

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

SITE: CHINA

Transcript of Ke Qianting

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Qianting Ke was born in Guangdong Province of China in 1972. She graduated from Sun Yat-sen University, receiving her Ph.D. on Comparative Literature and World Literature in 2005. She is currently associate professor at Sun Yat-sen University and an MA student adviser. Her research interests focus on feminist theory and its applications to literature, film, media and cultural studies. She is director of the Sex/Gender Education Forum of SYSU that advocated sex and gender equality on campus from 2007 to 2014. She also ran the Spring Feminist Society, an NGO promoting sex and gender equality in applied theater and other arts, from 2014 to 2017.

Qianting Ke: I am a faculty member in the Chinese Department at Sun Yat-sen University.¹ In the past two decades, I have also done some research related to women's rights and have worked on issues involving the protection of the rights of women and children.

As a child, I grew up in a village in western Guangdong. In our area, at the time, there was still a strong preference to have sons rather than daughters. Basically, everyone wanted to have a lot of sons. My parents were no exception. They thought at a minimum they must have two sons. My mother actually gave birth to five children. It just so happened that the [one-child] family planning policy² was adopted just after my mother gave birth to her second child. At that time, in order to escape family planning, she basically left the village and went into hiding as soon as she became pregnant. In such an environment, my mother suffered a lot, and I also learned to be independent. But in that kind of environment, I realized that my family seemed to value sons, and daughters seemed superfluous.

But it is also very contradictory; that is, my parents actually love us very much, their daughters. The main demonstration of their love was that they provided us with an education, so we all went to college. At that time, there were no girls in our village who attended college, and I was the first to go to college, and later to study for a doctorate; that is, even now in our village there's no other woman who has a doctorate. As I was growing up, even though (my family) thought girls were just like spilt water,³ they gave me a good space within which to grow.

Interviewer: What was the moment that brought you into contact with feminist thought?

QK: The earliest contact was in 1995, when the UN World Conference on Women⁴ was held in Beijing. At the time, I didn't know what the conference would be, but because I had just begun to work at the university, and we happened to have a female student who wanted to

¹ Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU), also known as Zhongshan University, is a major Chinese public research university located in Guangzhou, China. It was founded in 1924 by Sun Yat-sen, a revolutionary and the founding father of the Republic of China. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_Yat-sen_University

² One-child Policy, an official program initiated in the late 1970s and early 1980s 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. There were many enforcements of policy during that time including economic sanctions and forced abortions, sterilizations. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/one-child-policy>

³ "Girls were just like spilt water" is an old Chinese saying. The full sentence is "Daughter who has married out is equivalent to water that has been splashed and thus it cannot be retrieved." This saying is based on the major marriage system in China, that is, virilocal marriage, in which an adult son expects to marry a woman who joins his family and takes care of his parents. For her natal family, once a daughter is married out, she is regarded as a member of her husband's family. In contemporary China the virilocal marriage is still in practice in much of the rural areas, although young couples increasingly demand to have a separate residence from the husband's parents' household. It is the husband's family that is supposed to provide for the young couple's separate housing. <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-poetic-translation-of-the-Chinese-phrase-%E5%AB%81%E5%87%BA%E5%8E%BB%E7%9A%84%E5%A5%B3%E5%84%BF%EF%BC%8C%E6%B3%BC%E5%87%BA%E5%8E%BB%E7%9A%84%E6%B0%B4-in-English>

⁴ 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 global legal equality. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Conference_on_Women,_1995. The FWCW was accompanied by the NGO Forum which was attended by over 40 thousand feminists from all over the world. China witnessed a rapid growth of feminist NGOs in the decade following the hosting of the FWCW in Beijing and the NGO Forum in Huairou, a county seat outside from Beijing.

run for the position of chair of the school's student association, I thought I should support her campaign. But how to find a better campaign slogan? We looked at the news and saw that just around that time the World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, and we learned what the spirit of this conference was. So in the election program we said that the World Conference on Women was already held in Beijing, and therefore women can also become outstanding leaders. The student moved many people by her campaign, and as a result, she became the head of the students' association.

This was a practice; it wasn't until a few years later that I really came into contact with theory. That was 1999, when I started writing my master's thesis. I was conducting research for my master's thesis under the supervision of Professor Ai Xiaoming⁵ of Sun Yat-sen University. She suggested that I do research on female writers. But in order to do this research, she gave me a long list of books about feminist literary criticism.⁶ This was a completely new field to me. But during the process of being exposed to this theory, it had a great impact on me. As I said earlier, in fact, as a child I experienced a lot of patriarchal devaluation and sexism, but there was no theory for me to really interpret it. Later, these theories made me reflect on my experience growing up and the culture and social customs of my hometown. A seed was sown, which made me start to think that this theory was very valuable and useful for my personal development.

I: So how and why did you get into academic research on feminism? And what is your main field of research?

