

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

SITE: CHINA

**Transcript of Wei Tingting
Interviewer: Xueqin (Sophie) Huang
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Wei, Tingting, born in 1988 in Guangxi, China, a Chinese LGBT and Feminist activist, majoring in sociology in college and graduate with a MA in anthropology from Wuhan University. She started to get involved in feminist and LGBT movement since she produced and staged Vagina Monologues in Wuhan in 2007. She is the co-founder of national bisexual network in China, founder of Guangzhou Gender and Sexuality Education Center, and on the committee/counselor of several LGBT and feminist organizations. She was co-listed as the “10 of the Most Inspiring Feminists of 2015” by MS Magazine in the US. She is also a psychology counselor, writer, documentary producer and director. The documentary We Are Here she produced was screened in many countries.

Xueqin (Sophie) Huang was born in 1988 in Shaoguang, Guangdong province. She graduated from Jinan University. She used to work as a journalist for a national news agency and progressive newspaper. She is freelancing now, writing for Southern Metropolis Weekly, The Livings, The Initiative Media and NGOCN. Her reporting focuses on democracy development, civil society and the rights of disadvantaged groups in China. She published a report on workplace sexual harassment of Chinese female journalists in 2017, which ignited and promoted #MeToo movement in China. She is dedicated to women's rights and advocacy for anti-sexual harassment law. In 2019 she was jailed for several months for her reporting on Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement.

[Note: Some information has been redacted to protect confidentiality.]

Huang Xueqin: Could you please first tell us a bit about yourself?

Wei Tingting: OK, my name is Wei Tingting. Um, I'm thinking about how I should introduce myself. I am the founder of the former Guangzhou Gender and Sexuality Education Center (GSEC)¹. At present in China, I have participated in women's rights-related work and have nearly more than 10 years of experience, but then our organization was recently closed (laughter). In the previous almost 10 years, I have participated in ... for example, some actions of the young feminist activists, and then in 2015, I was one of the "Feminist Five"² who were detained for participating in anti-sexual harassment activities. After that in Guangzhou I set up this organization called Guangzhou Gender and Sexuality Education Center, but unfortunately we have recently been listed as an illegal organization by the Ministry of Civil Affairs ... the organization is suspected of being an illegal organization, so for various reasons, we shut down GSEC. This is a general introduction and account of my experiences. At the same time, I also make documentaries. In addition, I write some articles and do some investigative research.

XH: After listening to your feminist history, it's actually quite long.

WT: (Laughter) A pretty long history.

XH: But I want to know; everyone will want to know, how did you start your feminist activism, or where did your feminist thinking come from, and when?

WT: Well, I think what's pretty interesting is that my formal start, my feminist enlightenment or when things took root, I think I should discuss an iconic event. I think it was in 200.... Can I talk about that? OK! If you want to discuss this iconic event, it should be in 2007 that I first had contact with and got to know the play "The Vagina Monologues"³ In fact, that play was

¹ The Guangzhou Gender and Sexuality Education Center (GSEC), a leading non-profit organization in China dedicated to combating sexual violence and promoting gender equality, was shut down on December 6, 2018 due to the government's tightening control over public discussion about women's rights and non-profit organizations working on this front.

² The Feminist Five is a group of five young Chinese feminists who planned a demonstration against sexual harassment on public transportation. They became known after the Chinese government arrested them for this demonstration.

³ The Vagina Monologues is an episodic play written by Eve Ensler, which developed and premiered in New York and was adopted globally. The play explores consensual and nonconsensual sexual experiences, body image, genital mutilation, direct and indirect encounters with reproduction, vaginal care, menstrual periods, sex work, and several other topics through the eyes of women with various ages, races, sexualities, and other differences.

particularly interesting. When I entered university in 2005, and was studying at Wuhan University, I was actually a very active person in our theatrical society. I also founded a club in our department, called "WE Drama Club." Every year, in this community, each theater company would perform its so-called annual big production. I was still thinking about it, ah, what are we going to perform this year? It was such a coincidence, one time when I went to the optician to repair my glasses, it was when I was previously near-sighted, and while my glasses were being repaired, I had nothing to do. So I read the newspaper that was at the front of the table at the optician's shop. Ah, then it was such a pleasant surprise, as I was reading the newspaper, and reading it very close to me, I particularly remember that scene.

Just reading the newspaper, it said a play was performed in Wuhan, called "The Vagina Monologues." I was curious about the name, and since I was in a drama group, as soon as I saw the name, I thought, this is really interesting. After I returned to the dormitory, I started to search to figure out what kind of play "The Vagina Monologues" was. I discovered that Professor Ai Xiaoming at Sun Yat-sen University [in Guangzhou] had been putting on this play since 2005.

In 2007, another teacher, Peng Xiaohui [a famous sexologist who teaches at Central China Normal University], brought the play to Wuhan. At the time, either the *Wuhan Morning News* or one of the Wuhan evening papers covered it. So I started searching for that script, and then indirectly found it, I think on HBO, which aired an interview about [the playwright] Eve Ensler and the play. As soon as I saw it, I said, wow, this drama is so interesting; I thought, how about we just perform this play this year -- why not?

I then indirectly contacted Professor Peng Xiaohui. He took me to ... he said ah, he has a version of "The Vagina Monologues" that's copyrighted by Professor Ai Xiaoming. So one day I took two or three of my actors and we visited Prof, Peng together at his home. Was that his office or his home? I forget. Then he showed us this movie. While we watched the film, I remember we were all in tears! After the documentary was over, which was Professor Ai Xiaoming's version, we were all moved and excited! Ah, whatever, we'll do this when we go back! Later, in fact, at that time we didn't know anything. We had very little sexual experience or anything like that, so we went back and felt, wow, this is great! We'll do it. Then we started to recruit actors, and then

as the person in charge and director, I started to recruit actors, and we began to rehearse. Along the way we also made some changes to the scripts by ourselves. We changed scripts, added scripts, and then also selected from the earlier script; this is how we staged the play at Wuhan University. I remember when we were performing, the scene was really ... we really didn't expect that there would be so many people. Wuhan University has a place called the "Yingding", also known as Sakura Castle;⁴ there's a small theater there, and the whole place was packed with people.

XH: About how many people does the venue hold?

WT: Probably more than 100; I guess maybe about 100 or 200 people. But it's a small theater, so in fact, there were people standing on the side in a circle or two watching it, and then anyway, as soon as the play ended, everyone was applauding, blah, blah, blah. We thought that for a student at that time, wow, this really gave us a sense of achievement, and what's more, the topic we addressed probably was considered to be pretty avant-garde at the time.

XH: About sex.

WT: Right, about sex, about women, about vaginas, etc. The name itself sounds like a very avant-garde and shocking thing. So at that time we thought it was very interesting and meaningful. In 2007, we put on one or two performances ...maybe just one. Then a great opportunity happened in 2009!

XH: Uh-huh.

WT: There's a man named Huamei Chaoren, who is a member of the older generation in the theater circle. He started again -- I forget whether he was influenced by what might be called the Fudan University version, or what --he gathered people together from different cities around the country ... to perform the "The Vagina Monologues." So he located me because he knew that I had staged it before in 2007. And if I am remembering correctly, in 2007, I had

⁴ Located on the rooftop of one of Wuhan University's dormitories is a garden of cherry blossoms, also called Sakura Castle. There is an old library on this rooftop and it is said to bring students good luck when they study there.

made contact with some people in theater companies from Zhejiang University, Fudan University, including [the student group that focuses on gender-related topics] The Zhihe Society; at that time I started to get to know them. So we staged the play again in 2009, and we also expanded our group of actors to include people not at university, and I found another friend to be the director. I was the equivalent of the producer and convener with responsibility for the entire project. So we had four performances throughout Wuhan at that time. We went to different schools and social venues, and even a sexology museum to perform, so we also became very influential. In Wuhan, in the first college student drama arts festival, we actually took the first-place gold medal, but then it was recalled because of the name of the play.

XH: (Laughter).

WT: Later, our actors who were there told me that we had originally won first prize. They called me on the phone and said, "Director, what happened? We had initially won first prize, but then in the end, nothing?" Later they told me the reason was that the mayor would give out the first prize award, so they thought that our play might not be appropriate as the first-place recipient, and so they gave us a separate award for outstanding performance. But I remember when we did that competition, after the performance, our actors told me that the judges gave us a standing ovation, in other words, they actually approved of our play, but just because of this sensitivity issue, our prize was withdrawn.

XH: I think it's clear that this whole drama, or "The Vagina Monologues," still achieved great success. Why do you think it actually successfully attracted so many people-- what is its avant-garde nature?

WT: I think one reason is that first, it was because it was a student group that was dealing with a topic that related to sex, moreover, it dealt with sexual violence and private matters relating to women -- things that aren't really talked about and we showed that publicly on stage.

XH: And in 2007, topics relating to sex hadn't yet been fully developed or discussed; so nevertheless, there was space for this?

WT: Yes, yes! And at that time these topics may have been new to most, or many young people,

and I believe even today if we stage the show-- that is also relatively new, and it's not a very easy topic to discuss. It can even be said that there are some taboo topics. So I think this is why students can feel, on the one hand it is taboo, but on the other hand, it is a very important topic. I want to give a small example. At that time, when we were doing that workshop, we would let our actors tell their own stories. This was a way to collect stories and share experiences with everyone. We found that it was just like a line from Eva Ensler's script: "as soon as women start talking about sex, there's no stopping them."

This story did really happen during the workshop. This person told a story, and immediately she was followed by the next person who started talking, and then people kept talking about sexual orgasms, how to make love, and so on. Everyone was very interested in these topics, and they were very willing to talk about them. I'd like to go back to the question you just asked. I think it's because ordinarily there are too few such platforms, where there is this kind of space for discussions about sex, and the different things that sex brought to us. It could be violence, it could be taboo, it could be orgasm, it might be about this change in our bodies. For example, when you have your period, how do you feel? So I think this touched on all aspects of things relating to sex. Since there was no space to discuss these things, as soon as it was brought out in public, it attracted a lot of people's attention.

XH: And women also want to be spontaneous and take the initiative (WT: Yeah!) and voluntarily discuss something we previously thought was taboo, or existing in a private realm, about sex, because China 's sex education is very deficient. So in this respect, college students, or you as one of the women, to organize a discussion like this, what kind of influence do you think this had on the atmosphere of the larger society at that time?

WT: Me..... what kind of influence did I have?

XH: Or college students that advocated for these things?

WT: I think for everyone, including me and the crew, I think it was a very good education, because through this we started to talk about our own stuff, in fact, you will find women's stories are a great treasure. That is, many people will talk about different things. For example,

some of our actors at the time had already graduated, one woman talked about her orgasms. Those of us who had no so-called sexual experience at the time, were really curious, and said, “ah hah, so that’s it!” Ah, then, so it’s like this, and then different people talked about their menstruation experience, and then we discovered, hey, their menstruation experiences are quite different. And one thing that I found particularly touching at the time involved a female student who was my senior, and with whom I had a really good friendship. Before she came to act in the play, I didn’t know some of her personal stories, but then she proposed to write a script. What she actually wrote was a script about abortion.

