

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS PROJECT
PODCAST SERIES:
CONTEXTUALIZING FEMINIST VOICES**

SITE: CHINA

**Transcript of Wang Zheng
Interviewer: Abby Stewart**

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Intro: This podcast series, *Contextualizing Feminist Voices*, is designed to provide background information for people using the Global Feminisms Project website. The podcasts aim to provide users with a well-informed perspective on interesting aspects of the interviews from a particular country. For each episode one of the project staff interviews an expert on that country site.

Abby Stewart: Welcome to this episode of *Contextualizing Feminist Voices*. My name is Abby Stewart. In this episode I am talking with my University of Michigan faculty colleague, Professor Wang Zheng, who will provide a perspective on the interviews from China. Because we have limited time, we're going to get right to the point.

So, Wang Zheng, my first question is: what are one or two themes that come up in the interviews that users should pay close attention to because those themes are particularly important in Chinese women's movement scholarship or activism.

Wang Zheng: I would like to highlight the theme, I think that is most important, and also unique in some ways to Chinese feminism. That is, the relationship between the state and the Chinese feminism. We need to pay attention to state surveillance and self-censorship; in other words, how the political vicissitudes affected Chinese feminist activism. I also want to emphasize that that relationship is not fixed, is not stable. Rather, it varies in different time periods. And I would like to give some examples of how they vary.

So, like we all know, 1989, the Tiananmen incident: that is, the state violence against the democracy movement, and following that, the state control of the social space was very tight. But then, the CCP leadership also wanted to attract global capitalist investment back to China. So then, in 1995, the UN Conference on Women presented such an opportunity to the state and the companion NGO Forum presented an opportunity for Chinese feminists to push against the political boundaries for the legitimacy of NGOs. So, in the decade following the fourth UN Conference on Women, the Chinese NGOs flourished, you know, as our first group of Chinese feminists' interviews illustrate.

However, then, after the first decade, the rapid development of NGOs in China, the situation alarmed the CCP. So, since 2005 the government started to control and curtail the development of NGOs in China. But then in 2015, the detention of five young feminists actually marked the age that organized feminist activism was no longer spared from the state surveillance and suppression. The police, the national security line openly named feminism, as some sort of example of subversion from abroad, from foreign hostile forces. So, obviously after that, the space for organized feminist activism was further closed.

Over the past three decades or so each cohort of feminist activists has to pay close attention to the political boundaries. Okay, the political boundaries were usually marked by those keywords, suggesting taboo subjects. Because China embraced global capitalism, turned a socialist economic system to a capitalist market economy, of course, there's a tremendous class and gender realignment and reconfiguration. So, the state suppressed the term 'class.' And so, class became a sensitive subject and feminists of that cohort knew that you were able to talk about women's rights but that you shouldn't organize around workers' rights. That's a taboo subject, and you also do not talk in terms of class analysis, which you can see that feminists of that generation are silent on that subject.

So basically, I want to just summarize that the relationship between the state and feminists was the main theme, even though the interviewees may not explicitly articulate this theme.

AS: Thank you. And you've really moved into the second question: whether there are literally topics that a user might be surprised just are not addressed in any way in the interviews.

WZ: The most blatant silence is class issue, and another issue is one-child policy. We presented here the interviews of the Chinese feminists; they were all urban based. And urban based feminists, they would not organize around one child policy. For a long time, the violation of women's rights, because of this fundamental state policy, was everywhere, especially among the rural women. Okay, rural women became victims of this fundamental state policy, but we do not see that Chinese feminists have organized around that issue to protect women, especially rural women's rights.

So, these are the silences very blatantly there in the interviews, but we have to know that these are very important issues in the social reality, that Chinese feminists were not able to organize exactly because of the political system--because of the censorship, you know, because of the suppression. And as a result, Chinese feminists have to be consciously self, doing self-censorship, in order not to get into big trouble.

However, the political boundaries are not fixed. You never know tomorrow what kind of issue became sensitive issue again. It's very unstable, the political terrain was full of mines. And forced the Chinese feminists to act in a very cautious way. Right now, it's almost semi underground mode, for Chinese feminists.

Outro: Thank you for listening to this episode of *Contextualizing Feminist Voices* created by the Global Feminisms Project. The entire podcast team hopes it will help you understand and enjoy the materials on the website. If you liked this episode, check out the other

podcasts in this series, as well as materials about countries, teaching resources, and interviews.