QK: In 2002, I began to study for a doctorate with Professor Ai Xiaoming. Our main field of study was comparative literature and world literature. But at the same time, Professor Ai Xiaoming also believed that our comparative literature major must have its own characteristics. This characteristic was to conduct gender studies and cultural studies. I started to work on translation projects with Professor Ai Xiaoming. At that time, the first work of feminist theory I translated was Rosemarie Putnam Tong's *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*.⁷ Very soon thereafter, we translated *Language and Gender - An Introduction*.⁸ The translation of such works allowed me and my team to learn while translating. It was also opportune that from 2002 to 2004 I got to attend a class

⁵ Professor Ai Xiaoming, born in 1953, is a feminist literary scholar and the co-producer and director of the Chinese version of *The Vagina Monologues*, one of the activists of the Stop Domestic Violence network. She is the Deputy Director of the Women's Studies Center and director of the Sex/Gender Education Forum at the Sun Yat-sen University and was interviewed for the Global Feminisms Project. <https://globalfeminisms.umich.edu/en/china>

⁶ Feminist literary criticism is literary criticism informed by feminist theory and politics of feminism. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_literary_criticism#:~:text=Feminist%20literary%20criticism%20is%20literary.by%20the%20politics%20of%20feminism.&text=Traditionally%2C%20feminist%20literary%20criticism%20has.canon%20through%20a%20new%20lens.

⁷ *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* is a classic resource on feminist theory. It offers a clear, comprehensive, and incisive introduction to the major traditions of feminist theory. Rosemarie Putnam Tong is the emeritus distinguished professor of health care ethics in the Department of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosemarie_Tong

⁸ *Language and Gender: An Introduction* by Mary Talbot is an up-to-date textbook in the growing area of language and gender. Talbot examines the language used by women and men in a variety of speech situations and genres. https://books.google.com/books/about/Language_and_Gender.html?id=8Nh7R2dMavkC

held at the China Women's University⁹ in Beijing, that was created with resources raised by Professor Wang Zheng¹⁰ of the University of Michigan.

In this class, she invited famous professors from the United States, Hong Kong and China to teach us. The course covered feminist theory and some research in various disciplines, that is, interdisciplinary research, and the content was very rich. At the same time, the curriculum on theory was very difficult, but our classmates were also very enthusiastic about learning. After this foundational study, I began my doctoral thesis research. My doctoral thesis research was on contemporary Chinese novels, which was later published as a book titled *Body, Gender and Trauma*.¹¹ My academics started from here. At the same time, I began to pay more attention to some issues in China's social and cultural fields, so my research shifted from writers to researching topics involving culture, society and policy.

I: How and why did you become involved in the social activities of feminism? And what are the main activities you've participated in or organized?

QK: In terms of social activities, at the beginning we mainly used the method of literary analysis and applied it to the analysis of drama. Early on, we analyzed Eve Ensler's script called *The Vagina Monologues*¹² but soon we had the opportunity to perform in the Chinese version that was staged in the mainland. But when we performed *The Vagina Monologues*, we felt that Ensler's script was quite removed from our Chinese experience. For example, the play talked about some experiences of the American white middle class with vaginas and sex, which did not seem to reflect our experiences. Consequently, we did some local interviews and started to create our own version.

I also wrote an act for the play at the time. First, I interviewed some people, then I wrote stories about sexual taboos and repression that Chinese women suffered. Then we began to pay more attention to problems in the social news. In that year, a graduate student in Sun Yat-sen University's (SYSU) Chemistry Department named Su Shangyan¹³ was killed by her

⁹ China Women's University is the first and the only state-owned women's university, affiliated with All-China Women's Federation. It started as a vocational training school and was established in 1949 as a school of specialty in educating women and women leaders. It functions as a window displaying Chinese governments' achievements in women's issue and women's higher education. <http://www.cwu.edu.cn/english/aboutcwu/index.htm>

¹⁰ Professor Wang Zheng is a faculty member at University of Michigan. She is the Professor of Women's Studies and History, as well as Research Scientist of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender. <https://lsa.umich.edu/women/people/core-faculty/wangzhen.html> The faculty training seminar she organized at the China Women's University was one of her decades-long efforts that aimed to transform university curricula and promote feminist knowledge production in China.

¹¹ *Body, Gender and Trauma* is Professor Ke Qianting's work discussing the literary phenomenon of contemporary Chinese writers using "body" in their novels.