I didn’t learn until later, actually she was the one who told me, that in fact, it was her own story. So although as I said I was so familiar with this older female schoolmate, in fact, I had no idea that she actually had such a sad story. She accidentally became pregnant and, in the end, had an abortion. On her own accord, she took medicine to cause a medical abortion. So for me, I felt that this was a very new experience. In the past, I never realized that talking about gender or gender inequality was such an important topic. So for me, I think “The Vagina Monologues” was like that, looking back at my life experience, it was a turning point. After that, I started to realize that gender is actually a very important issue. And so many women have so many personal stories, whether it’s stories of oppression or wonderful things that happened, that hadn’t yet been explored. Therefore, after 2009, we started an organization called the Wuhan Women's Rights and Social Development Group.⁵

WT: This was the impact on me personally, and then you just now asked about the impact on society. I think one impact is education, and another is that I think the female actors in our crew, as well as the men, all experienced a kind of empowerment, or opening up to some new perspectives. I remember when we performed in 2007, it was very interesting, because our theater company for this show only staged female performers. So all the men were doing stage management, props, etc.; they were all helping out behind the scenes, backstage (laughter).

⁵ Wuhan Women’s Rights and Social Development Group, originally named V-Day in Wuhan, is an organization established in April 2010. The purpose of the organization is to help the public, especially adolescents, to learn more about sexuality and its positive and negative consequences by promoting education for gender cultures and extending its diversity. The main approaches include screening movies and holding seminars. As of today, there are 474 members across the country following the website of the organization and its last post was in 2012.

XH: All the leading roles were women; the men had supporting roles.

WT: Yes, women are the leads, and later I let them introduce themselves; that is, at the end of the performance we had a concluding session for the whole group. Everyone talked about their own experiences in the performance. The last one to do a concluding presentation was a male student who did stage management; he said, I want to dedicate this play to my mother, who is far away in heaven. At that time, we were very moved. It seemed as if through the process of helping to stage manage the show, he created a new connection with his mother. Because the last scene in the play is about giving birth, how human beings all come from our mothers' vaginas. So at that time, I thought, it was quite moving; that is, not only women were involved, but our male students also participated. And he perhaps realized at that moment that his mother -- it wasn't so easy for her, to give birth to him. Either the difficult facets of being a woman, or something else that he unearthed.

XH: In fact, this play was not only a way to let people understand women, or the people around us, but also to connect more women through their common experiences. Men also began to say that a critical door had been opened. This was an inspiration for your own feminist thinking, an enlightenment, right?

WT: Yes, even though at that time I might not have considered myself a feminist, or didn't use a word to describe myself, but I already felt that this was an important thing and we should do it. I had a hazy sense that this was important.

XH: It seemed like there was something planted in your heart.

WT: Right, right.

XH: There was a seed in your heart.

WT: So afterwards, we formed the group we just discussed. Then that ...

XH: What did this group do?

WT: Well, in the beginning, I was pretty much the main person, you could say I was the founder.

And there were two people who had been involved in the play. One was Xiao Tie.⁶ Maybe you know her? She is now the executive director of the Beijing LGBT Center. The other was my roommate at the time, but later, after graduation, she went to work at Alibaba.⁷ So I said, hey, look at the first three people in our production crew, all of our life paths were quite different. Oh right, later she went to work for Taobao. At that time, our work had several components; one of them was to show films, so we had a movie-viewing session either once a week or once every two weeks.

XH: What were the main aspects of the movies you chose for the film viewing program?

WT: We showed films that related to gender. "The Vagina Monologues," and I screened one called ... "Underage Prostitute" ["Sara" is the official English name of this Hong Kong film]⁸ and so on. Anyway, I forget, but we did this kind of activity several times. I also held seminars; it might have entailed discussions about gender. I've forgotten specific details but can go back and check. Also, at that time, I think we searched the Internet and found that there weren't that many organizations relating to gender. I found one at Sun Yat-sen University; it was a website related to women, gender, and social development. This was done by Teacher Ai [i.e., well-known professor Ai Xiaoming]⁹ and Teacher Ke¹⁰. In fact, it was after referring to this website that we came up with the name for our group. I see, yeah! We can name our group along these lines!

Let's call our group like this, and so in that way we just nailed down our name!

XH: Well, isn't that actually how you came to this issue initially, through this event -- you started to understand the issues of gender, gender equality and women's

⁶ Xin Ying, aka Xiao Tie (Iron), is the executive director of Beijing LGBT Center. She became an activist in the sexuality equality area in 2009, and she became a full-time staff member in Beijing LGBT Center in 2012. She is also the co-curator of Chinese Women's Film Festival from 2012-2015.

⁷ Alibaba Group Holding Limited is a Chinese multinational technology company specializing in e-commerce, retail, internet and technology. Its subsidiaries include Taobao, Alipay, Youku, etc.

⁸ The movie tells a story about Sara exiling herself to Thailand and meets a child prostitute Dok-my. Through the process of rescuing Dok-my, Sara becomes haunted by the memories of her own past that she was sexually abused by her stepfather.

⁹ Professor Ai Xiaoming, born in 1953, is a feminist literary scholar and the co-producer and director of the Chinese version of The Vagina Monologues, one of the activists of the Stop Domestic Violence network. She is the Deputy Director of the Women's Studies Center and director of the Sex/Gender Education Forum at the Sun Yat-sen University.

¹⁰ Professor Ke Qianting worked closely with Prof. Ai Xiaoming since she was a Ph.D. student of Prof. Ai and involved in the production of The Vagina Monologues. After Ai's retirement, Prof. Ke took on the leadership role of feminist programs at Sun Yat-sen University.

oppression.

WT: Right, right.

XH: When did you start to become an activist?

WT: Well, it was probably in 2009. I think there were two important things. One important thing was that I was selected to join an international sex education group, an organization called Marie Stopes International (MSI)¹¹. Marie Stopes has a youth pioneer project, which is to train a thousand young activists, who mainly focus on sex education. I was selected for sex education. At that same time, in the summer, I joined another LGBTQ group. At the time there were several organizations in Beijing that were very active and well-known, for example, the Beijing LGBT Center,¹² Beijing Gender Health Education Institute, Common Language (Tongyu),¹³ Aibai Culture and Education Center,¹⁴ and GS Magazine.¹⁵ These very active Beijing organizations organized a queer summer camp for young people.

At that time, I was straight, and I was also selected for this summer camp, so I participated in both summer training sessions at the same time. After I completed these two training programs, at the Beijing LGBT Center summer camp, I had already talked to them at that time, because we already had this group, and I had contacted them at the time and said, hey, I wanted to put on their Queer Film Festival in Wuhan, because there was no such event in those days. The young pioneers group also had a tiny, small grant, so I did a theater project called “Zero Theater.” The project was to put on some forum discussion theater, or practical theater, and use drama to do sex education. From a certain perspective, this was the case.

¹¹ Marie Stopes International is a nonprofit organization that provides contraception and safe abortion services to enable women all over the world to choose their own futures.

¹² Beijing LGBT Center is a nonprofit organization focused on advancing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights in China. The group was founded in 2008 and provides services such as an LGBT-friendly therapist network and a hotline for transgender individuals.

¹³ Common Language (Tongyu) is a non-profit organization founded in 2005. It focuses Chinese LGBT groups which get abused when they are facing issues like sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender performance. It provides face-to-face tutor, public education and related policy advocacy to eliminate discrimination and violence based on gender.

¹⁴ Aibai (Culture and Education Center), one of the earliest Chinese LGBT websites, founded in 1999. Before the rise of new media, Aibai was always the main access LGBT new source for Chinese community. In 2006, it was the only information source about LGBT in Chinese format. It also has an “LGBT Q&A” board held by Damien Lu through various platforms.

¹⁵ GS (GaySpot) Magazine is an independent non-profit magazine. It’s the most influential independent LGBT media in China. It changed its name from Spot to GaySpot in 2014. The magazine focuses on LGBT culture, rights and lifestyles and launches over 60 cities in Chinese LGBT institutions.

XH: Oh.

WT: So at that time, I established some connections. After returning from the summer camp trainings, I had a stronger sense of the concept of “activist.” Before in a group with basically no resources in one location, I had a kind of hazy, unclear feeling doing my work. After 2009, it seemed like I was talking to some so-called international organizations (**XH: Ha ha**) or big shots, or whatever. It felt a little bit like I was finding the organization or having some clearer identification. I think it was also the first time that I had contacted the “comrade”¹⁶ or LGBT community on such a large scale, but talking about comrades is another matter. Originally, I was an unusual undergraduate student, I wanted to do research related to comrades. So after 2009, I had two aspects, one was gender, and the other was to do LGBT-related work. And at that time I, uh, the story is so long, I really feel that two hours [for the interview] is not enough.

I’ll talk about gender first. Anyway, because of some “factors,” our original gender group slowly did less work, because our main people participated in the work of another gay group called Wuhan Rainbow, and then they became core members of that group. So my main focus turned to comrades. Then I graduated in 2011, so during that period of one or two years, I was doing graduate studies, writing my thesis, and also doing the work of the small group I just mentioned. After I graduated in 2011, I started to do headhunting for a while.

XH: Oh.

WT: Then I did head-hunting work....

XH: You were also a headhunter.

WT: Right, after graduation I looked for a job. I went to one, and finally chose a headhunting company, and then worked there. But when I was doing headhunting, I felt, like every day I seemed to be wasting my life, and I also felt that I might actually have an activist’s blood inside me. Sometimes my brain would think only about, hey! What activities is our group doing? Then

¹⁶ “Comrades” is used extensively during the era of Mao and later years, which refers to a fellow socialist or communist. In this definition “tongzhi” refers to people who share similar (tong) interests or aspirations (zhi). In the past couple of decades, the term changed its meaning due to the influence of the movement of gay rights in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Now the term is widely adopted to refer to homosexual communities and individuals.

I thought about where to go to participate in a *lala* (lesbian) camp or whatever kind of activity. I actually wasn't really focused on work at all. And that job was a bit boring. When you first start out at the job, you have to make cold calls; that is, every day you have to contact customers, and you have to count how many you did each day and note how it went. Then there was a good opportunity. Later, it seemed that because I and another colleague performed well, we were selected by the Wuhan branch of the company to go to Beijing for training, and so then I went for a sort of group training. I was there for a month or so, food and lodging were provided, so I just stayed there. So I took advantage of that month in Beijing, because I was already thinking about changing jobs at that time, to start looking for work in Beijing.

XH: Actually, if you have restlessness in your blood, then you're an activist.

WT: Yeah, right. Then I felt really bored. So when I was looking for work in Beijing, there were two organizations that were involved in LGBT issues that gave me offers. I did a comparison, pros and cons of each, and chose the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute¹⁷, which was one of the earliest gay organizations in China. I then went to work there full time. So in about September or October, after I returned to Wuhan from the training in Beijing, I immediately resigned. My Wuhan colleagues thought that was really strange, and said, why did they send you off for training, and then you resigned as soon as you got back? Then even when I wanted to resign, they wanted me to stay, saying that the company boss kept asking, why was I leaving? I didn't tell them why; I just said that, anyway, I wanted to leave. So I resigned, and then in November moved to Beijing and started my job at Beijing Gender Health Education Institute. So then I started a full-time job.

