

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

**SITE: CHINA**

**Transcript of Joy Lin**

**Interviewer: Tan**

**Original Language: Mandarin**

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In April 1987, **Sanshan LIN (Joy LIN)** was born in a small village in Yongji County Jilin Province. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in sociology in Northeast Normal University, she went to Shanghai and started her career in executive search industry. In November 2016, she founded **我们与平权 Wequality**, a feminist organization dedicated to raising public awareness of gender inequality in China, building community, and empowering members to unite to make gender equality a reality. Through regular WeChat articles and online/offline activities, Wequality continues its advocacy. In 2018, Wequality initiated "Our Stories" project to release interview reports annually with people's experiences and opinions on different gender issues in China. The one on sexual harassment was released in 2019 while another on gender discrimination in 2020.

*The interviewer who conducted Joy Lin's interview has requested to remain anonymous and will be referred to as Tan throughout the transcript.*

**Tan:** I'll try to ask briefly; in fact, what I want to ask is about your personal background and growing up, and when you first started to have this gender awareness? This is a bit long, so let me ask directly, first can you introduce the context of your growth and development?

**Joy Lin:** Okay, if you want me to start with my personal growth background, this story is very long. I was born in the countryside in Northeast China.<sup>1</sup> When I was young, I probably didn't have the word 'domestic violence' in my own vocabulary. In our village, it was very normal for a neighboring husband to beat his wife and a parent to beat their child. I don't think I heard of any family in which the parents didn't beat their children. There may have been some very strong wives who weren't beaten by their husbands. Then, it was only after I left the Northeast that I heard that Northeast China was a hard-hit area<sup>2</sup> -- a place where male chauvinism,<sup>3</sup> male oppression of women, and violence against women were all very serious. But when I was young, I completely felt that this was right and proper, that it was normal. Then my own growing process was very interesting, as if, step by step, I pushed open a door to a bigger world. When I was a kid, I went to an elementary school in a village first, then transferred to the elementary school in town, then transferred to a better elementary school in town, and then returned to the original elementary school in town. So there were three elementary schools in total, and I transferred four times. Then I went to town to attend junior high school, and after that I went to the city to attend high school. Going to high school in the city was very different from attending junior high school in the town. The things I saw were very different -- what my classmates wore, the books they were able to read, and things they were contacted with, were also all very different.

When I went to university-- I was still studying in the Northeast-- in the provincial capital city. At that time, when I arrived in the provincial capital, it was different from the small city near us, therefore a bigger door was opened. Then, during my senior year when I was about to graduate, I was determined to go to Shanghai<sup>4</sup> with a good friend of mine; it could be regarded as a form of internship, or to start up something new. After arriving in Shanghai, my feeling was that this city was even more different than the others I had experienced

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<sup>1</sup> Northeast China usually corresponds specifically to the three provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang. The region is often referred to as the "Rust Belt" in China due to its shrinking industrial sector and decline of economic growth in the post-socialist era. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northeast\\_China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northeast_China)

<sup>2</sup> Hard-hit area means a certain area is profoundly stricken and affected in an especially negative way. In this case, Lin indicates Northeast is affected by people's conservative concepts about gender issues and domestic violence. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hard-hit>

<sup>3</sup> Male chauvinism is the beliefs, attitudes or behavior of men who patronize, disparage, or otherwise denigrate women in the belief that they are inferior to men and thus deserving of less than equal treatment or benefit. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/male-chauvinism>

<sup>4</sup> Shanghai is located in southern China. It is the most populous cosmopolitan city in China and many Chinese want to make a living in the city. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai>

before, different from the cultural systems in the Northeast I had come into contact with. So then I stayed in Shanghai. When did I first encounter feminism? This is also a very interesting thing. A few days ago I looked through an earlier notebook, probably in 2011 or 2012, I wrote in my own diary that the most important thing for a woman was to find a husband who loves her, and to have an obedient child.

Now as a feminist, when I look back at this kind of notes, I think, was there really such a time as this? What I can remember now is that when I was in college, from 2004 to 2008, Korean drama was very popular in China. Probably when I was in high school, movies such as 'Autumn in My Heart', 'Winter Sonata'<sup>5</sup> and other films, began to become popular, and then there was a "Korean wave"<sup>6</sup> that came to China. When I was in college, we often spent a *yuan*<sup>7</sup> or two, and we'd go to different auditoriums, and watch some movies. Most of the time there would be a Korean drama, a kind of light romantic comedy, or a light romantic tragedy, and then there would be another movie, probably an American Hollywood film. At that time, I thought, wow, the kind of feeling in Korean dramas was really great. The man really cares about the woman. He is willing to die for her, and he rarely says beautiful words of love. This in particular is in line with the mainstream values of the Northeast; that is, a man who should love you, shouldn't say much, he should treat you well with his whole heart and soul; even if you misunderstand him, it doesn't matter.

At that time, I felt that if this is a model for normal and beautiful feelings, then I should find someone like in the Korean dramas, someone who is very good to me and doesn't say too much. Of course, it was very important that whoever might be my boyfriend must be tall and handsome. This was my understanding of love at that time. Then after I arrived in Shanghai, in the beginning, I was actually quite busy with my livelihood, hoping to make more money and to be able to settle down in the city of Shanghai. It was the case that some of my friends came to Shanghai, and after less than a month, they felt there was no way to gain a foothold in the city. But I struggled and could be considered to have established myself. Then I hoped to climb the social class ladder to an even higher level, make more money, and then make my life better, and have more discursive power.<sup>8</sup> Then came an awkward time, that is, I was about to turn 27 years old, I was already straddling the wall between being a leftover woman<sup>9</sup> and a non-leftover woman.

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<sup>5</sup> "Autumn in My Heart" and "Winter Sonata" were episodes in the 2000 TV series *Endless Love* directed by Yoon Seok-ho. This series was acclaimed as a masterpiece for Korean drama and has been broadcast in several countries.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endless\\_Love\\_\(2000\\_TV\\_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endless_Love_(2000_TV_series))

<sup>6</sup> The Korean Wave was the rise in global popularity of South Korean cultural products since the 1990s. It was driven by the spread of Korean dramas and K-pop. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean\\_Wave](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Wave)

<sup>7</sup> Yuan refers to the primary unit of account of the renminbi (RMB), the currency of the People's Republic of China.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuan\\_\(currency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuan_(currency))

<sup>8</sup> In this case, Lin's discursive power means to be in a position of power that ensures others would respect what you have to say. <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E8%AF%9D%E8%AF%AD%E6%9D%83>

<sup>9</sup> Leftover women is a derogatory term in China that classifies women who remain unmarried in their late twenties and beyond. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheng\\_nu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheng_nu)

At that time, in 2014, I was just beginning to feel the oppressiveness of the word "leftover woman." Earlier it was just an influence. Different colleagues would tell me, I want to help introduce you to a boyfriend, if you agree, of course. But basically, the guys colleagues introduced me to were not very reliable. If I disagreed, the response I'd receive would be, don't be so picky, you need to dress more beautifully, be sexier, be gentler, don't be so aggressive, etc. Then at the age of 27, when I went out for blind date-type events, others started requesting that those who were born in 1987 shouldn't come again; only those born after 1989 were welcome. It was only then that I had actually reached a point when I felt that there was something wrong with this.

**JL:** At that time, I didn't even know that the word "oppression" existed, and I started to search for a solution myself. I felt that I earned enough money; if I wanted something, I could buy it for myself. I didn't necessarily need another person to come and provide me with things. I could live very well by myself. If others felt that they had to call me "a leftover woman," then I would rather give the term "leftover woman" a new meaning; that is, I am an independent woman; I am a well-educated independent woman with a high income, who can live very well on her own. This is how I thought about the problem at that time; but in fact, these influences around me had always been there. One possible comfort could be sought is going into another cultural circle, such as hanging out with foreigners, or I'm not sure what else. At that time, my own solution was to interact with foreigners, but in the end, you can't live in that cultural circle all the time, the original social relations around you are still there, so this oppression is also always there.