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E8%BA%AB%E4%BD%93%E3%80%81%E5%88%9B%E4%BC%A4%E4%B8%8E%E6%80%A7%E5%88%AB%EF%BC%9A%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E6%96%B0%E6%97%B6%E6%9C%9F%E5%B0%8F%E8%AF%B4%E7%9A%84%E8%BA%AB%E4%BD%93%E4%B9%A6%E5%86%99>

¹² *The Vagina Monologues* is an episodic play written by Eve Ensler, which developed and premiered in New York and was adopted globally. The play explores consensual and nonconsensual sexual experiences, body image, genital mutilation, direct and indirect encounters with reproduction, vaginal care, menstrual periods, sex work, and several other topics through the eyes of women with various ages, races, sexualities, and other differences. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vagina_Monologues

¹³ On March 8th, 2004 (International Women's Day), Su Shangyan was killed by her boyfriend on campus. Although Su was the victim in this case, many people defended the murderer and stigmatized Su, accusing her of being unfaithful. Later, a

boyfriend while they were on a date on the East Lake¹⁴ of our school. This had a huge impact on us, because we must take that road to get back to the dormitory from the classroom buildings. And her boyfriend murdered her just because she rejected his request for reconciliation. After that happened, we found that our SYSU students, as well as many other university students and netizens, said that Su Shangyan must have something wrong with her. It was she who dated another man, and was not faithful in her love, so she angered her boyfriend. But no one condemned her boyfriend; instead, people felt that her boyfriend was a hero, killing for the sake of love.

Then we wrote a lot of articles based on the knowledge we had learned about gender and our own ideas. Basically, every one of our graduate students wrote articles and published them online for discussion. Finally, after a while, we felt that we had influenced our classmates. It was these people who began to realize that, yes, they should mourn the life of the one who died and condemn the person who perpetrated violence. It wasn't long after this incident happened, that another big event happened in China. A music teacher¹⁵ in Xiangtan, Hunan,¹⁶ was out on a date with her boyfriend; it was at night, and she died during the date. After the incident was reported, the police believed that the boyfriend, who had been by her side the entire time, was not a suspect and so they did nothing at all to investigate him. This situation led to a lot of discussion on the Internet, and we also got involved in the matter. The first thing we did was to get in touch with the victim's mother and assist her in her efforts to obtain justice. When we returned to school, we realized that incidents like Su Shangyan and Huang Jing's should have caused deeper reflection from our classmates, so since then we organized some activities on campus and at the same time invited the parents of the victims to come together to promote activities against violence against women.

At this time, we also discovered that every year from November 25 to December 10, globally, there are 16 days in which activities are carried out to oppose violence against women. We let our students know that this was a global activity. On campus, we deal with local problems, but at the same time have a connection with the whole world. From then on, each year our students will hold "16 days of activism against gender-based violence."¹⁷ At the same time, apart from focusing on the female victims, we also realized that the workings of the structure of gender discrimination and gender oppression are the same,

documentary called *White Ribbon* was published to tell Su's story and students' response as a way to fight against gender violence on campus. http://aixiaomingstudio.blogspot.com/2015/12/blog-post_7.html

¹⁴ East Lake is located in the southeast area of the South Campus of Sun Yat-sen University. Because East Lake is close to the girls' dormitory, and the environment is quiet and elegant, it has been the famous "Corner of Love."

<https://bksou.baidu.com/item/%E4%B8%AD%E5%B1%B1%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%A6%E4%B8%9C%E6%B9%96>

¹⁵ Huang Jing was a primary school music teacher. She died after her boyfriend was trying to force her to have sex with him in 2003. The investigation and trial of this case have attracted a lot of attention and debates in society. (Huang Jing's name will be mentioned in the interview later.)

<https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E9%BB%83%E9%9D%9C%E6%A1%88> The activism by Prof. Ai Xiaoming and her students introduced the concept "date rape" into the Chinese public discourse.

¹⁶ Xiangtan is in the central part of Hunan province, China. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiangtan>

¹⁷ The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an annual international campaign that kicks off on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs until December, Human Rights Day. It is used as an organizing strategy by individuals and organizations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/16-days-of-activism>

and from the perspective of vulnerable groups, it's all the same logic. So starting on campus and then moving into society, we also began to pay attention to the LGBT community. At that time, there were also some students on campus who were hoping to have the opportunity to express themselves. First of all, in school we supported students to organize reading clubs and film clubs, and we also offered a course on gender diversity. This course on gender diversity was not just about theory. We also invited leaders and individual activists from organizations in China, such as gay, transgender, and intersex organizations, to come to our classroom to share their ideas with our classmates: how did they see the problems that the community needed to solve; how did they fight against discrimination, and how did they get these people to stand up and fight for their rights together?

Such vivid examples also started to make students on campus realize that this matter is not just something in books, students can participate in activism together. So the students then soon broke into sub-groups to organize their investigation and research; they visited and interviewed people in these organizations. They also established an organization to focus on promoting a friendly environment for sexual minorities on campus.

I: In feminist research and activities, what role did feminism play and how did it influence you?

And how did your feminist viewpoint further develop?

QK: The biggest impact that carrying out research and participating in some activities has had on me is that it's pulled me out of a purely academic, bookish life into a community, a social group. For example, at the beginning, the events in the news we were paying attention to were actually quite abstract, but later on, Professor Ai Xiaoming and our team felt that we should contact these people who had been affected, and so we contacted them and got to know them. During this process, at the same time, more people also asked us for help. I once took a college student who had been sexually assaulted to the police so she could report it, because the police required a teacher to report the assault (along with the victim) before the police officers would really pay attention. We also went to factories to talk with the female workers and think together about what courses might be offered for women workers, and what kind of information to give them.