XH: So as you were just saying, at first, after you did theater, you were focused on gender and sex education, and later, as you also just said, you were at that time a straight woman, but afterwards. did the work you were doing make you have a better understanding and acceptance of yourself ?

¹⁷ The Beijing Gender Health Education Institute (BGHEI) is a non-governmental and non-profit organization founded in 2002. One of the first Chinese NGOs to focus on issues related to gender, sexuality and sexual health, BGHEI's mission is to advocate and raise awareness about sexual diversity and equality in Chinese society.

WT: I think . . .

XH: Do you mind talking about this aspect of your life?

WT: No, of course not. I think there were two aspects. During this time period, I discovered, well, that perhaps I could like women, or that I was interested in women. The main reason was because in 2009, when I went to that workshop (in Beijing), there was a T¹⁸ there who was really really handsome (**XH: ha ha**), a really attractive butch. I remember after she finished her presentation, I, along with another female student – that female student now works at New Ways of the World¹⁹ – the two of us went out for dinner that evening, right, while we were eating rice noodles, we almost did not have an appetite for food. All we talked about was that the person who just gave that presentation was so attractive, I was sitting there and said yeah, really handsome, so cool, and the two of us really did not feel like finishing our meal. Then, the next day, the other female student asked the presenter out on a date, and I felt a lot of regret about that.

XH: She made a move on her? (laughing)

WT: (Laughing) Yeah, I returned to Wuhan with a very sad feeling. At the time, it seemed like I felt that girls could be so handsome, etc., and later I met some women, or some lesbians, and then I gradually began, from being straight, to define myself as bisexual.

Later, there were more . . . but back to your question just now, I sometimes think about it. I remembered later that when I was in elementary school, in fact, a relationship I had with an “older sister” was particularly good, and I especially liked chatting with that sister, so I find it difficult to say exactly, how to say it, if this is something that is fluid and changes, or if it’s innate. Or is it because you’ve tapped into (**XH: I understand**) more of yourself, or because your journey in this life has given you the opportunity to develop new things. Anyway, I think it’s very interesting, so when I had a closer relationship with women, and later started having girlfriends, I think that subjective experience is also very different. In the past, when I was

¹⁸ T is Tomboy, here used in the context of suggesting homosexuality, equivalent to “butch,” a lesbian whose appearance and behavior are seen as traditionally masculine.

¹⁹ It is a media platform.

working, it seemed that I felt that I was a straight woman. I would do some things for my gay friends, stand up for them, or do something for them. But later I had a more personal kind of experience with discrimination against gay people, and a deeper feeling about women being subjected to such discrimination.

So if you ask how I became a feminist, one thing is "The Vagina Monologues" and the other I think is my own female identity. I actually experienced many different stories and different kinds of discrimination. Taking a look back, I remember that when I was a child, my mother, my family had incidents of domestic violence, so I was equivalent to a witness to domestic violence. This happened in a small rural village where we lived. Well, in fact, wife beating was a very normal thing, and as I grew up, as a woman, I was able to see that other people treat women differently than men. And as for myself, I think ever since I was little, I've been the kind of person who liked to explore a little bit more. Or I had no such particular type of thinking that, because I am a woman I can't do this or that-- I've never been that kind of person. So I think that on the other hand, in fact, since I was a kid, I may have had this special trait, as well as my experiences being a woman, plus later, "The Vagina Monologues," which we just discussed, and plus other experiences-- they all brought me to the road I'm on now.

XH: It can be said that in fact, as a female, you've been subjected to various kinds of oppression and violence since you were a child. Before you had access to, or because these things were everywhere, they were taken as normal. But later, after you came into contact with things like "The Vagina Monologues," in addition to some actions you took later, these made you see or face squarely that the gender issue led to some kinds of oppression. Is that right?

WT: Yeah, I guess you could look at it that way.

XH: Afterwards, I know that you were involved in more activities, and even arrested later. Can you talk about this?

WT: That event was actually in 2012. At that time, I was working in Beijing Gender Health

Education Institute, and the building in Beijing's Xintiandi area²⁰ was very interesting. There were many different organizations in that building, like Beijing Gender Health Education Institute, Beijing LGBT Center, and there was a period when "Aibai" (Culture and Education Center) was also there. Then there were the feminist groups, like "Feminist Voices,"²¹ which was actually next door, so we were neighbors. Then at the time there was another organization called "One Yuan Commune."²² But it's gone now.

XH: At that time, it actually seemed like various organizations were flourishing?

WT: Very much so; I often went to see or participate in women's activities and so on. I remember one event I participated in, it was after that experience that I finally felt that from the beginning I was actually a feminist, but earlier I just didn't know to use this term to describe myself. It was only at that time when I came into contact with the word that I felt, oh, all along I'm a feminist, or to have a kind of clearer definition. Also at that time everything was vibrant and flourishing. I remember friends' organizing events, because everyone got along well with each other, and then we also had a group of people, and also established another group called the Bianbian group.²³ In short, many different organizations were created at that time. Then friends, that is groups, were saying we can do Valentine's Day. Previously on Valentine's Day, it was "comrades" or feminists who would all do something for Valentine's Day. We said that we would do a Wounded Brides event,²⁴ and then we started to look for people who wanted to participate. Then I went, and so I was picked to do this (laughter). Then later, but I'm not actually the most important organizer, at the time ...

XH: The Wounded Brides²⁵ was 2012?

²⁰ Beijing Xintiandi Block A & B is a pair of office buildings located in northeastern Beijing.

²¹ Feminist Voices is a Beijing based NGO, founded in 2009. The organization aimed at promoting gender equality and increasing the visibility of women and gender issues in the media and in the society. In 2017, its Weibo account was shut down by Sina.com because of its reporting on a women's event overseas, which was considered as a violation of national laws and regulations.

²² One Yuan Commune is an NGO center in Beijing. It provided support and helped develop all kinds of non-profit creative activities for marginalized groups. It included various activities such as movie screening, talk show, women seminars and youth reading group on gender issues.

²³ Bianbian Group was founded in 2002 which focused on empowering sexual minority and marginalized group through queer theory and feminist theory. It helped increase the level of acceptance of marginalized groups and related issues. At the same time, it fought against the stereotypes about marginalized groups including women and queers. The main methods for the Bianbian group were holding seminars about sexual minorities, reading groups and movie screening.

²⁴ Wounded Brides event is also known as Bloody Brides event.

²⁵ Wounded Brides was the first street performance against domestic violence held in Beijing. Three volunteers dressed in wedding dresses with fake bloodstains and held the signs with slogans of anti-domestic violence. The purpose of the activity

WT: yes, right. [Redacted]

XH: At that time, how did you choose Qianmen as your location?

WT: Because Qianmen is a landmark location, and I guess it may be because a gay organization, I think in 2009, had earlier put on a very sensational piece of performance art there; that is, they took wedding photos at Qianmen, and that was on the 14th, Valentine's Day, then on the 15th, they told me at the time, that almost all of the important media's front page lead stories were photos from that event. So I think maybe everyone will take Qianmen, and it's road (a central road in Beijing), as an important landmark or an iconic thing in Beijing, so people go there and take photos, so we probably chose it for those reasons. And wasn't it just around that time that [the celebrity "Crazy English" founder] Li Yang's domestic violence²⁶ was exposed? We are all very angry about that. Angry! During our event, I remember I was walking and shouting slogans, and I even shorted "Oppose Li Yang hitting his wife!" Or something like that.

XH: Actually, the background at that time, I think should be that because there was the Li Yang incident -- he committed domestic violence against his wife and he was a celebrity, then that's why you had this event which said we are bloody brides. See what the violence that happens to brides, or intimate partners, later.

WT: Yes, but as far as I know, this action actually had a reference point at the time; I forget, Spain or some other European country had a similar kind of performance art, which meant that we could actually do the same.

XH: Can you recall what the scene was like at the time? Because many people will think that, as you said, later this photo became the headline in various media, and now many media are still using it, even made cakes out of you guys' images and made various symbols as well, which had already formed an iconic event. What effect did this have on

was to bring public attention to the problem of domestic violence. It also was a response to the famous "Li Yang Incident".

²⁶ Li Yang, the "Crazy English" guru of China, was exposed on Weibo by her ex-wife Kim Lee that he had serious problems with domestic violence. In 2011, she posted on Weibo with the caption "I love losing my face = I love hitting my wife's face" and with a few pictures showing her wounds. As a celebrity and a billionaire, Li Yang's incident caused enough national attention and compelled the public to face the problems of domestic violence.

people at the scene, some people watching, or what impact did this kind of action have on the atmosphere at that time, or was their conflict?

WT: I think what left a pretty deep impression on me was that it was really quite cold at that time. Actually, it wasn't really cold, I remember it was a bit cold, and then I stood up, and they organized other friends and said, hey, you can start going this way. Then I don't know who did it, but someone got some people in the media to come. The media folks said, "shout, shout some slogans!" So we started to shout "beating isn't intimate, and abuse isn't love!"²⁷ We walked along like this, and kept walking, but then a security guard came over. He was probably going to leave, but then I guess he was there for three or five minutes, maybe longer, and people started to watch. As they were watching, some of our friends started to distribute leaflets. But the thing that left a very deep impression on me was this: there are many different people on the side of the road watching, and I remember there were two middle-aged women, probably around 40 or 50 years old. Our friend gave them a leaflet, and told them what we were doing, that this was an activity about sexual harassment and domestic violence, blah blah. After talking to one of the women, suddenly one woman pointed to another woman, and said that she had also been beaten; she had the same situation.

XH: Oh!

WT: At that moment I felt quite stunned. For me, I also felt a bit of astonishment, and a little moved. The shock was that I never expected that a woman on the side of the road who we gave a leaflet would actually be a victim of this kind of violence. I was moved by I still remember the wind was blowing at that time, because our wedding gowns were flying up. On this fairly cold day, people were coming and going on the street, then because of our act of handing out leaflets and explaining what we are doing, then suddenly I made a connection with a woman I otherwise probably would never have met in my life. I remember that woman's expression, she seemed a bit embarrassed, but it also seemed like she wanted to ask for help. Later, it seemed they were talking about the matter and discussing what to do. I felt as if suddenly, I understood a bit better the significance of this so-called activism and action. You see that by

²⁷ "Beating isn't intimate, and abuse isn't love!" The slogan comes from an old Chinese saying "Beating is a sign of affection; cursing is a sign of love" which means that quarreling implies intimacy. They recreated the slogan and tried to use the saying people are familiar with to re-educate the public.

distributing things like this, you suddenly can have an impact on one person -- a woman who was so far away and distant in her life, standing in front of you, because of a domestic violence incident, which suddenly connects you together.

And at the time, I was even thinking maybe she knew that some people were doing such a thing, that it gave her a certain degree of comfort or a certain degree of empowerment; it let her know, hey, you can actually have channels, or someone might be able to help you. In that way, yes, this was very interesting.