Then in 2016, a friend recommended Leta Hong [Fincher]'s new book, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China*.<sup>10</sup> After I finished reading it, I thought, wow, she was right, she made a few points; one point was that the term "leftover women" devalued and objectified women, it did not treat women as a person, a person who is treated as equal to men. Because we have terms like "leftover women," we don't have much to emphasize the term "leftover men." Another point is that in the view of [Leta Hong Fincher], the term "leftover women" was coined by the All China Women's Federation<sup>11</sup> in 2007 in order to safeguard social stability. Highly educated and high-income women were pushed back into family life to get married and have children, as a means of domination.

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<sup>10</sup> *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* published in 2014. Leta Hong Fincher argues that the state-sponsored media campaign denigrating leftover women is indicative of a broad resurgence of gender inequality in contemporary China. <https://www.genderanddevelopment.org/issues/22-3-care/leftover-women-review/>

<sup>11</sup> All China Women's Federation 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. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-China\\_Women%27s\\_Federation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-China_Women%27s_Federation) It is unclear who first coined the term "leftover woman." But the ACWF endorsed the usage in some of its publications.

After reading this book at that time, I thought she was right. In my heart, I suddenly found an explanation for all of my sufferings, that is, there was actually a stronger force that may be oppressing us that we had never thought of before -- a power that is oppressing a group of women like us. The purpose is only that they hope we can be well behaved, and maintain the stability of this society, although we have not demonstrated how we've endangered the stability of this society.

Since then, because of this, I thought the fact that I had given "leftover woman" the meaning of an independent woman might indicate I had a kind of feminist enlightenment idea. But I didn't even know what feminism was at that time. I had never even heard of feminism. When I read the book Leftover Women, it was the English version, and then I knew that this thing belongs to feminism. Then I consciously looked for some books related to feminism, and some essays, only to learn then that there was such a term as "feminism." But because the public opinion environment we are in has always stigmatized feminism, at that time, I did not quite agree that I was a feminist, when I first read this book.

I read this book in 2014; at that time, I didn't acknowledge that I was a feminist, and I didn't really understand what feminism was. Then I just had this kind of simple plan pursuing practical gain, that is, to provide a resolution to my dilemma, a kind of feminist enlightenment idea. Then I gradually looked for some media reports, essays, and books to read, and it was during this course of study, that I began to think of myself as a feminist. Later, when I really recognized that I was a feminist, it was probably in 2016, when I was about to start this project "Wequality".<sup>12</sup> And I know very clearly that the feminism I acknowledged at that time was very different from what I now subscribe to.

**T:** Can you talk about what the feminism you identified with at that time was like?

**JL:** I think, because my own background was like this --when I graduated in 2008, I first joined a headhunting company, whose main target was some foreign-funded companies, and for the whole time I was there, I served some foreign-funded fast consumer goods companies, until I went to do in-house HR [human resources] later, and also served some foreign-funded consumer goods companies. I think that in a company like that, you need to embrace that kind of social Darwinism<sup>13</sup> thinking very strongly, so that you can live very well. Since I was able to move up step by step, it proved that I had been embracing this idea, which I may have actually already embraced in my bones. So when I first recognized the

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<sup>12</sup> Wequality: "We and Equality" is a grassroots organization that started in November 2016, dedicated to raising awareness of gender inequality in China and empowering Chinese women and men to unite to make gender equality a reality. Joy Lin (interviewee) is the founder of Wequality. <https://www.facebook.com/WeAndEquality/>

<sup>13</sup> Social Darwinism is an application of biological concepts of natural selection and survival of the fittest of Darwinism to sociology, economics, and politics. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_Darwinism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Darwinism)

concept of feminism, what I identified with was a ‘lean in’<sup>14</sup> type of social Darwinian feminism. That kind of thinking is, for example, take a woman who is in a domestic violence situation-- you are in such a bad relationship, you have been beaten, you’ve been mentally abused, financially abused, but you have not left-- even though I don’t know if at the time I would have blamed those women who suffered violence, I certainly partially blamed some of them in my heart.

At that time, I felt that I still had a mentality focusing on gains and benefits in solving my own dilemma. So the starting off point for my feminism was myself. I couldn’t think about the problems other women were suffering from, and I couldn’t put myself in their shoes to think about their dilemmas from their perspective. So that is a benefit-seeking, social Darwinian, ‘lean in’ type of feminism. I can’t say what kind of feminism my current feminism is. Now I can understand social Darwinism itself is a capitalist trap; it is a snare. Feminists should believe that everyone is equal. The reason why it is called feminism is because women’s rights have not been obtained in the long span of history, whether in China or abroad, and women’s rights have not been treated the same as others in terms of granting her some fundamental human rights, so it is called feminism.

**T:** Now do you still go back to the Northeast?

**JL:** I went back once probably about six years ago. It’s been six years since I returned to the Northeast.

**T:** In addition to family and personal reasons, is there a feeling that if you go back again, it may be difficult to adapt to the cultural environment that you saw when you were young?

**JL:** The current Northeast is completely different from the one I saw when I was young. Because China's development has indeed been very fast, especially in terms of the economy, when I was young, our economic situation, my family's economic situation was relatively good, but in fact we were struggling just on the poverty line. There were some very poor families, maybe a family of three. Because of the one child policy,<sup>15</sup> the average income of a family of three was only two or three thousand yuan a year. This was earlier; it was probably

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<sup>14</sup> “Lean in” means to grab opportunities without hesitation. In Sheryl Sandberg’s book *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, she suggests that women should seize opportunities during their careers and not limit themselves.

<https://grammarist.com/phrase/lean-in/#:~:text=Lean%20in%20means%20to%20grab.wind%20during%20a%20heavy%20gale.&text=In%20a%20short%20few%20years.in%20ways%20unrelated%20to%20business.>

<sup>15</sup> One Child Policy: an official program initiated in 1979 by the central government of China, the purpose of which was to limit the great majority of family units in the country to one child each. It ended in early 2016 and was replaced by Two-Child Policy, and in 2021 the state began to promote a three-children policy to address the rapid decline of population growth. There were many enforcements of policy during the decades of One-Child Policy, including economic sanctions and forced abortions, sterilizations. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/one-child-policy>

the period between 1995 and 2000. We couldn't afford to eat meat, but because we were in the countryside, there were definitely vegetables to eat, but it was impossible during winter to eat off-season vegetables, whether it was transportation problems or some other problem, or our own financial situation, there was no way to eat fresh vegetables, we could only eat things like cabbage, potatoes, and pickled vegetables.

**JL:** I went back last time to get a passport and an ID card; during that time Shanghai couldn't process these documents for me. I attempted to go from the town in the direction of our village and found that road, which previously was a yellow sand road-- maybe you've never seen one --when an automobile vehicle passed by, dust immediately flew up, because it wasn't an asphalt road; the surface was completely yellow sand, and sand was always being spread on top of it. Now it has become a wide asphalt road. Many houses that were originally single-story, now have become multi-story. I had no opportunity to go deeper and get closer to our village, but I heard from the elders that every year farmers get some subsidies, and these subsidies, relatively speaking, will greatly improve their living conditions. And, in fact, most people have already left the village [to go to the cities] to work.

**T:** From the perspective of gender, you didn't return to your hometown, but you continue to keep in touch with the people in your family. Do you feel that the gender culture, at the family level, has changed?

**JL:** My own family is a very special family, but from the responses of other relatives that I'm relatively close with, basically their thinking has not changed much. First of all, the top requirement of parents in the countryside is that they hope their children can study well and that they will be able to go to a better university. At that time, I only went into a provincial university within Project 211,<sup>16</sup> which is already a very, very good university.

When I was young, I heard about a family with an older sister and a younger brother; the family had exceeded the one-child policy limit. In the end, the younger brother was sent to school and the older sister became a migrant worker. There were situations like that, and at the time, I didn't have a feeling that it was something that was right, or wrong. Because it had nothing to do with me, as an only child, and a girl, I was the one who would go to school, and our family cared greatly about education. My own relatives are also very concerned about the children's education. There was no such thing as a child not going to school or choosing who goes to school based on gender. But after graduating, what I always feel is, I

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<sup>16</sup> Project 211 is a project of National Key Universities and colleges initiated in 1995 by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. By 2008, China had 116 institutions of higher education designated as 211 Project institutions for having met certain scientific, technical and human resources standards and offering advanced degree programs. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project\\_211](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_211)



have a very close female relative, she always urges me to find a boyfriend, especially since I am now in my 30s, but she probably has given up a bit now.