At the same time, we also went into some communities to share knowledge about anti-domestic violence. When we went into the community, we learned that the elderly, children, and housewives of the community did not really want to listen to us talking about these things relating to anti-domestic violence. So we started acting, and developed interactive dramas and after those were put on, we then distributed some pamphlets to the women. In this way, we were in contact with many women who had suffered domestic violence, and they were willing to open their hearts to us. It was only in this way that we had the opportunity to be in touch with them and understand their real suffering. I also

went to Hebei¹⁸ and Henan¹⁹ as a volunteer to help women and children affected by AIDS. I also know that a major epidemic in the world, AIDS does not only affect the MSM²⁰ communities like in other countries. In fact, in China, it also greatly affects women and children who sell blood.

These experiences also made my position on feminism change in some respects. In the early days, I mainly focused on women and children; later, I also paid more attention to communities like the elderly, people with disabilities, and the LGBT community-- the discrimination they suffered and issues relating to the development of their communities. At the same time, there was another change; originally, I was mainly concerned with literary culture, that was my major, but as we got to understand society, we also learned that if we want to make a better society, then we must change policies and laws at the same time. So I began to pay attention to, for example, anti-domestic violence legislation,²¹ and I participated in the promotion of the legislation with others, and I did research that discusses what's needed in order for our society to be able to have gender-friendly policies. This is needed in order to improve the lives of people affected, to enable them to benefit from policies and laws as quickly as possible. So besides a change in the way I do things, there is also change in my position, of course, because I see every individual victim, I also pay more attention to understanding the individual differences between them.

Early on, the emphasis was more on the need for groups in different communities to join forces together, that is, they must unite. But then later I realized that wanting the LGBT community, women's groups, and the disabled community to unite was just a fantasy. They each have their own goals, and it's not easy for them to unite. Later, I realized I thought that the combined force of these groups would be powerful, they could understand and support each other, but then in reality it is not necessarily the case. In reality, each community has to find its own goal, that is, it has to find what the specific community needs to develop and what they should advocate for, and what resources they can look for. In other words, this kind of difference may give more motivation to the development of the community, rather than thinking that we can be more powerful by bringing many people together to work together. This is also a change in my own position.

I: How do you combine academic research and social activities?

QK: There are two ways in which I combine academic research and social action: the first way is that I start with academic research. If I already know a lot about the field, then I will

¹⁸ Hebei, means "North of the [Yellow] River," is a northern Chinese province. It is bounded to the south by Henan. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Hebei>

¹⁹ Henan, means "South of the [Yellow] River," province of north-central China. In 1991-1995, plasmapheresis campaign by the Henan provincial government created a Plasma Economy, in which blood plasma was extracted in exchange for money. The campaign attracted 3 million donors, most of whom lived in rural China, and it is estimated at least 40% of the blood donors subsequently contracted HIV. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plasma_Economy

²⁰ MSM is the abbreviation of men who have sex with men. The term MSM was created in the 1990s and often used in medical literature and social research to describe such men as a group for research studies without considering issues of self-identification. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men_who_have_sex_with_men

²¹ Chinese Domestic Violence Law of 2015 was passed by the People's Congress in 2015 and took effect on March 1, 2016. However, its limitations make it largely ineffective until now. <https://supchina.com/2018/10/10/domestic-violence-in-china-and-the-limitations-of-law/>

work with my students and friends and take some actions. For example, since 2008, I noticed that there are many women in China who've experienced botched cosmetic surgery,²² so I interviewed them, and then wrote a paper. After writing the paper, I found that the problems encountered by these women who experienced botched cosmetic surgery were mainly in the medical industry. It is global feminism that recognizes that the harm done to women by cosmetic surgery is due to a single standard of beauty. But besides this kind of cultural oppression of beauty standards, in fact, in medical treatment, when China is undergoing such rapid development, these people who perform cosmetic surgery in a room or beauty salon lack the basic first-aid, emergency treatment conditions required for surgery, so it's easy for things to go wrong.

And those “doctors” are not actually doctors. Many of them were just beauticians originally, not doctors with professional qualifications and surgical capabilities. Through my interviews relating to these surgical failures, the reason why the failure rate was so high is because of the problems in our entire medical industry and the management of the medical industry. After I realized these problems, I discussed them with our students. Once I let our students see the problems, they took action. For example, after I finished speaking, some students immediately decided they were going to make some short videos, and another student wrote a short drama to perform. Later, we felt that the influence of these actions was insufficient, so some people suggested that we do a flash mob.²³ We asked a reporter to come along, and the reporter also gave us a lot of ideas. So we had more than 20 students, holding a banner together. We went to a subway station in Guangzhou, just under a huge beauty advertisement, and we did some performances to express our condemnation. Because this was a dance-like activity, the reporter was also very willing to report on such an activity. In this way, students had ideas based on my research, and when the reporter came to interview them, they could discuss their ideas very well. For example, they said that our society should not condemn those who have undergone cosmetic plastic surgery, because they are actually victims of this culture, and we should reflect on this culture. We should also pay more attention to medical management and medical safety. The reporter was also very happy that our students were able to draw these issues into such a deep level of thought. The “new media” at that time also was rapidly developing, so after the mainstream media reported on the issue widely, these students, after they returned, reposted on new media sites to continue the discussion. In fact, it became a media education, a public education, to make people think about beauty and cosmetic surgery from different angles.