XH: Another aspect is that it also shows how common violence is in intimate relationships.

WT: Right.

XH: Because you see just how randomly it could happen upon this person...

WT: Yes, this was what was shocking, as I just mentioned. Ah, I never expected how suddenly I could become so close to this matter.

XH: Although you just acted as a “bloody bride,” you didn't expect the violence to be around you everywhere. As for this action, it really had a big impact at the time.

WT: Right. I remember there were constant media interviews for a while.

XH: Then you started to become famous, right? (Laughter.)

WT: Yes, it started. Yeah! I remember at the time that someone in the foreign media was still asking a question, so later there was a discussion within the community, or within gay groups, because many of the participants at that time were lesbians, or bisexual like me. They were still asking, hey, why is it that lesbian women were always participating in events (laughter).

XH: This “bloody brides” action was a feminist action that got exposure on a large scale, right? What kind of actions were there after that?

WT: Later there was an action to occupy men's toilets.²⁸ Then there was an action involving shaving our heads.²⁹ I was going to participate, but I had a girlfriend at the time, and she was very opposed! **(XH: Hahaha!)** So this indirectly explains why it is sometimes easier for single lesbians to participate in social movements. At that time, I said I wanted to shave my head, and she said that anyway, she was slightly opposed to the idea, so I didn't go. I also remember that during a certain period of time Xiong Jing³⁰ called me and asked if I wanted to go to some activities. I replied that I was so tired! Because I originally had a job of my own, and actually participating in these activities was not within the scope of my so-called formal job. However, I mainly participated in these two activities, and with respect to other activities, I might have provided support behind the scenes.

XH: Then there was the “Occupy Men’s Room” action. Where were you at that time? Did you take part in Beijing or Guangzhou?

WT: Yes, I remember it was organized by (Li) Maizi (aka Li Tingting).

XH: Then that was in Beijing.

WT: Right, right, yes; after that I didn't go to any other cities to participate in any actions.

XH: At the beginning, what was the purpose of the “Occupy Men’s Room” action?

WT: This was actually a call for a recognition of the imbalance in the ratio of men's and women's restrooms.

XH: Did anything change afterwards?

WT: Yes, it did. I forgot the data; but I remember I also introduced the situation before. In fact,

²⁸ On February 19, 2012, volunteers in Guangzhou “occupied” men’s room in public locations as a protest to call for proper gender ratios of toilets and to advocate for building more women’s toilets. Similar actions took place in many cities, including Beijing. The event is an example of fighting for public space and volunteers pointed out lack of women’s bathrooms was actually a women's rights issue. It brought people’s attention to invisible and/or unrecognizable injustice to the public agenda.

²⁹ Bald Sisters: On August 30, 2012, four women publicly shaved their heads in Guangzhou to protest gender discrimination in university admissions, for example, lower minimum admission scores for men compared to those for women. The following day, two women in Beijing followed their actions, and eventually more than 20 women and men joined the campaign appealing to the Ministry of Education to end discrimination.

³⁰ Xiong Jing is the editor for “Female Voices” non-profit organization. As one staff member of “Female Voices”, she supported and helped with “occupy men’s room”, “bloody brides”, etc.

I think this action was quite effective in terms of impact and extent of implementation. Later, I remember pushing several universities to change the ratio of toilets. And after a few years, I forget which department, they actually issued a rule, and mentioned that it was necessary to modify the ratio of men's and women's toilets. So this in fact became an amendment to a legal policy and regulation.

XH: In Guangzhou, I think there are various shopping malls that have already begun to say they are changing the ratio of male and female restrooms.

WT: Right, right. At that time, there were one or two schools, because their students had raised this issue, one school really changed. I remember the school changed one floor to be for women, but which school specifically, I have to go back and check my materials, because it was years ago.

XH: In fact, these actions produced a very direct impact. Each one is because, well, you are also one of the “Feminist Five,”³¹ what was it like, your actions and how you escalated them later on?

WT: Yes, indeed. 2015? Let me see. In March of 2015 there were actually two activities at that time, so it wasn't the case that there was only one. At the time, the one I was going to participate in was something else, a run at the Olympic Stadium. I forget, I should have also been there, but that was close in time to when I was supposed to have an interview. But the interview was cancelled. Then I participated in another action. I just mentioned “Occupy Men’s Room,” but at that time, the action was initiated in different cities. So in Beijing, I remember there was a group, which was a WeChat group. I remember that everyone in the WeChat group was taken away (by the police). Some students were finally released. Later some of our friends analyzed things and figured out that we [the Feminist Five] were very active in NGOs. Before this, because I did “comrade” (LGBT) activities, I had been sought by the police or “talked to” earlier, and consequently, was detained. Then in about 2014, we also did some performance art, which

³¹ Feminist Five are five young feminist activists in China: Wu Rongrong, Zheng Churan, Wang Man, Wei Tingting, and Li Tingting. They were arrested for planning to organize an advocacy event against sexual harassment on public transportation on March 7, 2015. Their case received unprecedented attention from domestic and international communities, over 300 civil society groups around the world made public statement demanding the release of the “Feminist Five” and two million people signed petitions demanding their release.

was also about comrades, and sex, well, and LGBT topics. Then, when we were taken away, they questioned me about my involvement in seminars relating to gay (rights) law.

XH: But those were all interrogation, but in the end, the Feminist Five were locked up for more than thirty days. That was really quite ...

WT: Yes, yes, I was quite shocked.

XH: What did you do at that time?

WT: At that time, Big Rabbit³² launched an action, that is, she wanted to oppose sexual harassment on public transportation in different cities by distributing leaflets and stickers against sexual harassment. I think that it was an action jointly involved several cities at the same time.

XH: Were they actually distributed?

WT: No, I actually didn't go.

XH: You didn't go but you were detained anyway?

WT: Right! I have a deep impression of this, because the previous event had been cancelled. Later, we thought it would be okay to distribute leaflets.

XH: This seems to be a relatively mild thing.

WT: Yes, and my mind at that time thought this was not a big deal at all. And one of my thoughts at the time was that if we were asked, because we also doing a little bit of wishful thinking, which is to say, if we were asked, we would say that we hadn't done anything and that was it. So it was either on the 6th (of March) or the 5th that police came to look for me, and because they had also looked for me before, I didn't take it that seriously, I just thought it was fun.

³² Zheng Churan, aka Da Tu (Big Rabbit), is Chinese feminist activist. She was arrested as one of "Feminist Five" for protesting sexual harassment on public transportation. In 2019 her husband Wei Zhili, who is a labor rights defender, was detained by Chinese police. She began to post photos of her daily running on social media as a way to call public attention to her husband's unlawful imprisonment. Her husband has not been released.

XH: They wanted to find you to tell you not to go (and participate in the action)?

WT: Before this, I was looking for another event. It was very interesting. I got a phone call a day or two days before the event. At that time, Beijing was not very windy. A woman called me and said, recently Beijing is very windy,³³ and said she was asked to ask me not to leave my home. I answered her, and said it was fine. So now when I think back, there were actually many warning signs.

XH: Very mild. It was just to give you a tip that you shouldn't go.

WT: But at that time, I really felt that what I was doing was nothing; it was not anything serious. So I still believed that it wouldn't be too excessive. So the police came on the 6th, and at the time, I felt uncomfortable and a little sick, and I was lying down at home. The police had gone directly to my office. It was my colleague who called me and said, where are you? The police are here looking for you blah blah blah. Then I called the police, and the police called me again, and said they were at Xiangyuanli, or where? **(XH: Sanxiangli?)** No, it's another one, the Xianghe Police Station, he was waiting for me there, or something. I still felt sick then, and I didn't even bring my computer, oh sorry, I just took my computer but even did not take the data cable or computer charging cable. My thought at the time was that I would go talk to them for a while, and then go straight to work in the afternoon. So I bought two buns and took them with me. My idea is that at most they would talk with me for a while; I wanted to say that no matter how serious the conversation got, I would say I didn't do it, and then leave, something like that. Who knew that once we started talking, I would be held up there, until 6 pm.

Then I talked to them at the time. Later one of the police officers had a slight complaint because three of them were waiting for me, talking to me and not letting me leave. Then he said, you see, the three of us have been stuck here this afternoon. I also said at the time that, what are we doing; we had not done anything yet. The police officer I was looking at asked me, "do you know where Wang Man is? We are looking for her." Later Wang Man³⁴ sent me a text, secretly

³³ Windy is a pun in Chinese context. It is not only an adjective to describe weather, but also can be used to describe the worsening surveillance of social activism by Chinese government.

³⁴ Wang Man is one of the "Feminist Five" who was arrested for protesting sexual harassment on public transportation.

sending the message saying she was back in Tianjin. She said that the wind here was too strong, and I had to leave here. At the time, I thought that Wang Man might have run away, and the police couldn't find her. I was thinking anyway, I'm fine sitting here, I guess they'll let me go after a while --I really thought so. Later, that policeman told me, because I had received training and had little bit of common understanding about the law, and so I knew that if they took me away, they would need to provide a notice of detention, etc. Then that person told me, hey, anyway, people from the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau³⁵ will come. They said that if they come, and if procedural formalities (such as a detention notice) haven't been done, then you won't have to go with them. They were still comforting me, you know!

So he also comforted me, saying that I wouldn't have to go with them. I said, right, right. I said that this was really odd; I also complained. In the end, when they came, they did give me an official summons for interrogation. Then they showed me, this is your summons for interrogation. you have to come with us. I thought, hey, this isn't quite right, but I still really felt that since we hadn't done anything at all, and I didn't actually go to this event, because I was interrupted the previous day. So I then went with them to their car, and they took me to a police station in the Haidian District, and what must have been the basement of the police station. There were about five or so small cells, and they put me in one of them. They also took away my glasses, so I couldn't see anything clearly. Because it was winter, I was wearing UGGs snow boots. I remember taking off my UGGs and putting on a pair of sandals, then I went into the cell and sat, waiting. I think I was the first one among five of us to go into one of those places in the basement. I definitely was the first one; after that I heard some sounds, and thought, hey, but because they had brought someone in, they made me turn around, so I couldn't see. He told me to turn around, so I just turned around, and then I heard voices behind me, and I discovered that some people like Li Maizi and Suan Xiaola³⁶ came in one after the next.

XH: They made some sounds?

³⁵ Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau is a department of Beijing government and responsible for the public security in Beijing. It has a higher level of authority than Xinghe Police Station.

³⁶ Xu Ting, aka Suan Xiaola, is Li Tingting's partner. She is the director of Wuhan Rainbow LGBT Group. She is also one of the editors of "Female Voices", her recent articles including "Feminists' Life Stories" was released through Vagina Project.