When I was around 30 years old, [this female relative] hoped very much that I could quickly find a boyfriend to settle down with. This kind of thinking is actually quite interesting. One thing is that she didn't want me to look for a man in order to rely on him and have him make money, while I fulfilled the traditional roles of a good wife and mother, because her own children did not do things this way. The woman perhaps earned more money than the man. However, she also felt that you must have a man in your family, whether it is mentally or emotionally or whatever, so that you can settle down. Maybe she just feels that there's no way for a single person to settle down. I think this idea is an especially simple idea stemming from the collectivism<sup>17</sup> of the past. You have to be with a man in order to be secure, and you must have a family to be secure. I think a person alone can also be secure, if the goal really is the pursuit of stability.

**T:** Why do you think this is an idea from collectivism?

**JL:** Because I think that from her perspective, before, if you were not married, you wouldn't get a housing distribution. You need to have a house, and food coupons for rice and flour, etc., and the benefits issued to you by your work unit<sup>18</sup> will be different; there are many more things like this. In this case, getting married will bring you many advantages and benefits, and your life will become better. This is because at that time, she, my female relative, had a work unit. But my own parents would not think about it this way. My female relative just thinks that you should find a boyfriend, but why? There is no why. She may not know why. It may be because all other parents are advising their children to find a boyfriend or girlfriend as soon as possible, especially if you are a female, and if you are already over 30, which is already very old in terms of value in the love and marriage market. I don't think my parents will consider such deep things, like value in the love and marriage market. To them, it's just like other people's parents are urging their children to get married, then you should also be nudged by me.

**T:** Right now you just said that the feminism you embrace now is completely different from the time when Weequality was created. How did this process happen? When you talk about this, please also talk about the organization's changes.

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<sup>17</sup> Collectivism is a view of the individual as subordinate to a social collectivity such as a family, state, nation, race, or social class. Collectivism may be contrasted with individualism, in which the rights and interests of the individual are emphasized. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/collectivism>

<sup>18</sup> Work unit is the name given to a place of employment in socialist China. Prior to economic reforms that dismantled socialist planned economy, workers were bound to their work unit for life in the state owned enterprises. Each work unit provides their employees housing, child care, schools, clinics, shops, services, post offices, etc. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Work\\_unit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Work_unit)

**JL:** I'll first talk about how I started doing this work. Around July 2016, I left my original foreign-funded company and stopped working in personnel affairs and stopped working for capitalism. Then I joined a social enterprise in Shanghai that was also run by a foreigner. That time was actually because when I returned to China in 2015 and began working, I had continuously been looking for various opportunities to volunteer, because I really want to do something that would benefit society. I don't know specifically where this idea came from.

### **[Short Break]**

**T:** You just mentioned that the feminist ideas you embrace now are very different from when you first founded this organization, Wequality. What caused your change? As you're talking about this, please also introduce the process of creating and developing this organization.

**JL:** Let me first talk about how this organization got started. That was after I returned to China in 2015 and started working. I had been very consciously looking for some charity organizations, hoping to do some volunteer work for them. While doing this volunteer work, I also hoped that I could find what I am most interested in, and do this work in the future, whether it's creating a charity organization, working for a charity organization, or creating an enterprise relating to public affairs by myself-- these kinds of projects. At that time, I could think of many things, all of which were related to education. First of all, because of my own background, I believe in education very, very much. Because without education, there would be no way I would be where I am now, sitting here talking with you. I wouldn't have read Leta Hong [Fincher]'s books, and I wouldn't have known what feminism is.

I couldn't imagine concretely what I would be like now. So at the beginning, in 2015, I probably helped 3 different organizations to do education-related volunteer work. But although I was very interested in education, and I felt it was very meaningful to do these things, I still felt that some things were missing. I think you still need this thing to be related to your own interests, so that you can better realize what you want to do. Then probably in 2016, in fact, it was July 2016, I stopped working for capitalism. I went to join a social enterprise project created by a foreigner in Shanghai. When I went there, the idea was also very utilitarian. I hope to run this project with their entrepreneurial team and learn how to run one, learn how to do a social enterprise. I joined this organization in July [2016]. In November, there was a venue for this project I was working on.

In November 2016, a major event that changed the whole world happened -- Trump was elected. The first thing he did when he came to power was to cut the budget of Planned

Parenthood.<sup>19</sup> At that time, there was a young Chinese-American woman in Shanghai. After this happened, she immediately hosted a fundraising event in Shanghai at our venue; all the funds raised would be donated to Planned Parenthood, which everyone knows is a very large organization in the United States that is concerned about women's health and reproductive health. When I was preparing for this event, I was in contact with her, and I was mainly responsible for some event-related work. At that time, I thought it was something similar to a feeling of nationalism. What I thought at the time was that even an American could do a fundraising activity in China to raise funds for a women's health organization in her country, well, then, as a Chinese woman, I wanted to do something related to Chinese women's rights. Why not start right away? At that time, I actually had some ideas from much earlier. I wanted to do a social enterprise project that would involve making some products that conveyed an awareness of equal rights.

So, when the Chinese-American woman did this fundraising event, I printed out these products and made the first batch of trial sales. At that time, I also was determined, and promised myself that the official [WeChat]<sup>20</sup> account<sup>21</sup> I created before would also be updated every week, and so, indeed, that has been done ever since then.

**T:** When did your official account start?

**JL:** I started my official account in May 2016.

**T:** You started it before resigning.

**JL:** Yes, I made an official account at that time, and the things I posted were all basically about petite bourgeoisie<sup>22</sup> lifestyle kinds of things, dealing with people and material stuff. And I didn't post much at all, especially since I had just made this official account before resigning to join this social enterprise. I was really very busy, and I didn't have much time to write or update. I took this opportunity in November [2016] and was determined to keep updating. Now when I go back and read the things I wrote before; they really are very immature and

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<sup>19</sup> Planned Parenthood Federation of America is a nonprofit organization that provides sexual health care (including care around issues of reproduction including contraception and abortion) in the United States and globally.

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/>

<sup>20</sup> WeChat is a Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment app developed by Tencent.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WeChat>

<sup>21</sup> WeChat Official Account is a China based marketing platform that acts as a complete brand hub to gather followers, send followers targeted content, push them marketing and service notifications, redirect them to a website/e-commerce.

<https://wechatwiki.com/wechat-resources/wechat-official-account-marketing-platform-epic-tutorial-guide/>

<sup>22</sup> Petite bourgeoisie is a French term referring to "little city-folk" - the small business people,--sometimes extended to include the professional middle-class and better-off farmers. In China, petite bourgeoisie usually refers to people with higher education and also influenced by European American Culture.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%B0%8F%E8%B5%84%E7%94%9F%E6%B4%BB/1927772>

rough; there's a simple and funny feeling to them. I just said that my early thinking was very much Social Darwinist, but at that time I didn't even know the term "Social Darwinism."

I also slowly began to communicate with people in different WeChat groups, plus I consciously looked for some books to read, and it was then that I realized this idea [of Social Darwinism] and this tendency, and then I slowly tried to change this way of thinking. Because this idea is wrong, this idea is actually incompatible with Feminism. It does not follow the concept of equality for all people advocated by Feminism. During this process, there were actually several things that had a great impact on me. First, beginning in May 2017, we started doing offline activities, things were no longer online. There had been some emotional quarrelsome exchanges (online), but these exchanges were moved offline. Offline, people can carry out discussions about a certain issue face to face, and sometimes there would be some disputes. I think that every time I hosted these offline events, I got a lot out of the experience, especially at the very beginning. The second thing (that had a great impact on me), was that around 2018, or the beginning of 2017, Fudan<sup>23</sup> offered a class, Professor Wang Zheng's<sup>24</sup> Introduction to Gender Studies, it was in 2018.

I took this class. The total course period was only eight weeks, but the workload was very heavy. There was one seminar every week, which lasted three hours. She asked us to finish reading a book before the class during which we would discuss it. Every time the book selection was related to Chinese women; they were all very good sociological and anthropological works. That was the first time I systematically studied the concept of gender. What is gender, actually, and where did it come from, what is the nation-state, and what did Liang Qichao's <sup>25</sup>era say about women's education, women's rights, hegemonic discourse,<sup>26</sup> social construction--these things. I may have heard some of these words before, but that was the first time for me to truly understand what they were. I felt very tired in those eight weeks, because every night I had to read until one or two o'clock in the morning. I had to finish the books in order to understand what the teacher was talking about. But those eight weeks of class enabled me to greatly improve my understanding of gender. I think these two things had a great impact on me, in terms of my gender perception.