The other method is to engage in social activities first. Based on social actions, we then would do action research or related research. To give an example of this method, we have

²² Cosmetic surgery is a discipline of medicine focused on enhancing appearance through surgical and medical techniques.

<https://www.cosmeticsurgery.org/page/CosmeticSurgery#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20difference%20between%20cosmetic%20and%20plastic%20surgery%3F&text=Because%20treated%20areas%20function%20properly.trauma%2C%20burns%2C%20and%20disease.>

²³ A flash mob is a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, perform for a brief time, then quickly disperse, often for the purpose of entertainment, satire, and artistic expression. On April 11, 2010, students from SYSU organized a flash mob at Guangzhou subway station. The topic was to criticize the beauty anxiety that was produced by cosmetic surgery advertisements. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_9c9715b30101acrc.html

been performing *The Vagina Monologues* since 2002, and later we paid attention to *The Vagina Monologues* that appeared one after the other. By 2013, we felt that since it was the tenth anniversary of *The Vagina Monologues* arrival in China, we thought about putting on a new version of the play. So first of all, our Sun Yat-sen University Gender Education Forum²⁴ staged a play called *Continue the Vagina Monologues*, which was based on the stories of Chinese women we had interviewed and used a method that Chinese people would feel was more appropriate. At the same time, actually, different women's organizations across the country also staged their own versions of the play. After our performances, there was one more thing we wanted to do. We wanted to take these dramas back to those communities, that is, the women who earlier had acted in the plays in their communities, rural women, women who were victims of domestic violence, and women who had been sexually assaulted. We wanted to send the play back to them and stage a performance. Because this drama talks about sex, vaginas, and the body, it had a definite impact, and there was indeed a big impact when we returned to the communities to perform.

So I went to observe such a process. I also wrote about how Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* was being performed again in China, and how people were using such a platform to unite women's groups, LGBT groups, disabled persons' groups, and victims of domestic violence through acting and drama. At the same time, the play enabled the voices of different communities to be articulated, so that their experiences could be seen. This was also how we moved the play from the stage to the community and interacted with the community through this relatively flexible form. So this experience was very different from the method that Eve Ensler employed throughout the world to use *The Vagina Monologues* to oppose violence against women. We felt that such a Chinese experience needs to be written up. So just like that, I wrote two papers based on my research of the process of ours. To sum up, we mainly have these two directions. One is that there is research first, followed by social activities; the other is that there is social action first, followed by relevant research as follow up. This is our approach to combining the two.

I: After engaging in feminist research and social activities, has your personal life and thinking changed?

QK: In my personal life, I started to communicate differently with different communities. My personal ideas changed a lot. For example, in taking some aspects of equal rights thinking and really applying it in my life, because we continuously reflect on power relationships, then we return to our lives, just like teachers and students, and heads of households in our families and children, and intellectuals like us – our relationship with members of grassroots organizations²⁵ when we go to their communities. I think we have

²⁴ Sun Yat-Sen University Gender Education Forum founded in 2003. The forum had different seminars regularly and invited different gender studies scholars from overseas. It also established a database for information and a website for interactions. The forum committed to promoting gender equality education and expanding women and gender studies in the university. https://globalfeminisms.umich.edu/sites/default/files//XiaomingTranslationFINAL_E_0.pdf

²⁵ A grassroots organization is one which uses the people in a given district, region, or community as the basis to construct a political or economic movement. Grassroots organizations are associated with bottom-up decision making and are sometimes considered more natural or spontaneous than traditional power structure.

to constantly engage in self-reflection. One thing is to share knowledge more frequently, interact more, and communicate more to better understand other people's ideas and needs, rather than being self-righteous.

This aspect has changed much in terms of my thinking. On the other hand, I am consciously distancing myself from mainstream ideas. We want to have independent thinking and promote the development of disadvantaged and minority groups. If you are very close to the mainstream in our society, you may not be able to stick to your position. Therefore, you consciously distance yourself from the mainstream, and you'll also distance yourself from the benefits that could be obtained from the mainstream. In this way, more time is spent with the community and people in grassroots organizations. In fact, in this process, I am also delighted to find that they are very capable. Although they may not have much knowledge about theory, they are very wise and tenacious in real life as they pursue their rights and interests. I have also gained a lot of wisdom from them.

I: Can you discuss your analysis and evaluation of the development of feminism in the mainland? And what is your outlook for the future?