WT: Yes, because sometimes they were speaking, so that's how I found out that Wang Man also came in, and my first thought at that time was that didn't she go back to Tianjin why she came, I found that more and more companions were being detained in the same place, I later found another girl seemed to be here. I was taken away to be interrogated and they asked me a lot of different questions. This was all the way until the second day, sometime in the evening, like six or seven or eight clock, someone came and took me out of the room. Then another time, in the middle of (being interrogated), someone specifically proposed to record a video. A person brought a camera to record a video. It was only later that I recalled that scene. At the time I overlooked that, I was too careless. I guessed that later they would broadcast my so-called "confession" video. (Laughter) Now we're familiar with the CCTV³⁷ confession videos, was it this? I suspect it was because the boss guy who had the camera said, "Ask her to say it again." And then the police were a little nervous and unfamiliar with what to do; they said, "Just talk about what you were doing "," or "Just talk." Anyway, it was a little like...

XH: They didn't know what to do.

WT: Yes, they were not very familiar with how to do it, but the guy with the camera said ask her to say it one more time, and then he asked me some vague questions again, but I think later the video was never broadcast.

XH: Because the questions he was asking, you didn't admit anything. Or, in other words, you all just hadn't done anything.

WT: As for a question I had already answered, I thought it was quite strange still: Why ask me the same question again? Anyway, OK, so back to 7 or 8 pm; at that time someone brought us out. I thought I was finally being released. I felt that since I had been interrogated for a day I would finally be released. We went out and got in the car. On each side of me there were, I think, interns or something. And in that way, with the interns on either side of me, I got into

³⁷ CCTV is the abbreviation for China Central Television, which is the predominant state-owned television network in Mainland China. It has various channels for different topics such as news, culture, movies, military affairs, and agriculture. CCTV is the main information resource for people who are unfamiliar with the internet and the news posted on CCTV are always considered as official. CCTV also became a tool for policing people by broadcasting videotaped "confessions" of arrested people who are usually political dissidents or social activists. The videos were also made without the awareness of the subjects, let alone consent.

the car.

XH: It should be two intern police officers.

WT: Right, right, I guessed they were probably intern police officers, because they looked so young, and wearing plain clothes. But I felt something wasn't right as we were driving. The car kept heading north, past the third north ring road, and then the fourth ring road.³⁸ I felt....

XH: How did you know you were headed north?

WT: Because I was wearing my glasses, and there were street signs. Yes, I could see the road signs and so I knew we were always heading north. The more I thought about it, the more uneasy I felt. Something wasn't right, and I felt more and more like something was a bit odd. At the time, Li Maizi was sitting behind me, but we couldn't speak.

XH: She was also in the same car?

WT: Right, we were in the same car. Myself, Li Maizi and Wang Man were all taken away, and others were set free. I think the others were students at that time. At that time, Li Maizi and I both had been interrogated by the police before, and we were also working, and we were pretty active in our NGOs.

XH: You were no longer students.

WT: Then Li Maizi, who was sitting behind me, told me "you need to be mentally prepared; it's possible we may be detained." Then after 37 days, maybe 37 days, we'll come out, but at a minimum we may be detained for 30 days, etc. I started to panic a bit and felt something was wrong, I said, huh? What happened? Why would we be detained? I felt kind of baffled. Then they actually took us to a detention center and asked us to sign some papers. Initially I said I wasn't going to sign. The police said, "girl, you must understand that you've been detained; I'm telling you..." blah, blah, and then he said even if you don't sign, it's useless. He said he would

³⁸ Beijing Ring Road is the main road system that constructed Beijing City. Starting from the center of the city, ring roads were constructed one after another. Except for the first Ring Road, each of the other ring roads today is a circling expressway. The innermost ring road is the second Ring Road, and as the number goes bigger, the distance from the center of the city (to the specific Ring Road) gets longer.

write another one later, saying that this woman doesn't agree to sign, but I have shown her the document anyway. You will be detained regardless, so there's no use, etc. He just said a lot to me. What I still remember clearly now is when I was lined up to get a medical examination, the police officer who brought me to the detention center said to me, "Girl, I'm going to teach you something. Inside (the detention center), what's the most important thing? Don't make others unhappy, get it? "

XH: He really gave you a lesson and some tips. (Laughter)

WT: Right! It's just to give me some tips! A little warning for you, you know what? What is the most important thing (inside the detention center), just don't make people unhappy! He talked to me and I was vague, just saying "hmm." I didn't really think it was serious at the time, so it was just in my heart.

XH: Did you know at that moment that you were being detained and summoned or ...?

WT: I had no idea! I think that it took three or five days at most. My impression was that it was just like this and then I'd leave! And I remember that earlier, in the NGO, everyone used to make jokes casually, that is to say, on which day you will be detained, and who and who will be detained on such and such day; it was always just a joke. I finally thought, ah, originally I was always joking, but today I really was detained. And my major was anthropology, and my undergraduate disciplines were anthropology and sociology, and I thought, oh dear!, I have never been to a prison!

WT: Right, that's what I thought. I had never visited a detention before. I thought this could be an anthropology fieldwork,³⁹ so my feeling at that time was to use this experience as an opportunity for a 3-to-5-day anthropological field observation! Go in, yes, I think I really was pretty optimistic, so I didn't feel too sad, because others came into our cell later, and some of them cried for a day or two as soon as they arrived, you know, that kind of crying that you can't stop? They began to talk about how they missed their children, then, boom, they just

³⁹ Anthropology fieldwork is the most important method by which cultural anthropologists gather data to answer their research questions. While interacting on a daily basis with a group of people, cultural anthropologists document their observations and perceptions and adjust the focus of their research as needed.

started crying again. Maybe at the time I felt like wow, this was so fresh, this was also young. I think it was like a little newborn calf. The second thing was that I thought it would be three or five days at most. Wasn't the "Two Sessions" (*lianghui*)⁴⁰ held at that time? I was thinking that maybe it might have something to do with the "Two Sessions." And I thought it was just a matter of three or four days and I'll be back. Except for being anxious and worried, I also had the idea to take advantage of these three or five days to observe the inside. It was so immature haha, I had just this kind of immature and naïve idea as I went in.

XH: What was life like inside?

WT: Well, I think the first day, in the beginning, I felt a bit like Alice in Wonderland.⁴¹ How many more minutes do we have?

WT: Sorry!

XH: No, I think it's wonderful.

WT: Right, because I think it's better to talk about the details rather than to talk about how I feel about the feminist movement, as you just mentioned. Because this is even more grounded (real).

XH: No problem, it's ok to speak a little more. (After a tea break)

WT: Then I'll continue; I'll fill in a bit where I left off in the last sentence. At first I thought it was just a matter of three or five days, so I said that I would do a field observation or something. So now recalling that time, we were too young, too naïve.⁴² (Laughs) We really

⁴⁰ Lianghui (two sessions) is the annual political meeting. The term refers to the annual plenary sessions of the national or local People's Congress (NPC) and the national or local committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Elected Representatives meet for two weeks in March and, essentially, turn the party's wishes into law. During this particular time, there are many political elites in Beijing, so the police would tighten up security measures to make sure no social unrest or any incidents during the period.

⁴¹ "Alice In Wonderland"/ "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" is an 1865 novel written by English author Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. It tells a young girl named Alice falling through a rabbit hole into a surreal fantasy world populated by peculiar, anthropomorphic creatures. Wei here wanted to express that her experience in the detention center was so surreal that it made her think she was not in reality.

⁴² "Too young, too naïve" originally came from former CCP leader Jiang Zemin's meeting with Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-huwa and was asked by reporters if he would support Tung's re-election. The full phrase he said in English to lecture the Hong Kong journalists is "too young, too simple, sometimes naïve". In early years, it was imitated by Chinese netizens because it's funny and ridiculous. Later, more and more netizens use it with more positive attitude to Jiang Zemin compared to current chairman Xi Jinping who has made the Chinese political environment deteriorate rapidly.

were too young and too naïve! But when I went in at first, I thought it was pretty mysterious, because my glasses were taken away. Ha, I suddenly feel as if I'm reporting to other media. Previously, the other media reports were all written in a sorrowful style. Why when I'm talking about it now I have a little...

XH: (Laughing) So happy!

WT: It's funny! (Laughing) Really, my apologies for the reports of foreign media friends.

XH: It's okay. This is growth. Empowerment, you know?

WT: Right, right, because now I'm already laughing about the situation, but at that time, I still might have felt a little bit . . . (something). I remember not wearing glasses that night! But there is another point. I think that on the one hand I felt tense, but on the other hand, I also felt curious. That kind of curiosity young people have about the world, that is, wow, so this is what a detention center is like. Then I felt that these different things were all mixed together, including later when I was interrogated; that stage of life inside the detention center. I think for me, I think there were many different things all happening together. On the one hand, the sense of curiosity I just mentioned, on the other hand, it was still quite tense, because you don't really know what the future has in store. You have no idea what it's going to look like. I'll give you an example from very early on-- the medical examination. I forgot, it seemed to be a man doing the examination.

XH: A male doctor?

WT: Male doctor. I forgot what our physical examination was. It should have been without clothes on; it was a body check, to see if you have any tattoos, or to see if you have anything. But maybe they asked us to remove our coats, oh, I can't remember. Anyway, it was a check; aiya! I don't remember very clearly. But at the time I did protest. I said why do you have a man do the exam, but not a woman. Why male doctors?! Later that person said . . . anyway, the meaning was probably, stop talking nonsense! No other person will give you the exam. **(XH: Hahahaha!)** At that time, I had this feeling that opposition was ineffective, so it wasn't easy to muster up my courage to say a few more words. In the end, someone said, don't call out, no

one will come; it's just this person. It doesn't matter if you want to have the exam or not, you must do it -- his meaning was something like that. There was a policewoman beside me, then I said that I wanted the policewoman to watch me have the exam; then I finished the fingerprint verification. But once again I couldn't see clearly. I remember I was still telling Li Maizi at the time that I couldn't see clearly, all I could do was follow them, in a haze, because my eyes were 700 or 800.⁴³

XH: Was there a group of people together?

WT: At first the group was together. But later we were assigned to different cells. At the time Wang Man was saying something like she had a heart condition and she needed to rest. It seemed that Maizi and I were sent to the cells first. Afterwards I did not hear much information on Wang Man. When I was sent to the cell, they gave me a quilt. They opened a door leading to a long corridor. They led me in, saying, you are in No. 3, get in. Then I entered, feeling very odd. The room was similar to the size of this one (the interview studio). There were two long planks on the floor, covered with a bunch of blue quilts. I could not tell if they were blue or black because of my poor eyesight. I only saw this, but I thought it was very strange at the time. There were two people wearing red hats there. Later I knew it was a shift rotation, a nighttime guard. But I felt strange at first when I first got to the detention center. How could this place be like this? And then there was a girl we later called the squad leader who brought me in, and said "hey put the quilt here and clothes here, and now first go wash your hands and use the toilet." Then she secretly asked me, "What's the crime are you in for?" I said, "Picking quarrels and provoking trouble." She said, come, use the toilet, wash your face, brush your teeth. She had a set of things for me; which I paid for; it was only later that I learned this money had been deducted.