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<sup>23</sup> Fudan University is a major public research university in Shanghai, China. It is an important academic center for Chinese humanities, natural sciences, and medical studies. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fudan\\_University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fudan_University)

<sup>24</sup> Professor Wang Zheng is Professor of History and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan. She was site director for the China site throughout the life of the Global Feminisms Project at least until 2022. She is the director of the UM-China Gender Studies Project, and founder and co-director of the UM-Fudan Joint Institute for Gender Studies at Fudan University. <https://lsa.umich.edu/history/people/affiliated-faculty/wangzhen.html>

<sup>25</sup> Liang Qichao was a Chinese historian, journalist, philosopher and politician who lived during the late Qing dynasty and the early Republic of China. He was a renowned reformer who promoted women's education, among many of his proposals, as a means to transform a declining dynastic empire into a strong modern nation-state. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liang\\_Qichao](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liang_Qichao)

<sup>26</sup> Hegemonic discourse refers to a dominant narrative promoted by the ruling class or dominant social groups with their control of media, cultural production, and other discursive institutions. <https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-hegemonic-discourse-252963#:~:text=In%20a%20nutshell%2C%20a%20hegemonic,says%20they%20deserve%20their%20wealth.>

**T:** Between May 2016 and June 2017, there were only articles on WeChat. In June, offline activities started.

**JL:** From November 2016 to May 2017, there were always only very rough articles on our [WeChat] official account. It's also because I was not satisfied with online communication and exchanges, which were very often only one-way communications. I think it is an extravagant hope to truly be able to achieve communication on WeChat. Many times, people are really just talking to themselves when they communicate and exchange on WeChat. I might not have had such deep thoughts at the time, but I just thought this sort of thing was wrong, or bad. I wanted to do something else, for example, I thought we should do an offline activity. At that time, I hadn't thought about wanting to build a community. Maybe the word "community" was such a lofty word, I never thought about it. But it was precisely because of this offline activity that we slowly began to build a real community. I think many of the decisions about the development of our organization were made by me; they were "captain's calls,"<sup>27</sup> which was how I started doing activities. It was just that I thought the online method alone didn't work; I wanted to do some activities, and then I just started doing activities.

After holding a discussion forum offline, I felt that the discussion format alone seemed a bit dry. I thought, is it possible to watch movies, because I like watching movies, and there are so many good movies that many people don't know about. We held our first film screening in August 2017. The movie was "The Vagina Monologues,"<sup>28</sup> a documentary produced by HBO about Eve Ensler.<sup>29</sup> Later, other lectures, and psychological mutual assistance groups, these were all captain's calls --my decisions. At that time, I felt that there should be this thing, so I must go do it, and I did. If it succeeded or failed, it didn't matter, we'd talk about it later. These days, film screenings and discussion forums have become regular activities. As long as there's no external interference, the lectures should gradually also become a regular activity.

**T:** When you first started doing offline activities, what kinds of people participated? What are the differences between those participants and the current participants?

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<sup>27</sup> Captain's call is a decision made unilaterally by a team leader without consulting colleagues.

<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=captain%27s%20call>

<sup>28</sup> *The Vagina Monologues* [by HBO] captures Eve Ensler's unique performance of her work, and travels beyond the stage as she explores the creative impetus behind the monologues, and conducts a series of new and revealing interviews as inspiring as those that brought about the original work. <https://www.amazon.com/Vagina-Monologues-HBO-Eve-Ensler/dp/B00UGPUCC0>

<sup>29</sup> Eve Ensler (V), Tony Award winning playwright, performer, and activist, is the author of *The Vagina Monologues* which 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 of various ages, races, sexualities, and other differences. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Vagina\\_Monologues](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vagina_Monologues)

**JL:** It is very interesting that there's someone who participated at the very start, who is now still involved as one of our volunteers. She actually has participated in our activities ever since. When she first participated, we headed over to talk with a foreign restaurant on North Shaanxi Road<sup>30</sup> and we spoke with her, and told her we are going to do this kind of activity, and we don't know how many people there will be, and we don't have any money to give you for the venue fee. All I can do is try to persuade everyone to spend some money. I remember very clearly that when I was doing this first activity, seven people came and she gave us the second floor. The space on the second floor was neither too big nor too small. It was on Tuesday night, and seven people came. I really felt so happy. I didn't expect so many people to come; I was wondering if only one person would show up.

Everyone had a great time and enjoyed the discussion. I remember a female programmer whom I later interviewed, who gave me a deep impression about sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the workplace. That was the first time that I truly understood these things that I often read about on the internet and in the media; these things really existed, and they actually happened to people around us. I think it was also because of that experience that I felt that these stories were very important and very powerful. Since I was moved by these stories, then other people, too, would be moved. Therefore, I started to do a lot of interviews, and through the method of interviews, a lot of gender-related information was able to be conveyed.

**T:** Was there a theme for the first discussion forum?

**JL:** The first discussion should have been about feminism and feminists. Moreover, at that time, I didn't know the specific connotations behind the word "gender." I only knew that I was a feminist and I wanted to discuss feminism.

**T:** And what about the current participants?

**JL:** The current participants are somewhat different from those before, but in fact it's mainly that the group of people changed, I think. At that time, I started to do this project because I tried to find some organizations in Shanghai, hoping there would be some opportunities, whether it was volunteering or helping the organization with work. I wanted to get to know what the women's organizations were doing specifically, and I really thought that this was what I wanted to do. I searched for half a year and didn't find anything, and then I was inspired by the fundraising event for Planned Parenthood, so I started to do this. At that time, just as I was getting started with this activity, some of those people who were involved

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<sup>30</sup> North Shaanxi Road is a well-known cultural and leisure street in downtown Shanghai.  
<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E9%99%95%E8%A5%BF%E5%8C%97%E8%B7%AF>

actually had this (feminist) aspect. I thought their consciousness was deeper and stronger than mine, so at that time, I felt that it seemed that many people were paying attention to this issue, and I am not alone in paying attention to this matter, but it seemed that people weren't organized.

Now, I have a strong feeling that we are this organization, no matter how we exist, even if we, although we are still publishing articles and doing activities more regularly, I think no matter what, as long as we still exist here, it's a local organization in Shanghai. For them, at least it's reduced that kind of perplex I felt when I was looking for an organization at the beginning. But the people who came, I think they are actually similar, but my current feeling is that at that time, it seems that few people understood, although some people did understand, but there was no organization. Now I feel that there are many people who know it well, and there may be many people who know it better than I do. With this kind of thinking, my own mentality has changed.

**T:** There is one question that I was originally planning to ask later, but I think you have already mentioned it several times before, so I want to ask. You said at the beginning that after coming to Shanghai, especially when it comes to the issue of "leftover women," you were feeling some pressure because of your age, and you also felt some social pressure around you, which perhaps was deeply rooted in some expectations and norms in traditional Chinese culture. You also said at the time that one of your solutions was to spend more time together with foreigners. You also mentioned reading Leta Hong [Fincher]'s book, and that you went to participate in the work of many volunteer organizations, and the people you met, including that restaurant where you held your first activity, which was a foreign restaurant, I think it's particularly interesting. Was this due to a kind of eagerness to escape from a kind of bondage that is closely related to traditional Chinese culture, so you felt that a foreign environment or culture such as this gave you a kind of empowerment or a space? I just want to ask you, what do you think of this foreign influence, or that you can access foreign resources, in terms of your doing local feminism-- what's the relationship between the two? In addition, you don't go back to your hometown much now, but now when you recall your childhood, although you didn't really have feminist ideas at that time, a lot of experiences based on your gender were gained since your childhood. Maybe the thoughts you are embracing now are difficult to transmit to your childhood family. What do you think about what you want to do with such a local organization, using words familiar to local people to talk about some local issues? But during this process, you are actually often empowered by international and western [resources and ideas.] What are your thoughts on this relationship?

