that this is the most rapidly developing field. Why? I feel in this sphere, in the recent years research in feminism should be relatively smooth and develop relatively quickly. This is because these changes have come about at the same time as the government's reform and opening policy, the revolution in the education system, an increasing number of scholars returning from overseas, and along with increasingly more people beginning to accept different kinds of thinking. But I personally estimate that until we can make women's studies an official discipline like it is overseas, to obtain national Ministry of Education approval, and to be able to award different types of degrees, there is still a long way to go. Because people still consider women's studies to be a marginal discipline that does not count. Currently there are a lot of people engaged in this kind of work. For example Du Fangqin¹⁸ of Tianjin, Wang Zheng,¹⁹ people at our school, as well as Beijing Normal University.²⁰ We are jointly putting together classes for a higher education curriculum that encourages women's research. Our goal is to be able to influence college students and establish a favorable climate for women's studies. After we have a foundation and when the Ministry of Education approves and agrees to our plan, then we already have a few prerequisites. I feel this is one level.

Another sphere I feel that will be relatively easy to carry forth is that of "development." Why this field? Because currently many people – no matter if they accept or do not accept feminist thought and theory – in fact have already discovered this field, or are carrying out programs in this field. This is a field in which it is relatively easy to find funds from big foundations, even including some national funds. For example there are funds for women's employment, employment projects, training rural women, supporting

¹⁸ Du Fangqin is a prominent gender historian and feminist scholar in China. Currently she teaches at the Tianjin Normal University of China, where she holds the position of the director of the Women's Studies Center.

¹⁹ Professor Wang Zheng teaches at the University of Michigan. She is a historian of Chinese women's and gender history and a researcher for the Institute for Research on Women and Gender.

²⁰ Beijing Normal University was the first teaching-training university in China, which grew out the Faculty of Education of the Metropolitan University founded in 1902. It was named the Beijing Normal University in 1923.

marginalized women, etc. I found that quite a lot of people have already begun to pay attention to these programs. Although some officials have not consciously accepted some of the feminist theories, methods and perceptions, they still feel that they can do these projects because they have funds. Therefore I feel that similar to the field of women's research, the field of development should also receive our attention. I believe the development of these two fields probably occurs rather quickly. I believe that a big issue is that these two fields are still relatively separate. Still people doing research focus on pure scholarly research. Those administering programs care more about operations. Therefore I believe that the integration of these two aspects is still quite important.

The situation appears to be different overseas. Overseas when a field of research exists, there is also a market for that field of research. For example women's studies departments have different types of degrees to award and naturally have funding sources. Since this discipline exists, there is a kind approval for the discipline. Since students choose this discipline, the students themselves must consider the market and job possibilities after they graduate. But China is not quite the same, because there is still the problem of the graduate employment rate for Chinese universities. China's current Ministry of Education department publicly announces each university's employment success rate. When you publicly announce the employment success rate, this puts pressure on the university. Then the university will not recruit students to fields or disciplines where employment rates are relatively low. This occurs even to the extent that there are stipulations – for example if the employment success rate does not reach 50%, your discipline's recruitment of students is automatically cancelled. This is a kind of pressure. Therefore I feel that if you want these two fields to develop relatively quickly and to form a strong force, there is still quite a long road to travel. But I should say, in the field of women's research and conducting women's programs – women participating in “development” programs, we currently have some outstanding people who have a great influence. I myself feel this field's development should be the fastest.

Shi: Thank you, President Zhang Li Xi.

Zhang Li: Thank you.