QK: This is a big question. I believe other scholars can also talk about this very well. A simple analysis of my own --I think that around the time of the 1995 UN World Conference on Women (held in Beijing), that generation of feminists introduced Western theories into China, and conducted solid theoretical research of Chinese society as well. Moreover, through the opportunity of the 1995 World Conference Chinese women's studies and social movements were linked up with the global movement and studies. I think the so-called first generation, that is, the scholars who started doing research in women's studies since the 1980s, they really did a lot of work.

But I also feel that the other aspect of what they wanted to do was to turn feminist theories and concepts into widely accepted concepts in China, and even form a culture. Such efforts have not yet achieved what they sought. In other words, feminist theory is still unfamiliar to most people, and it is still resisted. In academics, it is basically difficult to affect those men who control academic resources or reach those very influential disciplines. This kind of breadth has not been achieved.

Then later, after 2010, more young women joined the movement. In fact, the young women's strengths are not necessarily theory and research like their predecessors, but they are very concerned about our social reality and they can use new media and mass media. So they are actually an example of how these theories, as I just said, influenced people and how more people use this as a criterion for their own lives, some basic concepts, some consensus concepts, I think after these young people joined the movement, they did a lot to promote them.

As for the future, I think I might have to go back and slowly conduct research, and through research and policy advocacy promote (the movement). Because our current media is not so free, the vigorous and lively media education, public education, and gender awareness that was originally promoted by the young people in the movement has now come to an end for the time being. What can be done at this juncture? I think I can still return to academic research, which is a possible channel.

I: What influence has global feminism had on you?

QK: I feel that my personal connection with global feminism is not very close. Of course, the convening of the World Conference on Women (in 1995) was an influence of global feminism in China, and I was also influenced by this. Another relatively specific aspect of my involvement with global feminism was my trip to New York in 2015 to participate in the [59th session of the] UN Commission on the Status of Women [NS1] [MOU2] [MOU3] (Women's Status Commission)²⁶. The theme of the session that year was opposing violence targeting women. I also went to many meetings, which was eye-opening. At the same time, we also organized a forum to tell women from other countries how we were fighting against domestic violence in China, how the legislative process was progressing, and how the status of women in China had evolved. That forum received a very enthusiastic response, so we also felt that we have made our own voices heard in the global conversation with other women, and at the same time when we participated in other forums, we also saw women from other countries and their activities, which were actually very creative and lively. Their women's organizations were more active than ours, so we also absorbed a lot of new methods.

At the same time, global feminism has formed some important documents, such as those against all forms of discrimination against women [CEDAW]²⁷ etc., these documents are also important for my own research and advocacy. For example, in 2015, I published a book with other experts called "Twenty Years of Chinese Women's Development"²⁸. I wrote a very long introduction to this book. In the introduction, I carefully organized the UN documents related to women, children, the elderly, and migrant workers (i.e., floating population)²⁹. In short, I have put them all into order. And I also used the UN indicators, strategy, and vision to compare with China's policies to see if China's policies were friendly

²⁶ The 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The main focus of the session was on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which reached an agreement at the World Conference on Women in 1995. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/previous-sessions/csw59-2015>

²⁷ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. It has been ratified by 189 states. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_on_the_Elimination_of_All_Forms_of_Discrimination_Against_Women#:~:text=The%20Convention%20on%20the%20Elimination,the%20United%20Nations%20General%20Assembly.

²⁸ Twenty Years of Chinese Women's Development was published in 2015. It views Chinese women's development and challenges from 1995 to 2015. It analyzes policies and regulations related to women's development and seeks for more effective policies and regulations to help with women's development. <https://book.douban.com/subject/26718495/>

²⁹ Floating population is a terminology used to describe a group of people who reside in a given location for a certain amount of time and for various reasons, but not generally considered as part of the official census count. In the context of Chinese migration, floating population refers primarily to migrants in China without local household registration status through the Chinese Hukou system. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Migration_in_China

enough, forward-looking, and whether the goals are in line with the real promotion of women's development. It can be said that although we do not often participate in global feminism in an organized form, we are still closely linked in terms of concepts.

I: How do you coordinate activities with other domestic women's organizations?

QK: There are two types of women's organizations in China. One type of women's organizations is national in scope. Our relationship with them is loose and we only work together on some relevant subjects. For example, I am a member of the National Anti-Domestic Violence Network,³⁰ so if there are any activities, research, or meetings of the Anti-Domestic Violence Network, I will respond and engage in activities locally. At the same time, I am also a member of some national women's organizations. For example, from 2008 to 2010, I was a director of the national Network of Women's and Gender Studies [NWGS].³¹ At that time, they chose me to be a director, so I participated in teacher training and policy advocacy. Then in 2014-2016, I was also in another network, called GAD Network,³² which is an alliance of Chinese women's organizations, and I was also the leader of their small group. The goals of this small group in those years was also teacher training, policy advocacy, and paying attention to news incidents, and then organizing women's groups around the country to advocate. At the same time, we published the book I mentioned earlier, "Twenty Years of Chinese Women's Development." We used such a book to commemorate the 20 years since the World Conference on Women was held in China and reflect on the development in policies relating to women during the past 20 years. Nationally, there is probably this kind of loose connection.