**JL:** In fact, this question is a bit complex. Let me start by talking about my most intuitive feelings. I remember that in Prof. Wang's class, she talked about a concept, which was very

difficult for me to understand at the time, the concept was “social construction.” All things and all concepts actually already exist. Everything you have embraced is not yours. It is you who, during the process of your socialization embraced different values, different concepts, ideas, ideology, and so on. All these things are mixed together to constitute you. I couldn't imagine it at that time, because in this case, where is my autonomy? All my things belong to others. In the course of a slow process of practice, gradually I was slowly able to understand this. I also very much agree with the theory of social construction.

I think that if I use this method to analyze myself at that time, someone who threw herself into the embrace of Western capitalism, a large part of the uncomfortable feeling I felt at that time came from the values I had embraced. In that case, even if I saw a glimmer of light from another culture, I went over to it. I think at that time, another point was that the education we received since childhood was very uniform, and so I was unable to handle very complicated problems. I was taught this way-- every issue is either black or white, it's either good or bad. Under such circumstances, I originally embraced traditional Chinese cultural ideology, which requires you to marry a man and to have a stable life. Under the bad circumstances of traditional Chinese culture, which oppressed me, I abandoned the whole thing and quickly found the thing that gave me a glimmer of light, that is, Western culture.

I was very active in the foreigners' community in Shanghai; I made friends, played with everyone, danced, and drank. In a short period of time, it gave me some comfort. Because I feel that in this community, I was treated as a more autonomous person. That time period was probably in 2015. So I went clubbing more often, went out to play, and engaged in all kinds of activities, whether they were outdoor or private activities. I truly experienced another kind of lifestyle that I had not experienced before. It brought me this kind of illusion that made me feel as if I had regained autonomy in my life. But because while you're still living here, you can't really completely get rid of all that restrains and oppresses you, unless you don't live in this environment. For instance, if I move to somewhere now, say, to Los Angeles, still the Chinese community will give you this set of values; it's the same. But at that time, there was no way I could realize this: I saw that ray of light, and I ran over.

Then when I was in this ray of light, I slowly discovered that, in fact, it was only a ray of light. But at that time, I could not deal with this kind of complicated thing very well, the simultaneous mix of good and bad. You'll be seriously influenced by the environment around you. That is, if everyone around you especially reveres Western culture, you will also be forced by peer pressure, so that you may not be able to criticize it particularly strongly, in this kind of situation. Besides, I seemed to be happier than before, so it was like this at the time. But I really don't think that at that time I learned feminist ideas in that environment with a group of foreigners. I think that many of my behaviors at the time could be called sexist, racist, and homophobic. They were definitely there, and I also didn't know anything



about LGBT groups; and I often said some bizarre things. In the eyes of many people, especially those who've received education in universal human rights, it would be a very absurd and funny situation.

But how specifically did this thought get hold of me so quickly? I think that in addition to the point that the concept of "leftover women" was oppressing me at the time, Leta Hong [Fincher]'s book [*Leftover Women*] gave me a feminism solution, which is a feminism-based solution, so I embraced feminism. It's the same value. Either right or wrong. Since this thing gave me a solution, it is all good -- probably it's like this.

But one thing that I think is very good, recalling it now, is that Leta Hong [Fincher]'s book gave me another perspective; that is, all the education I have received before, may be wrong. For example, like the education I received before, which said that my country should consider how best to maximize my interests. Also, I was taught that the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) very much considers the interests of women. It is a women's organization, and what we see daily in our Chinese media, what ACWF posts, should be correct and true. I think I used to maintain this kind of simple value concept, but after reading Leta Hong [Fincher]'s book, it seemed like I was struck by lightning. After I embraced feminism, it seemed that my eyes suddenly opened, and I began to understand things properly. I was blasted by thunder, and I started to look for a different kind of value system.

But I think it's the same as when I abandoned traditional Chinese culture and immediately embraced Western culture. After I was struck by this thunder, I immediately began to look for something that was completely different from the education and information I had received before, and then embraced it with all my heart. I felt that what it said was correct, because what it said was different from what I learned before. I think I could really start to deal with the complexity of every problem, every ideology, every statement, to understand there is a position behind it all, this really only began in 2019. Thus, I think that I could embrace feminism and gradually mature. There were some influences brought about by this book, which split open my original values and mode of thinking. Then I gradually got in touch with critical thinking and the complexity of things, and connected with many, many things that are different from the sole black-or-white values and educational methods used before.

**T:** You just said that offline activities enable you to communicate more with other people, unlike the one-way output on WeChat. Can you give specific examples, such as sharing some of your interactions with the people who participated in offline activities, those things that you remember very well, no matter if they were good, or they made you angry, indignant, or frustrated?

**JL:** One thing I can think of now was particularly interesting. It was about July or August of 2017, and we had probably had three or four events by then, when a middle-aged woman came; she was probably about the same age as me, in her 30s. At the time, she accused a married man who was a participant on the scene, saying you're a married man, what are you doing here participating in this kind of activity, causing everyone to criticize her. However, even in this situation, everyone was very rational; that is, it is completely different from what happens on WeChat. Everyone spoke very rationally. Why do you say that? What is the actual meaning behind what you're saying? Why don't you have the right to say this to him; what you've said is a personal attack. I thought it was very interesting.

If you ask me to speak specifically, for example, from which person and which scenarios I've received a lot of inspiration, I can't do it, because I think every activity gives me great inspiration, especially in the early days. But if you ask me for concrete examples, I have no way to enumerate them. Another very important point was that through our offline activities, I began to slowly build up our current team. Because every volunteer, including core members, got their start with these activities. Everyone upholds relatively similar values. Thus no matter how you want to do things or what your specific goals are, you can come together. This is also part of it. Let me think hard, but I can't think of specific scenes or remarks that left a particularly deep impression on me. And especially recently, I no longer host these events myself.

**T:** What kind of relationship does Weequality have with organizations that care about gender or women's rights in China? Is there any interaction, cooperation or contact?

**JL:** The current situation is that because we are a relatively young organization --we've only just been established for three years-- and because at the beginning I built the organization acting on my own, I didn't establish particularly good connections with other feminist groups in other locales, at least not in the beginning. Everything was like, whatever I want to do now, I'll just do it myself, this kind of situation. Now, since the organization has developed to a certain scale, although the scale is not very big, the organization needs a breakthrough. Only after sensing a bottleneck, I started to establish contacts and seek cooperation with feminist organizations and women's organizations in various regions, in the hope of finding a breakthrough, so we are still in the process of actively contacting and establishing cooperation with groups. But there is no particularly close contact and cooperation yet.

**T:** Could you please tell us a bit about your relationship with other members of Weequality and the organizations' volunteers?

**JL:** This is what we are like now: there are two batches of volunteers, one of which is completely online, mainly doing some reports and working on content for the official WeChat

account. This group of people mainly entrusts work to others and then collects the content that's created; it's this sort of connection. The more in-depth contact is in November of each year. Because our organization was established in the month of November, we will send out to everyone some souvenirs that we made ourselves in November, and there will also be some slightly larger-scale interactions. At other times, when I have the time, after I receive the collated content they send to me, I'll have a simple exchange with them, such as, how did you feel when you did this work, and what do you think of it? There will be some communication of this type, but it is online after all. I think the communication is not very close.

Another part is that besides me, there are eight volunteers in Shanghai, including two core members, so among our volunteers, there will probably be an offline activity every month. This activity is only for volunteers and involves eating, drinking and having fun, and doing such things as picnics, singing, eating, getting manicures, etc.; at any rate, we've done everything. I feel that the bonding among everyone is quite good, and it is no longer just work. As for the core members, I think it is actually a bit similar to the relationship between friends and family, because we have established a certain degree of trust with each other, and we can talk to each other about things that may not be possible to tell others, like about some confusion, or dark thoughts.

As for me personally, I think the existence of these volunteers, especially the core members, is very important. Because I became a feminist, during the evolution of my feminism, there were many very painful times. This pain was something I imagined when I was working for capitalism, because then I was in a detached state. I was working for others. When my work was done well, I received recognition, either material or non-material. But if you don't give me these material rewards, then if worse comes to worst, I'll just leave. But when I was doing this feminist work, because this was my belief, I had no way to say, I won't work for you, and pull up my stall<sup>31</sup> and leave. This is impossible. After all, we have a team at the same time we also have a community. Can we just abandon this community and not be concerned? Just abandon thousands of people like that? Therefore, in this painful, metamorphosis-like process of transformation, it is necessary to have one's own people, family and friends who can trust and support each other before they are able to support me to continue the work that I am doing. Otherwise, I think it might cause depression.