Then anyway at that time, I felt stupid, I also was nervous and scared, because I had no idea about what a detention center was like before, and it was a dangerous place in my imagination. There was still a little nervousness, hesitation, and anxiety because it sounded like, seems like, you'll feel that it's a prison, and that the people in the detention center will be that kind of

⁴³ 700 or 800 is the number description of one's eyesight in Chinese context. Generally, if one's number is lower, his/her eyesight is better. Wei's saying "my eyes were 700 or 800" means she had short-sightedness about -6.50 to -7.25.

criminal-type person, who are all very unfriendly and scary. You feel like after you enter this place, how will you face all these things? Even before we left, Li Maizi was very chivalrous and brave; she also told me, if someone bullies you, there is a prison cell bully who bullies people, just press the button for the bell, and etc. She told me this and that. And you say what the guard's name is. I was ready in my heart thinking that in case there was a prison jailer who was bullying me, I know what I should do, and I began to think about it.

XH: You started to feel a little scared.

WT: Right, a little panic. Then after we went in, she separated two people and said, you sleep in the middle, then brought the quilt over. I started to sleep there, but the first night because that place was so crowded, I only had a small space.

XH: Sleeping on your side.

WT: Right! I can only sleep on my side and then I dare not move! I don't think I ever moved!

XH: There were people on both sides.

WT: Yes, the place was very crowded, full of people. That's how I slept all night. But then I should have fallen asleep, but my impression is that my space was only so big (i.e., very small), and then it was sometime after 6 o'clock on the second day, the bell rang and someone said, "Get up! Get up!" I started to get up, but then there were people who still urged me, "Hurry up! Hurry up!" What? On the first day, for a meal, they gave me *mantou*,⁴⁴ and the person next to me said, "Are you new here?" **(XH: Respectful?)** No, not really out of respect. She said, "This place is different from the outside. You have to look at a lot of things carefully, just pay attention, such as eating faster. " Later, it was clear that anything you did, you had to be quick about it. You have to complete this thing within a specific period of time.

WT: Otherwise you will receive a talking-to or be yelled at, or told hurry up, hurry up! Blah blah, or if there is a disciplinary bell to scold you, then the people in your cell will be in trouble.

⁴⁴ Mantou, often referred to Chinese steam buns which is unstuffed, is a basic staple in the northern part of China.

Anyway, for me, it just feels very new--

XH: If a person comes to scold you, then the whole

WT: Maybe everyone will suffer somewhat! Or sometimes, for example, they may cut off your hot water, or you can't watch TV, just to punish all of you.

XH: Were you ever punished like this?

WT: I remember our cell seemed to be pretty good! I think I may be relatively lucky, because we belong to the "excellent dorm" category. Outside, there is a brand that's also called "excellent." What is an "excellent dorm"?

XH: Wow, in prison there's also this system.

WT: The cell monitor was also a kind person. Later I heard about troubling things that happened in other cells, and I thought they were pretty miserable. For example, they divided up the food. If you were good, they'd give you a little bit more, but if you were bad you'd get a smaller portion. There was also the location where you slept. For example, there are some places where you go to the toilet. There's always a line; those with the most experience (in jail the longest) go first, and the inexperienced juniors are the last ones to go to the toilet! Yeah, we actually had this, but it's not that serious, for example, like me. I later learned that it might be because I am a political prisoner, all my work the whole time I was there was mopping the floor.

XH: Ah, so you had to work in the detention center?

WT: Yes, everyone had to work, and we were divided into different groups. The highest level group probably was the quilt group or the meal group-- who were responsible for dividing up the food. Well, the quilt (duvet) group was responsible for stacking everyone's quilts,⁴⁵ and the clothing group was responsible for drying everyone's clothes,⁴⁶ because your clothes could

⁴⁵ Chinese style of making beds requires people to fold one's quilt/duvet in a very tidy way. The folded quilt should have sharp angles and look like square tofu. The standard of folding quilt is extremely strict in institutions such as the military and prison.

⁴⁶ Instead of using a dryer or drying rack, most people in China usually dry their clothes on clotheslines on their balcony or in the yards.

only be dried two hours a day, or maybe one hour a day, I forget. Once or twice [a day?] during outdoor recreation time, people responsible for the clothes would quickly go out to dry the clothes, so they were able to go out first. Others had to wait outside; the outdoor recreation time was only about 15 or 20 minutes.

XH: Every day?

WT: Yes, every day only half of the space was available. Let me calculate; it should be about 4 square meters, 4 or 5 square meters. If you're a group of people, then maybe there's more space, like 6 or 7 square meters. If it's a group of people, you have to go in turns, in fact if you go in turns, then you have occupied almost all of the space. So if you want to exercise, it's just like this. You stand in a circle and walk around; there is this kind of space. You can go outside to get some sun, walk around, other than that, there is no other time. Because there's a daily schedule or work and rest, such as waking up at 6 o'clock, and then eating at 7 o'clock, and then everyone must sit on the floor and do nothing.

XH: What did you usually eat?

WT: Basically, the main food is *mantou* (steamed buns), really, because steamed buns are the best to distribute. So, basically, I never ate rice. For more than 30 days, I never ate rice, only steamed buns. And when you eat steamed buns you must pay attention not to leave any leftovers, because you cannot throw away the leftovers. So you must either eat the whole bun, or although you can't leave anything remaining, you can keep it for yourself. You just can't throw it away; you can't waste food. There are also stewed potatoes. I remember that the potatoes still had their skins; they hadn't been peeled. You could see the potato skins in the stew. So there was potato skin stew, and also green vegetable stew, and radish soup. Anyway, it feels like a very motley sort of thing. Then only once a week would we have eggs once or twice, and meat only once. But the so-called meat was not really -- now thinking of it, the kind of meat you wouldn't eat on the outside, in the detention center I felt it was, well, so precious. I thought at the time, today to eat meat was like, today finally I'm having a meal with meat, same feeling when we had eggs to eat, it was like that.

XH: This feeling was still just a few days a week.

WT: I remember my first week, because no one deposited any money for me, nor did I have any money. During the first week, I depended on others for assistance. For example, when I had my period, it was other people who lent me sanitary napkins, and I also borrowed toilet paper from other people or they gave it to me. Then I had no meat for a whole week, and every day I felt so hungry, so hungry, so hungry! Every day there was a feeling of hunger, and hunger makes you feel empty every day, why is my stomach so hungry? Because it didn't have the feeling of having touched any greasy foods. Then, as for me, I was interrogated a lot, so on the one hand it was the hunger for food, on the other hand, sometimes it was because I was in an anxious state. Because you don't know what they will ask, especially during the first 10 days, I didn't have a chance to see a lawyer. I later thought that their strategies were actually very clever, because the interrogation during the first 10 days was particularly intensive, that is, almost three times a day at the most.

After breakfast, we have a loudspeaker at the door, and a bell for 24-hour monitoring. Then our cell monitor (*banzhang*)⁴⁷ said that even if you took a needle, people could see very clearly inside, and would see it. So the environment is that when you shit, the door to where you shit is glass, so everyone can see you shit as long as they turn their heads. In our cell, there was a person who didn't shit for over 30 days, because she felt embarrassed or didn't want to shit in front of others. So all in all, she controlled --

XH: Everyone can see as long as they turn their heads?

WT: Yes, everyone is able to see; all they have to do is turn their heads.

XH: Everything could be seen without barriers?

WT: Yes, of course, you take a bath, everything is completely transparent. So every person of course sees everyone, and that will prevent you from doing other things in the room, so we're monitored 24 hours a day. And as soon as something happens, because there is a loudspeaker at the door, as soon as anything happens, you'll hear "1203" or whoever, what's going on? Then you feel that there is an indescribable God who makes a sound, saying, 1203, you feel that

⁴⁷ Cell monitor, also known as the dorm leader, her duty is usually to keep order in the cell.

you've been condemned again.

XH: You were 1203?

WT: Yes, I was 1203.

XH: Generally, what did they yell? Did they say "1203, what are you doing?"

WT: Yes, "1203 What are you up to!"

XH: When you did what kind of thing would they shout at you?

WT: For example, someone suddenly ran out while doing exercises, but in fact, at the time, we weren't permitted to move; or according to the rules, two people, or three people, couldn't stand on the floor at the same time, or during activities, only one person can go to the toilet, or only one person do whatever. You can't have different people stand up at the same time during the "sitting on a plank" period;⁴⁸ that was a rule. My first week there, I had to memorize the prison regulations. The first three days, I didn't do anything else, only memorized the rules. There were more than a dozen or two dozen rules for the detention center! That's right, you must memorize what's illegal! I remember there was one called.... I can't remember it now. I used to know it well! Basically, there was one rule that said we must rehabilitate and dig deep into the root of crime; that is, dig deep into the root of why you committed crime!

XH: Reflect on the roots deep in your heart!

WT: Right! I remember that I was always being interrogated, and when I was questioned, at first they asked about my work, and then later, after each round, I discovered that they already knew more and more about me. Later, the people in my cell were all curious, because they generally were thieves, scam artists, or whatever, and at most they were questioned once or twice. Some people were released after being interrogated only once. So each time after I was interrogated and came back to the cell, some people would say, wow, Wei Tingting, so what

⁴⁸ "Sitting on a plank period" is a time period all inmates have to sit on the floor of their cells. And they have to keep certain postures to cultivate discipline. Inmates have to get permission from a cell monitor or jailer to move around. It is done on a daily basis or a few times every day.

crime did you actually commit; why are you being interrogated so many times? Because I was questioned more than 30 or 40 times. Almost every day. During the first 10 days, it was two or three times a day.

XH: How long did the questioning last each time?

WT: Every time ... um ... I didn't have a watch, I don't really know, but according to, for example, after I finished dinner, at 7 or 8 pm, and then they would return me to the cell at 10:00 or 11:00 pm. Thus each time was about two or three hours. Sometimes after a brief nap at noon, I was taken for questioning at 2 or 3 pm, and then brought back at 4 or 5 pm. And then after dinner, it may be around 7 or 8 pm, around the time to take a shower. It should be later than 8 o'clock, they'd called me again for questioning. The latest was 12 o'clock at night; I was returned to the cell when everyone was sleeping; it was basically like that.

XH: They were digging deep into why you did this; what your "ideological tumor"⁴⁹ was.

WT: Yes, and I discovered they were unfamiliar with me in the beginning. But after three or five days, I increasingly realized that they knew a lot about me. I remember them asking me at the time, what activities did you attend in the winter of 2012? Did you participate in some activities organized by such and such group? I said no; I don't remember, I said no. He asked, "what activity did you host?" I said none; I just participated and then left early. He said, "no, that's not right; I'll remind you; on such and such a day didn't you host a workshop?" I said, "Oh! It seems so."

XH: He knows you better than you do.

WT: Right! I said, I was joking, I said, oh, you've done a thorough homework. Then that police woman said, "It was necessary!" Later I thought that she must have flipped through my Weibo. I had written a lot of content on my Weibo. And I remember falling in love at the time and writing something about that. They also asked, "Why did you write this paragraph, were you thinking about committing a crime at that time?" His general meaning was at that time were you planning this event to oppose the country; his question had a little bit of that kind of flavor.

⁴⁹ The phrase "ideological tumor" refers to any thoughts not in-line with what is officially promoted or permitted by the state.