We and the women's organizations in Guangzhou have a pretty close relationship. There is one type of thing that, as long as there are activities, we will all do them together. For example, GLCAC (Tongcheng),³³ PFLAG,³⁴ GETCH Foundation³⁵ (for persons with

³⁰ The National Anti-Domestic Violence Network was founded in 2000. The Network provided various activities to fight against gender violence including training, survey, community intervention, media, legislative advocacy, male participation and youth education. In 2014, the Network announced that their fourteen years of work had finally come to an end. <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/articles/problems-cohabitation-rise-fall-anti-domestic-violence-network/>

³¹ National Network of Women's and Gender Studies was founded in 2006. Members of the Network devoted themselves to students' understanding of women/gender studies along with social development and transformation. The Network held the first seminar in mainland China and found a special student forum and student award toward women's and gender studies. <https://kns-cnki-net.proxy.lib.umich.edu/KXReader/Detail?TIMESTAMP=637289111810733540&DBCODE=CJFD&TABLEName=CJFD2010&FileName=FNYJ201005010&RESULT=1&SIGN=IOVEIioTV786GC7e brXnQsATQYU%3d>

³² Gender and Development Network in China (GAD) was founded in 2000. It committed to promote gender mainstreaming in China and established a database for more organizations to pay attention to gender equality in China. Its main events included anti-gender violence in Beijing and publishing the *Report on Women Development in China ('95+10)*. <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.org.cn/org536/>

³³ Gay And Lesbian Campus Association in China (GLCAC), founded in 2006, is the first Chinese NGO focused on LGBT youth and gender equity education.

³⁴ Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) China, founded in Guangzhou on June 28, 2008, is an NGO formed by LGBT individuals, their parents, friends and supporters to serve and support LGBT people. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PFLAG_China

³⁵ GETCH Foundation founded in 2013, it supports people with disabilities and believes that they are as valuable as everybody else and deserve equal chances. The foundation provides means of personal and skill development, job referral; and raises awareness of people with disabilities in the society in general. <http://www.getchfoundation.org/eAboutUs.asp>

disabilities), Girl Fans.³⁶ These are LGBT and disabled persons' communities; we will hold events together. In addition, we have very close relations with the New Media Women's Network,³⁷ which they later established as the Sijin Cultural Research Center. Basically, all our activities are held together. For example, we have held two art exhibitions featuring amateur artists that focus on women's issues. We have jointly held photo exhibitions of images of violence committed against women by the Japanese army in WWII.

We also pay attention to those news events together, because they are the media, and good at tracking media practice, and turning it into media action. We are good at introducing this fresh knowledge into our classrooms, or we continue to express it through the form of drama to attract people's attention and so on.

Our relationship with organizations like the New Media Women's Network is that we are always together, and we don't care who does more and who does less when organizing events. We've also formed a habit, that is, whoever is more specialized in whichever area, then we combine our forces and cooperate to do whatever it is that needs to get done. So we have also tried to work with the (All-China) Women's Federation³⁸ in the hope that the Women's Federation would join us in advocating policies after the sexual assault and abuse of primary and middle school students occurred. Later, the Women's Federation also joined us to go to the Education Bureau to advocate specifically that gender education should be included in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. Every time we do this kind of thing, we tell the media that we are going to do such and such as advocacy, and we also write out surveys and documents in real time for advocacy. Now looking back, I think that this was a very good collaboration, and it was also a relatively efficient and effective mode of work when different organizations worked together.

I: What are your gains, losses, difficulties, and deficiencies in becoming a feminist activist? What is the reason?

QK: The biggest gain is that it has enriched my life. Because I know different people, because I really understand the lives, needs, and dilemmas of the people, and during this process, I also expanded myself. At the same time, during the course of my work I met many different communities in China, especially those activists, those who work hard to promote the development of the community, their efforts are wonderful in themselves. Such a lifestyle is highly fitting with the elements sustaining my life.

³⁶ Girl Fans founded in 2009, at the beginning, it belonged to GLCAC, later in 2013, it became an independent organization to serve the age 18-25 female sexual minority in Guangzhou. It committed to improving the life of female minority groups. <https://site.douban.com/213181/>

³⁷ New Media Women's Network founded in 2004. It was one of the major feminist networks in Guangzhou. The goal was to promote gender mainstreaming in the society. The Network was later established as Sijin Cultural Research Center. <https://www.douban.com/people/65316979/>

³⁸ Women's Federation, full name is All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), is an official women's organization established in 1949. For a history of the ACWF, see Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China: 1949-1964*, UC Press, 2017. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-China_Women%27s_Federation

I originally wanted to do just this kind of thing. Like many of my friends at the time, I felt that this could be viewed as my life's ideal to which I could devote my tremendous efforts forever. Of course, there are many difficulties in this process. The main difficulty in the early stage was, of course, insufficient funds. Later, when we found a working method, in fact, funds were not the main problem, because what we did had an impact; then it was a lot easier to raise funds. The difficulty later became that what we wanted to do would probably be stopped for some external reason. Often when through exploration we finally came up with some effective patterns of activism and became familiar with a particular community, then we might not be able to continue our work.