**T:** You just said that there were some particularly painful points and processes. Can you give an example of something that you felt was particularly painful?

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<sup>31</sup> "Pull up my stall" is a dialect from Northeast, which means being irresponsible to leave the work spot and give up. <https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/1640215996010567740.html>

**JL:** I think that all activists will face a problem, they will have some sense of powerlessness, their expectations will be very different from what they can realistically achieve, and their output, and especially under those of our type, under this type of political environment, under pressure, there are many, many frustrations. These will all create a psychological and emotional impact. I think the more serious point for myself is that my beliefs, my practice, and my expectations of other people who claim to have the same type of beliefs, in practice, there are some areas that are incompatible. For example, if there is a person who pursues feminism, then why should she embrace this very patriarchal and hierarchical system? In the past, in my head, I couldn't understand it.

But I am able to understand now, and I am also trying to deal with these things. I think things will be somewhat better. But this process is very painful, because in my mind they are not consistent. Because as I said before the values I have received since I was a child are one-sided. It's not that you should have a "left" and a "right." When a person emerges, she may have a part that is left, a part that's right, and a part that's neutral. But we have no left or right, we only have one direction. So, the education I received was quite one-dimensional, something is either good or bad.

So, in this situation, my thinking was quite simplistic. I could only deal with one-dimensional things. She is a feminist, so she should have all the characteristics of feminism. But she also possesses those traits that feminism opposes. So this is not self-consistent. In my mind, such a phenomenon shouldn't exist. So I need some time, some theories and I don't know what type of support, to let me address inconsistencies, and to let me be able to develop a harmonious relationship with her. I think this may be a problem encountered only by a person who has not had a perfect socialization process.

There is another problem that many activists will encounter, especially related to human rights. The environment we are in now is not an environment that encourages you to believe, it is an environment that encourages you not to trust each other. And now on many social media, we have seen that the atmosphere of reporting people is particularly prevalent, which reminds me of a certain historical era <sup>32</sup> that was plagued with tip-offs and political accusations behind one's back. Such an atmosphere creates an environment in which everyone is in danger. If, for example, I am fighting side by side with you, but at the same time I cannot trust you. This is a very painful feeling. How do you make this matter become a situation where I can fight side by side with you, and I can also at least partially trust you? This is also a point where you need to think about finding a solution for yourself.

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<sup>32</sup> Here she refers to the Cultural Revolution that was launched by Mao Zedong late in his life. Widespread political persecution was often based on unwarranted accusations made by people in fear of their own security or other motivations.

**T:** You said that you have harmonious relationships with people or organizations that show some characteristics that are incompatible with feminism. How is this harmony achieved?

**JL:** It has not yet reached the level of complete harmony, but I think it might be better if you look at this matter with a more utilitarian perspective. I think it's something similar to the idea of the CCP underground cell in Shanghai <sup>33</sup> in the 1930s and 1940s. I don't have to absolutely agree with you, but I can unite with you to use your strength doing things that help build a New China. Let's take the Women's Federation as an example. Of course, it is undeniable that there are some positive forces in the Women's Federation. They also hope to do something for women's rights and achieve positive changes. But if you come across a work unit like the Women's Federation, that unit does not have this (feminist) idea, but it does have a sum of money it must spend, and it wants to do something (beneficial). In this case, if the unit can just use you and is willing to use you, a person who seems more sensitive (politically), then I think we can sacrifice some aspects and let it contribute money and publicity to help us do some feminist projects.

**T:** Can you share the activities or projects that the organization carried out that you are most proud of since its start, or the experience that frustrated you the most?

**JL:** Let me first say that I have no particular experience of frustration. <sup>34</sup> It should be said that since the establishment of this organization, I haven't experienced any particular frustrations related to activities of this organization, but my own performance often has made me feel frustrated. For example, that very simple, binary way of thinking -- that there was no way to cooperate with organizations with different values. In the past, I was unable to deal with all types of people in order to get along more harmoniously in a nice manner. This kind of thing was very frustrating for me, and very painful. But in everything the organization and team members did, there was not one thing that made me feel particularly frustrated.

It seems that I have a feeling that the organization didn't let me down, but that I am not worthy of the organization. But if you want me to talk about something I am particularly proud of, I feel that in fact, that we were able to carry out every single activity is something I feel very proud of. We can do it; so many people attend our events, and now, actually, we now have more and more people, especially compared with last year. Everybody can also

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<sup>33</sup> During the 1930s to 1940s, the Communist Party cell in Shanghai moved underground and secretly developed revolutionary activities. The Party organization adapted to its environment and adjusted long-term revolutionary goals to immediate local goals by uniting with Nationalists for anti-imperialist movement and National Salvation Movement. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015047060960&view=1up&seq=23>

<sup>34</sup> Joy Lin's organization also became the target of police surveillance in 2020, which resulted in drastically reduced scope of activities. Lin enrolled in a gender studies graduate program in England in the fall of 2020 while managing to continue her downsized organizational activities.

engage in a lot of discussions. One thing that I am particularly proud of, that I put forth the most effort on, was the report we did containing interviews about sexual harassment, which we did from August of last year (2018) to March of this year. Because in such a short time, while at the same time maintaining our daily operations and daily activities, I interviewed more than 30 people. In the end, this 90,000-character report we put together had different forms and categories. We had different stories of sexual harassment stemming from social interactions, the Internet, campus, and the workplace, and we also had interviews with experts. Finally, the fact that we got it done, I think this is something I am very proud of, because really, the report was mainly done by myself.

Let me think about the things that I remember better than others. I can think of a case that can be considered unsuccessful. It was a psychological mutual support group related to gender-based violence that we created before. The gender-based violence we encountered could be regarded as somewhat mild, or it could be regarded as more serious. We discovered a lot of problems in this mutual support group, but because of the limitations of my own abilities, there was no way we could continue this mutual support group. This is an unsuccessful case, but I don't think this made me feel frustrated. Because we're a grassroots organization, we don't have very good capacity-building training, and we don't have much money, and we don't have a strong network or connections, so everything is basically an experiment. After experimenting with this case, we discovered that our original way of doing it did not work. In fact, if you continued to do it, if you doggedly persisted you could still do it, but the end result would definitely not be good. So after putting the mutual support group into practice, I discovered the form we used was not working, but I perhaps have a new idea that may lead to other types of activity in the future.

And all kinds of activities we do now can be dispersed in the end, they don't have to be under this big umbrella of Weequality. If there is a person now, for example, who has a background in psychology, and, she wants to do her own ABCDE psychological mutual support group for things like domestic violence, gender violence, and sexual violence, we are willing to provide whatever resources we can to support it; as long as we have the resources, we'll provide them. I think this kind of thing is more important. When I started this organization, Weequality, I actually hoped that someone older (with experience) would show me the way; that way, I could have saved a lot of time, and a lot of unnecessary troubles. But at that time, I did not meet such a person. Now I am very happy to be this kind of person, like the ones I have experimented with before. So, if there are other people who want to organize a group, or if there are other groups who want to do similar things, we are all willing to share our previous experiences with her. Successful experience is experience, and failed experience is also experience. I think both are valuable for learning.

**T:** Since its establishment in 2016 to the present, the organization has grown and changed, and you have grown and changed yourself. In terms of feminist practice, what changes have taken place in this general environment?

**JL:** My feeling is that the environment is getting worse and worse, but if you ask me to give specific examples, in addition to what I just said, the trend of reporting others on social media networks is widespread, and other than the suppression of the visibility of LGBT communities on social media networks in recent years, I cannot cite a particularly clear example of what can show that our political environment is getting worse. But my own feeling is like this, part of it is my performance as I just mentioned, and part of it is that my political sensitivity is slowly increasing. I think feminism revealed a very important point; originally I didn't care about politics, and I thought politics had nothing to do with me, because we are in such a system and politics has little to do with us, and because there are too few things we can change.