But I was thinking, isn't this a good thing? It had something to do with feelings. He suddenly thought about this thing, and it seemed that he felt I did it on purpose. Because I later learned that at that time there was support from the outside, domestically and internationally,⁵⁰ maybe they thought we were organizing --

XH: Overseas forces that are organized and premeditated.

WT: Organized, premeditated, plotting to do some sorts of things, right.

XH: So they have to unearth that part of your memory.

WT: Right, and they also read my diary. They said, hey, you have a diary, what did you write in it?

XH: What did he mean? Was he referring to what you had on Weibo?

WT: No, it was in my own computer, because they confiscated that.

XH: They just turned on your computer.

WT: Yes, at that time, wow, I was so angry, I said in my heart, shit! ---

XH: No more privacy.

WT: Anyway, later I went back to the people in our detention center and said, each time I went for questioning I felt I had been raped. Because he would ask, hey, what was the idea you were conveying in what you wrote then; so you were already thinking this way at the time, right?

Because what I wrote was that sometimes I felt that doing some work for social structure or policy actually didn't lead to change. I forget exactly what I wrote in the diary anyway, but it was something like this. He was analyzing whether at that time I was already thinking about doing some sort of "reactionary" or "subversive" thing, blah blah; he started to say these things. Ah, it was really amazing; to take my diary, things I don't know are hidden in which corner; I

⁵⁰ Global feminist support for her and the other four detained feminists, who became known as the Feminist Five.

thought that they had taken my life of 20 something years --

XH: of history.

WT: One by one, everything, like “previously you studied at this school, you participated in these activities, then, which day and month you went to the US, and in the US, which training you received?” etc.

XH: Checked very clearly.

WT: Yes, they had investigated me very clearly; for example, you got a hotel room with whom, on which day --what did you do that day?

XH: Did they see the record of your getting a room?

WT: Because I later found out that, for example, they said on that day, but I myself didn't remember that day. He said, “You're wrong.” “Didn't you get a room with Li Maizi on that day; what were the two of you doing? Speak!” But I couldn't remember it myself! Because what they asked was about earlier things in 2012 or 2011, including, Uh. I thought, I can't remember these things myself, how can they still remember? I think it really was like this. They're too powerful, their ability to search for information.

XH: Do these things that make you feel scared? When they have every piece of information, big and small, about a person like you,

WT: Yes.

XH: Moreover, since it seemed they were treating you as a political prisoner, they moved in the direction of finding a basis for a crime.

WT: And to be honest, I sometimes thought for a moment, did I really commit a crime?

XH: OK, it's self-doubt.

WT: Because they would say, for example, they said, hey, although you might go to the streets,

he would say this, and maybe your intention was good, but you block traffic, or you go the subway and create a traffic congestion, then what? And according to the law, if you have an activity with more than such and such number of people you should submit a report in advance, if you don't report it, then you are breaking the law. So I thought for a while: maybe it is actually unlawful, or, to some extent, although I didn't know, I broke the law, and so for a period of time I was even thinking about it like this. So one thing was that I was afraid --wow, how did they know so much? And the other thing was that I was really worried.

But my worries at the time weren't about myself, I remember. I remember I cried once because I forgot what they asked about, but I thought how could they even know about this matter? Then I cried a little bit, and I said, Maizi and Datu are good people. Because I thought at the time, I felt that my role in the action was just as a volunteer: I was not an organizer. So I was sorting out the order in my head at that time; I was thinking that the first people they detain or sentence should be the organizers or something, they would put them on trial first. I didn't think I would be sentenced first, and so I said that they were good people or something like that. When I talked about this kind of thing, I was worried at the time, because I saw a lawyer later, and the lawyer told me that I might get sentenced for this matter. I was particularly anxious during the final 7 days [of the detention period] because I couldn't see my lawyer. My lawyer told me, "I may not be able to see you after I leave this time. If it is fast, I may see you in 7 days," but then I asked him if I'm sentenced, how long would the sentence be?

If I was sentenced, they said it would likely be for a half a year, or possibly a year, or three years. When I went back to the cell, I thought, if three years, what would I do? I was in this kind of place; so sometimes I was quite anxious. Right, yes, pretty anxious – during the last several days of detention. And there were the first 10 days, too, when I was quite anxious. I felt during the first 10 days the thing made you most afraid was being cut off from any information. Inside the detention center, I had no computer; I had no phone.

XH: You didn't have any news from the outside!

WT: The only contacts I had were the thirty or so people in my cell, we chatted together, but I only asked about background information; I had absolutely no idea what happened in the

world outside the Haidian Detention Center.⁵¹ And then I had no idea where my destiny will be, so this was a fear of the unknown, as well as lack of individual personal freedom, including my information, and even to a certain degree a lack of freedom of thought, which brings you this ... fear. You feel as if you lack such a sense of control over your personal life, and that nothing is in your control. You can see that as long as the bell rings and says “1203 Wei Tingting!” and I start to leave the cell, then someone starts handcuffing me, and I go out. When people (i.e., police/guards) asked me questions, I had to answer. Once I didn’t want to answer a question; he asked me “You intentionally did this, right?” Then we dawdled over this question until 12 midnight. Later I was thinking that delaying and wasting time like this was not a good way. You always want to return home, right? So sometimes you have to just answer their question and cooperate with them again. So that feeling of things not being under my own control, that felt really bad.

XH: Everything was out of whack. Moreover,

WT: Right.

XH: The ability to control your own life, like you said, you had absolutely none.

WT: Yes, absolutely. It’s true, you have no control. I felt like I was meat on their chopping block; completely at their mercy. I felt like I was being chopped up. Sometimes I discovered they knew more than I did. That’s a horrible kind of feeling to have.

I want to drink some water, I’m really thirsty. (After drinking some water)

XH: I’d like to continue chatting a bit, did you come away with any gains from your time in prison?

WT: Yes, yes, there were so many. Actually, I thought about some things later. One thing is that I think among all of the Feminist Five, I was relatively lucky. I am really relatively lucky. One is that I met my girlfriend in the detention center and so I gained love. Another thing is those feelings of tension, fear, and loss that I just talked about is one aspect; on the other hand, I

⁵¹ Haidian Detention Center is located in northern suburban Beijing. It is the largest detention center nationwide, which can accommodate about 4,000 people.

think it actually provided me with a broader way to think deeply about topics relating to women, or gender, or about people generally. Why do I say that? I won't talk about what I mentioned earlier; it's too personal, because while I was inside the detention center I was falling in love with someone, so these days, from a certain perspective, in fact, were not so sad!

So sometimes later I thought about some human right activists who are living under residential surveillance or something; their life, in fact, is really difficult. Why? Because they have no one (to interact with). Because they are all alone, in fact, that kind of loneliness is even more difficult. When I was in the detention center, I had more than 30 people (in a cell together). Since I am a pretty optimistic person, sometimes I would chat with them, and I would even talk about homosexuality and sex--just talked about this kind of topic. More than 30 people who all came from different (socio-economic) classes. For example, there was a legal representative of a large company, she was probably 60 or 70 years old; we are all called her aunt. I think she said that she had been tricked. Anyway, whatever, because she is the legally responsible person . . . there was

another woman, a big-time swindler. She may have defrauded millions of people, and then there were those who sold heroin, the drug dealers.

XH: People from all walks of life.

WT: Yeah, it really was people from all walks of life, as well as a woman who was a so-called prostitute, others called her a prostitute, but she said that was a front desk worker, and so we couldn't confirm she truly was involved in prostitution. Then there were also petty thieves who stole things; someone stole an iPhone and was detained. Someone else stole three or four thousand yuan and then there was "Little Fatty." I later wrote an article just about her and her story. She was just over 18 years old, very young, and stole thousands of dollars. While she was inside, her family did nothing to help her. I later memorized her father's phone number, because before I left, she asked me to make a call for her. She said she wanted to ask her dad to come and help her or whatever. I called, but her father just ignored her.

So I thought at the time, wow, this person who is living on the margins, is so helpless; moreover, she is illiterate; she can't write. I especially remember that there was no one to put money into an account at the detention center for her, so at the time when I had a little money with my girlfriend -- because you need money in order to buy things, and you can only spend a few dozen or one hundred yuan on goods at a time. You can't buy an excessive amount of things, and moreover, there is only that little amount of money you can use, so you're able to buy a few apples and some cookies, etc. Later, we said, we have a lot of things, and I'm leaving soon, oh, actually I wasn't just about to leave, I forget, anyway, we had a lot of things so we gave a box of biscuits to Little Fatty, and she was really grateful! A little while later, when we had outdoor recreation time, she ran over and said, thank you both, etc. etc. She was so marginalized inside; she had no money and she was young. I remember that she got her verdict before I did. It was 30 days or whenever, when it came.

I was detained on the same day as she was. Wow, I'm speaking too fast, let me slow down. I was detained on the same day as her. I remember that I was sitting on the plank, and next to me was the entrance to the cell, and then someone came to deliver a decision, saying that a decision had been made in her case. The decision was that her arrest had been approved, so she would then be arrested, and the next stage of the process was to go to the court for a trial

or something, and then receive a verdict. They gave it to her to read, but she couldn't understand it. Then I felt, wow, really sad. Imagine an 18 year-old stealing a few thousand yuan, and then when I was interrogated, she asked me, Wei Tingting, when you go out (for interrogation), please ask for me, stealing more than 3000 yuan, how many years will I get? Because she had no news at all, and I was the only one every day--

XH: to go out for interrogation every day.

WT: One after another, I went out every day to see the police. She would say wow, you see them every day. She didn't have the chance to see them; she was afraid but always wanted to ask. She asked me to help her ask the police how long her sentence would be. I did in fact ask for her, but the police said what are you doing caring so much about other people; you should mind your own business. Then I said I had a prisoner friend, who asked me to help her, because she didn't know how long she would be sentenced for. Later, a decision came down, and she couldn't understand it because she was illiterate, and it seemed she couldn't sign her own name, but she had to sign it. Someone read it to her, and it said that her arrest had been approved. Got it? She understood. Then the document was taken away, that was it. I felt how tiny our human life is, but on the other hand, I felt that with more than 30 people in that place, they are actually very powerful. On the one hand, you are weak and small, or your destiny is completely at the mercy of others, and you are completely ignorant, incompetent, without this ability, but on the other hand, you feel this creativity, how do I say this word "creativity."

It's because really the stuff you own in the cell is minimal, but they can really make abundant things out of these very simple things. For example, let me think, we had a facial mirror in the detention center, but actually, it wasn't a mirror, because you're not allowed to have a mirror. So what did she use to make the mirror? She used the tin foil covers of milk or yoghurt, yes, it was milk. She ground off a layer of the tin foil cover.

XH: Uh huh.

WT: As a result, it turned into a mirror. I don't know who did it there, so that you can look in a mirror. Then, for example, let's think about it, one person still used a needle, but it wasn't actually a needle. I don't know how they ground a thing, but they did, so that you could thread

the “needle” and sew things. Just when you had absolutely nothing, they created a lot of things on their own.

XH: And these are seemingly low-level, relatively small lives.

WT: Right!

XH: In this environment, many interesting things were created.