So, under such circumstances, I have always been political apathy<sup>35</sup> and didn't care at all. However, after doing feminist work and gender equality education work, I discovered that in fact everything is related to politics. If you still hold an ostrich position and completely ignore all the political events happening around you, it will do no good for the growth of the organization and the growth of the community. So, you must understand what is happening in the world now, what is happening in China, what are the problems behind it, and what's the purpose behind it. Another thing I think is very important is that I think feminism is an ideology, it is a kind of value, so many of its values may conflict with the current more prevailing values, which is why it's been very difficult for the feminist movement to develop in China. Even if we are talking about feminism in daily life, it's still being suppressed and stigmatized.

I may not be compared with those who've been (talking about politics) at home since childhood, like discussing for whom they should vote this year; which legislators talked about tax reforms and which one talked about raising employment rates, so we should weigh the pros and cons of who we vote for; there is no way for me to compare with that. After all, for me it's only been a recent period of two or three years to understand and study politics. But I think at least you have to have a start. This is what every person should do. Because you have to understand, before you can truly... even if you can't immediately change the environment you're in now, you should know what things are influencing you. This is a very important point for me. I increased this sensitivity. I started to know what was affecting me.

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<sup>35</sup> In political science, political apathy is a feeling of disinterest or apathy towards politics. It can consist of interest apathy, voter apathy, and information apathy.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political\\_apathy#:~:text=In%20political%20science%2C%20political%20apathy,in%20participating%20in%20political%20activities.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_apathy#:~:text=In%20political%20science%2C%20political%20apathy,in%20participating%20in%20political%20activities.)

Based on the things that I know now, I can judge what things may be more sensitive, and what's bad -- things that may cause some harm or risk to me and my community. But I think there is also a negative side about this (enhanced political awareness); it can bring a very strong self-censorship.<sup>36</sup>

If we really have a line here, if you go above this line, then you are a very sensitive event or organization that may be closed or cancelled immediately. Under intense self-censorship, you may have already stopped even when you are actually far away from the line. In fact, there is a part in the middle where you can wander around. But no one tells you that the middle part is a place you can roam around. And this line changes at different points in time, and in different cities the line changes as well as at different points in time. In the absence of anyone telling us where the line is, out of an overprotective mode of thinking, whether it is to protect yourself, or to protect your team, or to protect your community, you hope to stay a bit further away from the line. In this case, I think it has a great impact on our work style. You do things repeatedly, back and forth, and it's still in this form; will you have other, more impactful, more influential innovations? Where is the innovation in concrete terms, and what form is used to make these innovations? How to innovate, what to innovate, which aspects to innovate-- these things I think are blocked in part by this self-censorship.

**T:** In the next stage, what kind of development do you hope for Weequality? What do you see in the future?

**JL:** In the next stage, I hope that we can develop some new groups or organizations if the next stage refers to, say, three years. Of course, the most important thing is to stay alive. But if we can't survive, then I hope to incubate even more groups. My own thinking is that I hope to have some of these; she has a point of her own, and this point is of particular interest to her and is related to gender, and she wants to do something. And her idea is achievable. In this case, no matter where she is located, and whether her field is something we have paid attention to before, I very much hope that we can provide her with some resources to support her and enable her to carry out her idea. Because this is how we came into being, through practice and building things up slowly. Although we haven't been doing this for very long, it can be considered to be beginning to take shape. So, I hope that they, especially in this increasingly stringent censorship atmosphere, will have the opportunity to have people push her from behind or pull her from the front, and enable her to do the work she wants to do, and to practice. This is what I think is more important.

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<sup>36</sup> Self-censorship is the act of censoring or classifying one's own words or actions. For more Chinese feminist self-censorship, see Wang Zheng, *(Self-) Censorship and Chinese Feminist Networking in a Global Perspective*. <https://chinesefeminism.org/2020/07/10/%ef%bc%88%e8%87%aa%e6%88%91%ef%bc%89%e5%ae%a1%e6%9f%a5%e4%b8%8e%e5%85%a8%e7%90%83%e8%a7%86%e9%87%8e%e4%b8%8b%e7%9a%84%e4%b8%ad%e5%9b%bd%e5%a5%b3%e6%9d%83%e7%bd%91%e7%bb%9c/>



Another thing is that I think our volunteers need various types of training very much. I hope I can find some resources to give them some training so that we can have more of this kind of capacity building. I hope when volunteers come, in addition to the sense of accomplishment in doing things with "Weequality," they can take some "software" back with them. In terms of resources, this is what we need to find in the future, this kind of support.

**T:** What sort of impact does this work have on your personal life?

**JL:** The personal impact on me has been very substantial. As I just said, when I was working for capitalism, I was in a detached state. When I was at work, I was in a work situation. After work, this (work-related) matter has nothing to do with me; don't call me again; if you call me, I might scold you. But after starting my own organization, it feels completely different. You can work 24 hours a day as long as your eyes are open. This is one part, and there's also the fact that there's not as much feeling of frustration when you work for others. It's the kind of thing where I can go out to drink some wine, go clubbing, and when I return, the (work-related) thing is over, because after all, it's not my business.

Now everything is my own business --my community, my team, my organization, because every person (is my business) --I think I have a certain responsibility, and so my own mistakes bring with them a very strong feeling of frustration. Of course, there are also some external impacts, for example, you suddenly hear that a friend you are not particularly familiar with, but who is like-minded, was criminally detained in a certain place.

This kind of thing may not have, on the surface, produced any effect on you. After all, the person who was detained is not you and you're not in the same city, and there won't be a particularly close interaction. But this matter will have a very big impact on you. One question is, what can I do? Even if she's not a personal and particularly close friend, she is still my comrade-in-arms. What can I do for her? I can fully trust this person, and she has done nothing to harm society. She is just an activist, a doer, a person who advocates for, and does things to promote human rights. But in fact, if you want to protect yourself, you can't do anything (for her). But if you don't do anything, in what position are you placing yourself?

An event like this leads to this sort of inquiry, and it actually makes you feel sad because you really don't know what you can do under such circumstances. There are also some external influences. After all, if you do these kinds of human rights-related activities, you will definitely be visited and questioned by the relevant departments. Your family and your friends may also be harassed by them, and inexplicably, even your other distant relatives may be harassed via phone; they may be interrogated, or they may get a knock on the door. Such things can happen. In such a situation, I would have this thought: it's me who did this thing, so if you want me to take responsibility, I am completely willing to accept it. But this

thing was not done by other people, so why would they want to take responsibility for it? I would take responsibility for this matter because I think it was the right thing to do and it's my belief. I think this is the most correct thing I can do, and it is meaningful. But other people are just living their own lives, and have not done anything to make certain departments feel what she did was harmful to society, so why should they be implicated because of me? <sup>37</sup>

This matter had a significant impact on me. Also, sometimes these things will affect you financially. For example, if you send out an advertisement and the other party doesn't let you post it. Thus, you won't be able to sell your stuff. It's probably like this. I just forgot the point, but I especially wanted to talk about this. After I embraced Western values, did this have any influence on my feminist thinking? And how did I start doing charity work? I stopped headhunting in September 2014; that is, I stopped working in executive search. I was not very happy, and that was related to the company's environment and economic environment at that time.

At that time, I made a decision. I decided to take a backpacking trip to Southeast Asia; I went to Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, and I was away from China for four months. Those four months had a very big influence on my life. It established a very important life creed for my life. I think "life is all about experiences." We have but this one life; we arrive empty handed and die without taking anything along.<sup>38</sup> Probably all you can obtain are these experiences, and you should experience them to your heart's content. At that time, it also partly influenced me to later embrace Western values. In fact, very few Chinese, especially mainlanders, carry backpacks while travelling abroad. So, while I was backpacking, most of the people I met were Europeans. I don't know why; maybe it's because they have a tradition of a gap year. Many people go to low cost of living places such as Southeast Asia for their gap year.

I came into contact with some values that were very different from my original values. I tried to understand, listen attentively, and experience them. I think they [the European backpackers] may have received an education about the importance of giving back to society since they were young. Whenever I arrived at a place, I often would go somewhere together with them. For example, this place supports poor young people. If you come to eat in the cafeteria at this place, 50% of the money is donated to a certain farm; I often came into contact with these types of things. You feel that this thing is right, it's good, and this is how it

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<sup>37</sup> Lin refers to a common coercive practice adopted by Chinese police in dealing with the people under their surveillance, that is, not only the targeted people (here influential feminist activists) are monitored and interrogated but also their families and friends will be harassed so as to form a deterring network around the target in order to further curtail her activism with psychological pressure from her loved ones.

<sup>38</sup> This is a Chinese proverb that indicates a Buddhist thought that asks people to reduce their desire for wealth and fame in their life. <http://dict.revised.moe.edu.tw/cgi-bin/cbdict/gsweb.cgi?ccd=hqXzk1&o=e0&sec1=1&op=sid=%22Z00000132281%22.&v=-2>

should be. Including when we are on the road, we often went to places where we could donate our unwanted clothes and a dedicated local group would collect and distribute the clothes to local residents, farmers, and islanders. In fact, many of these places are operated by Westerners who have stayed in these locations. At that time, perhaps a sprout of something like a simple and plain sense of social responsibility was planted, and I wanted to find some projects I could handle after returning to work in China. In the early days I did education projects, except for one project that involved coordinating a market, the other projects had me acting as an English teacher and a teaching assistant for English. I taught migrant children and kindergarten teachers; teaching English was something that was within my power.

Only then did I slowly get to know more people and put into practice a feminist organization. Just now, there is another point about the language issue. I was born in rural China. I started to gradually separate myself from the countryside. It may seem I resented it a little bit, but I can't say that. My childhood life was very happy. I don't think children in cities would have such a happy childhood. If I really have a child in the future, I also hope that she can grow up in the countryside, because for me, that's what childhood is all about. But what I might resent is the value system, like the value of becoming accustomed to violence. Also, the Northeast of China is a place that really emphasizes human relationships and feelings. You need a strong network of all different kinds in order to do even a very small thing.

That is something I am very unaccustomed to, because Shanghai is a relatively formal and rule-based city. This is what I've become more accustomed to. This may also have led me to embrace Western capitalist values and rules, and this is easier to deal with. Because if you're talking about *guanxi*,<sup>39</sup> there is no way to grasp many things that are not in plain sight. Whoever has that particular *guanxi*, that person will get more advantages. I think this is also contrary to feminism. Speaking of this language, I think one of the problems we are facing now is that the job I am doing is public education, awareness raising, and work related to consciousness-raising. You hope that more people will read what you write and accept the information you convey and enter your community. This is what it takes to be considered effective; this is what's called influence.

But the discourse we can adopt either entails those academic words that are translated and not used in our ordinary lives, or a discourse whose words have now been given some special meanings by the current traditional culture; a discourse that has always been used to tell a very traditional, single narrative. But it's very difficult to make these two discourses compatible. When you are narrating a matter, you can either compromise a group of your

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<sup>39</sup> Guanxi (in Chinese, social connections) defines the fundamental dynamic in personalized social networks of power, and is a crucial system of relationships in Chinese culture. It plays a fundamental role within the Confucian doctrines, which sees the individual as part of a community and a set of hierarchical relationships that includes kinship.

readers and use a more professional discourse, such that every word and its meaning are strictly representative of academic discourse, or you must compromise the meaning you want to express, so you have to use a discourse that is similar to the meaning you want to express but that's produced in our traditional culture with certain patriarchal tint. So which discourse should you use?

In other words, we are in this kind of situation, if we want to produce feminist knowledge, how should we do this? If we are going to produce feminist knowledge for the whole populace, if we use this kind of academic discourse is it too difficult and abstruse? If you want to use the patriarchal discourse that originated from the patriarchal system, isn't it the case that it's not feminist enough, and not thorough enough? Or, we can have this opportunity to spread the discourse of feminist scholarship to all the public, so that everyone can understand it and use it skillfully. Even if she can't use it skillfully, she can understand what these words mean, and she can see it and take it in.

Or perhaps, we can take these words originally produced in traditional culture and with patriarchal coloring and innovate, transform them into new feminist words, which are more gender equal, and words that are more neutral, instead of specific narrative terms. I think this is a problem that everyone who wants to do consciousness raising and advocacy, especially those who are in a Chinese language context, will encounter. I also feel very conflicted and don't know what to do.

Finally, let me introduce myself. "Wequality" is an organization that was founded in November 2016. We have several parts to our work; one part is online. We have a WeChat official account, also called "Wequality," where we post an original gender-related article once every week. This article could be a story of a personal experience generated from personal interviews. Of course, they are all gender related. There will also be sharing of movies, books, and sharing with everyone from the masses. Every Tuesday, we also share books and resources related to gender, including e-books, which everyone can download directly. This is the online part of our work.

Offline, we now have three forms of activities, that is, we have about three activities per month, as long as there's no external influence.<sup>40</sup> There will be a film-screening gathering, a discussion forum, and a lecture on issues relating to general knowledge. In addition to these activities, we also have some reports. Our last report was a collection of interviews and stories about sexual harassment from August 2018 to March 2019, 21 individuals shared their personal experiences; among these, 19 were victims of harassment and 2 recounted their experiences as harassers. It is divided into four parts, including social interactions, the

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<sup>40</sup> "External influence" is a euphemism referring to police interference.

Internet, the workplace, and college campuses. There is a real person behind each story, and I am especially grateful to these people for accepting my interview requests.

The report also includes five interviews with professionals, including those in the field of training, college campuses, law, psychology, and academics. This collection was actually influenced by the #MeToo movement<sup>41</sup> in China last year. Since we have an organization, "Wequality," I also hoped to be able to stand in for those people who are unable to speak in public and help them make their voices heard, and to tell their stories. This approximately 90,000-character report stands in for all these people's participation in the #MeToo movement.

Another part that we are pushing now is to hold some workshops on gender awareness. The purpose of these workshops is to cultivate future community leaders and hope that they can acquire certain abilities or mindset. Even if she thinks that our workshops were not done well, and she thinks that she can definitely do better than you in future workshops, it's also possible to learn from a failed case. I hope she can be inspired by us and with the training from these workshops, do whatever she wants to do in terms of a gender-related group, or a community. As for the future, I think that every time I think of what it is I want to do, I dug a hole for myself, then jumped in, and found that I could swim in it, which is good, so I went ahead and did it.

At present, after digging so many pits, I feel that my energy is a little bit scattered, so I also hope that someone can come and take one of the pits away and develop it into a larger swimming pool, and then she will do it. I forgot to mention one thing. We originally had a book corner, which contained a lot of good gender-related books, especially translations and introductions of feminist scholarship that were able to be published around the time of the 1995 World Women's Conference (in Beijing)<sup>42</sup> and at other certain points in time, especially translated books. The translated books may only have one edition, and there won't be any more, so we hope that with limited opportunities, we can buy the books back, make a book corner, and share them with everyone. Anyone who wants to come and read can come. Earlier, we spent about half a year in a space in Longhua.<sup>43</sup> After it closed, recently we're

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<sup>41</sup> Participants of #MeToo Movement in China (2018) have creatively spread discussions on sexual harassment on social media and saved censored information through screenshots and blockchains. However, the state censored the majority of posts with the hashtag #MeToo and temporarily blocked some victims' social media accounts.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/metoo-movement-china-powerful-fragile-181022082126244.html>

<sup>42</sup> The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace was held by the United Nations during 4-15 September 1995 in Beijing China. At this conference, governments from around the world agreed on the Beijing Platform for Action which was a plan to achieve gender equality globally. The companion NGO Forums enabled a period of rapid development of Chinese feminist NGOs, many of which engaged in feminist publication activities. A lot of feminist literature got circulated widely in China in the decade following the Fourth World Conference on Women.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_Conference\\_on\\_Women,\\_1995](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Conference_on_Women,_1995)

<sup>43</sup> Longhua is an area in Shanghai. Lin refers to her efforts to find public spaces (which could be privately owned such as bookstores) that would allow her to host feminist events or sale of feminist books.

going to cooperate with another space. It's a space in the vicinity of Changshu Road and Huaihai Middle Road <sup>44</sup> that seems to be extremely upscale. We'll post this on our official account in the future.

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<sup>44</sup> Huaihai Middle Road is a more upscale and preferred business district for local residents. It is in the former French Concession of Shanghai. Locating an upscale space in downtown Shanghai has the benefit to attract more urban participants to the events she organizes.  
[https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%B7%AE%E6%B5%B7%E8%B7%AF\\_\(%E4%B8%8A%E6%B5%B7\)](https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%B7%AE%E6%B5%B7%E8%B7%AF_(%E4%B8%8A%E6%B5%B7))