WT: Right. And their stories are actually very interesting.

XH: Very powerful.

WT: Actually, I had a chance to read during detention. I read a book by San Mao,⁵² and I felt particularly touched by a sentence. She wrote an essay about her buying and bringing water to some prisoners in the Sahara Desert. At that time, she said, the people detained in this prison are actually ordinary people. She said that the true criminals, like as the Chinese say, the dragons, you can't catch them. My feelings on the inside were particularly deep. Really, the truly evil people, really are dragons in China, they can't be caught. So you've caught the ordinary, furtive robbers, or whatever kind of people, and put them inside.

XH: Thieves, are people at the bottom! Many people are forced to do this in order to survive.

WT: Yeah, and in fact, many of them have reasons to do these things, or because of their environment, or whatever, makes them do these things, so I think, on the one hand, it is very interesting. And I think I can share another small story. I was talking about sex inside the detention center as I mentioned. In fact, I felt that they were all very interested. Later, there was one time I was reading a magazine. There was a woman named Yu Rihong, a landlord, who every day she would sing while washing out the mop rags. She would sing “Older brother, Wait” (singing) and “Crashing into the Dock”⁵³ etc. I learned the songs from her! Later, as soon as I

⁵² Sanmao was a famous writer and translator from Taiwan. Her works range from autobiographical writing, travel writing and reflective novels, to translations of Spanish-language comic strips. The story Wei mentioned comes from “Stories of the Sahara”, which has an enduring appeal for generations of young Taiwanese and Chinese women yearning for independence from conservative social norms.

⁵³ “Crashing into the Dock” is a Chinese Pop song released in 2011 by singer Da Zhe. The original Chinese name “Chuang Matou”

heard these songs, I thought of her. I couldn't see clearly. I could only see her blurry back. It was very interesting and lively, washing clothes and singing. Later, one time, she even ran up next to me and told me something, "I had an orgasm." She then showed me a book; hey, you should take a look at this. And then just start talking to me about sex stories. Then there was a person who sold fake ID cards under the flyover of Tsinghua University who told me that she had actually done it with the police.

XH: Hahahaha.

WT: It's something like this. It might be the way to have good relations with the police; they probably slept together. It's very interesting, anyway.

XH: You were able to see all kinds of life in the lowest rung of society! Then, our time ...

WT: OK! Fast forward! We have 10 minutes! Hahaha!

XH: We were talking about how after you came out of detention like this, in fact, it had a huge impact on your own growth. But this is also a setback for many people-

WT: Right, yes.

XH: After going through this not so good, not so enjoyable experience, in fact, you are still doing some actions. Can you talk about what you did after you came out of detention? You still persist, why?

WT: Actually, there was a period of time when I wanted to give up. When I was inside, I was saying to myself, I'm not going to do this anymore, but after I returned home, they [her friends] encouraged me for example, and said, you should go to the Women's Federation,⁵⁴ or you should become a candidate for the National People's Congress,⁵⁵ and then later you can use your achievements to influence others. (To the video recorder: 10 minutes more at most.) But

means to go to an unfamiliar harbor for an adventure in order to seek one's fortune. In his song, the singer expresses the feeling of a man who has to break up with his girlfriend to work in another place for financial reasons. In the song, he makes the promise to return to his girlfriend once he has made fortune.

⁵⁴ Women's Federation, full name is All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), is an official women's organization established in 1949. For a history of the ACWF, see Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China: 1949-1964*, UC Press, 2017.

⁵⁵ The National People's Congress is the national legislature of the People's Republic of China.

then I was thinking forget it, I'm no longer doing this, but I felt what especially motivated and moved me, was that after I came out of detention, I found that in fact many friends were supporting me, or a lot of people, including this kind of solidarity and support that the activists did, and the whole country, wow, I felt that at the time, wow, I was so moved, there are so many forces from all over the world supporting you! So, I felt very inspired and touched at the time, so I thought, wow, this is really a very important thing, not an easy thing to abandon.

XH: Not so lonely.

WT: Right, right, so I think after that, I felt on a certain level closer to feminist action or the so-called world solidarity concept, and I was particularly touched by several things. Previously, I held some international conferences. I have a friend who wrote to me and told me that they saw my article in the *New York Times*. I have a friend in India who said, wow, this is a very important moment, for the ... transferring? transferring ... (transnational) No. Anyway, she probably means that this was a very important moment for the international feminist movement to come together and unite. She also said that because she is an activist in India, and I had met her before; she said, Tingting, we also made a website, and did a petition for you, this is the link. At the time, they must also be the first wave of masked friends.⁵⁶ Because I had interviewed them in India before, they must be the first wave of people who wore masks. They also said that they had a petition, I went in for just a little and they had 100 or 200 signatures. I thought, well, the number of more than 100 people is nothing in China. But I felt very touched and moved; it was heart-warming in your heart, because she said, oh, I found out that my friend went missing, we made a website for the petition, and gave you blah blah blah. It was very encouraging.

XH: And you find that more international organizations and more activists are supporting you.

WT: Yes, yes. So, this is really a very moving thing, and I think this was a very important inspiration for me. So after I was released, in 2016, I moved to Guangzhou, and that year, I thought, what should I do? Later, based on a feeling, or intuition or something, oh, I felt that it

⁵⁶ "Mask Demonstration" is an activity started from India to fight for the "Feminist Five" freedom. Protesters in New Delhi, India were the first to publish photos of themselves wearing masks made out of photos of the "Feminist Five".

seemed that there weren't many, actually very few organizations exclusively focused on the issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence. So at the time I said that if I wanted to establish an organization, its focus must be on sexual harassment. So that's what I did; I thought of many different names at that time, and finally decided to call such an organization the Guangzhou Gender Education Center.

XH: It seems like an official name!

WT: Yes, it sounds like an official name. Then I founded this organization. Later I saw at the beginning, during the first one or two years, there was actually no money. But I was really in good shape at that time, because there was another organization willing to share some of its funding with us, a small amount of funding. We used this initial money to hire the equivalent of two part-time staff. So this small organization started to do some things, and then in succession did some investigation reports, and some research, and some actions and advocacy, and so on. Then ... but I think it may be in 2018, because of the #MeToo wave or 2017, after some accumulated experience and wisdom, we actually got a lot of opportunities. For example, the Nandu Foundation⁵⁷ proactively sought us out, but they were also very cautious. They talked with us for almost half a year, and were willing to cooperate with us, for example on #MeToo victims --we had some cooperation and contacts, and then we are also doing some things, such as planning to do some plays at the time, or to do some workshops, etc. In fact, it was almost 2018 when I thought if I can focus and continue in this direction, in fact, I can foresee that in two or three years, it will have developed in an excellent way, and it's possible that it will become a very large national website or network if no other kind of power comes in and interferes.

XH: If there isn't any of that kind of political obstruction,

WT: Without any other kind of obstruction, within my own field of vision, I could feel and recognize that it will develop very well. But unfortunately, just when I thought that it was actually beginning to slowly get a start and that it could quickly make a rapid development, we

⁵⁷ Nandu Foundation, also known as Narada Foundation, founded on 11 May 2007. It is a private foundation approved and supervised by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, with a registered capital of RMB 100 million donated by the Shanghai Narada Group Co. Ltd. Its mission focuses on fostering civil society.

encountered something unpredictable and unpreventable! We started in the second half of 2018. I think there were probably some different reasons. One is my identity as one of the Feminist Five. I found out that I had been investigated beforehand, and some people who cooperated with us were called by the police and told not to cooperate with us, or whatever. Another reason is this organization. We also participated in some #MeToo actions, so I guessed that the organization may have been considered as one of the black hands behind-the-scenes of the #MeToo movement. We were also asked about our funding sources and investigated. There were many different kinds of pressure.

Later we started to want to do some offline activities and found that we weren't able to.

Whoever we contacted, or whatever, they would be interrogated by the police. Or if you wanted to cooperate with other people, even official cooperation... I remember once I was invited to speak at an official forum, but then I found out that neither I nor another foreign lawyer who came from out of town could give a speech. They told us not to come. So I felt that this issue was getting more and more sensitive, and that we could no longer do it. In December of 2018, because of all these various pressures, even our interns and volunteers were being talked to by the police, and anyone related to our work, so we ourselves first shut down our WeChat public account. Then some of our previous funding sources were also told [by the authorities] that they could no longer donate to us; they couldn't give us money.

XH: It's a bit like stopping when you encounter obstacles.

WT: Right! You feel as if there is a strong resistance here. When I first encountered difficulties, I thought that there might still be a chance and I could try again, but later I found it very difficult. Until January 2019, our organization and the Guangzhou Rainbow University Alliance⁵⁸ were listed as suspected illegal organizations by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and now you know what is particularly serious? When you search Baidu,⁵⁹ for example, if you search Guangzhou Gender Education Center, you will find that Baidu shows that it appears on

⁵⁸ Guangzhou Rainbow University Alliance, also known as SYSU Rainbow Group, was an independent student group dedicated to creating LGBTQ – friendly campuses in Guangzhou, China. It was listed as suspected illegal organizations in 2019.

⁵⁹ Baidu is the largest search engine platform in China after the Chinese government banned Google. It was the main information source for most netizens before new media rising. It is criticized by the public because of its manipulation of information and news.

the list of suspected illegal organizations.

XH: Isn't it listed first?

WT: You're right, it's first. You also searched for it! I've searched! I said, Damn, it's over! You feel that it cuts off all your legitimacy. As long as someone searches you, and it says that this is an illegal organization, you have no way to continue working, so almost at this point, the organization is shut down.

XH: With so many obstacles, in the end, what are you thinking about what you can do; what else will you do in the future?

WT: It's a strategic question for me. I'm doing some work on psychological counseling. On the one hand, during 2015, I saw a lot of friends around me, including myself, who were somewhat traumatized or who had the existence of some sort of injury like PTSD,⁶⁰ and I started to be interested in this. After I started doing #MeToo, in fact, I found that psychological support is also an important job, very important, and no one was filling that gap. In addition, it's a service-oriented job. To some extent, it is not so easy to meet so much resistance and it's not so sensitive. After I studied psychology myself, I found that the patriarchal thinking in psychology is quite serious, so I am currently studying psychological counseling and treatment, and I am starting to be a psychological counselor.

WT: Earlier, we had a group for victims of sexual assault, and now we have a psychological group for gay activists. I find it very useful. For my personal career, I feel that I have been doing these kinds of action for the past 10 years. For a period of time, I felt a little burnout, as if everything is repeating! Repeating the same project, work. Well, now that I am studying psychological counseling, it is something new for me **(XH: New direction?)** Yes, I am learning. So in the future I will probably do some counseling in the areas of gender or sexual minorities.

XH: Uh, okay. Okay, thank you, thank you Tingting! Thank you all! (applause)

⁶⁰ PTSD is the abbreviation for Posttraumatic stress disorder. It is a long-term psychological distress suffered by someone who has experienced a terrifying, uncontrollable event. People who have PTSD will have intense fear and anxiety for they may re-experience past events.

WT: Thank you all! I'm very happy. (applause)