For example, we performed *The Vagina Monologues* in 2013. At that time, when we performed on campus, many people were very interested. There were probably 300 people in attendance per show. According to what was needed at the time, [the play's popularity] demonstrated that we had staged a drama that was very thought-provoking. Many colleges and universities sent us invitations, hoping that we would perform on their campuses. But perhaps because our mobilization ability was too strong; that is, hundreds of people came to watch each show, thus finally we were no longer allowed to perform at universities on the Mainland. Of course, we also made some efforts to keep performing. In the spring of the following year, we went to the Chinese University of Hong Kong³⁹ and the University of Hong Kong⁴⁰ to perform. Although we performed in Mandarin, the drama aroused an enthusiastic response locally from scholars, and from people interested in feminism and theater. This was our final performance; afterwards, there was no way to continue staging the play. It should be said that this was also very frustrating for the young people who invested a lot of energy in writing scripts and rehearsing, because they have invested so much effort in this project, and of course hoped that there would be more opportunities to perform.

Some other examples: we've developed some good ways to talk about gender issues in the classroom. We invite people from social organizations who have practical work experience to give lectures to students. They are usually able to inspire our students to organize small groups to do real research and serve society. At the same time, it's possible for them to train students to develop strong leadership skills. So in this process, these young people can find a way to learn and then go to the community, become a leader, and seek new ways of doing advocacy. Just at the time when this method was working very well, then, in 2016, we could no longer have classes like this. Not only could we not teach like this, but even the public elective class on gender was halted. So this was even a bigger difficulty. That is, the model we explored can only, in the end, be arranged into something like academic research. We cannot continue to improve it, nor can we continue to explore the model in response to some [actual] problems.⁴¹

³⁹ The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) is a public research university in Shatin, Hong Kong formally established in 1963 by a charter granted by the Legislative Council of Hong Kong.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_University_of_Hong_Kong

⁴⁰ The University of Hong Kong (HKU) is a public research university in Hong Kong, founded in 1911. It is the oldest tertiary institution in Hong Kong. It was also the first university established by the British Empire in East Asia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Hong_Kong

⁴¹ Here Ke narrates the increasing state's surveillance and control over feminist activism, which range from their activism among off-campus communities to classroom. As soon as some feminist organized activity gained some

And if that wasn't enough, we feel deficiencies in every activity. For me, the relatively difficult thing is, for example, I am a full-time teacher. I also have to take care of my family, so my time and energy are always insufficient. Therefore, every time there's an activity, I feel it's very hurried. We've also realized that we need to train more young people, but the energy we can put into this is insufficient.

I: You have been in charge of the Gender Education Forum of Sun Yat-sen University and the 'Feminist Spring Society'⁴² in Haizhu District of Guangzhou. What is your particular feeling about it?

QK: My strongest feeling is that it is very difficult to manage a social organization. Originally our Gender Education Forum at Sun Yat-sen University is based at the school, so there wasn't really any organizational management work. Teachers and students participating in the Forum were organized around activities, which was relatively simple. But the problem we encountered at that time was that graduate students graduated after two years, and undergraduate students started to learn about us in their first and second years of college, and then they started to participate in some activities in their junior and senior years. But when they had gained a little experience, they would graduate. Therefore, we must unceasingly continue to train students and continue to replicate such a work pattern. So the feeling at that time was if someone could remain and continue to do the work that would be good, but it was impossible.

Later, after our performance of *The Vagina Monologues* in 2014, these young people and young students who took part in the play, actually embraced this method of gender education through drama, so they established the Feminist Spring Society (theatre group), and because of this they finally stayed on. They didn't look for other jobs. They knew that their gender theory study was already solid, and they also had a lot of experience in how to do community activities. As a result, they played an important role in this process, such as the way they rendered the style of the drama -- making it applied theater, interactive theater, and using many flexible modalities to go into communities and do activities.

But there was a new problem here, that is, the Feminist Spring Society is an organization registered under the Civil Affairs Bureau, so you have to manage the staff's wages, social security, and taxes and be subject to various inspections. The administrative work is very complicated. This is beyond my control. So if you want a women's organization to survive in a system like China's, --in fact, it is facing new problems⁴³-- that is, you need a specialist to manage it. Instead of like us, using our spare time in order to manage it well.

I: What are your plans and prospects for the future?

influence, the national security system would order the organizers to stop the activity or force them to disband the organization.

⁴² The Feminist Spring Society founded in 2014 by the original stage crews of For Vagina's Sake. The society continues working to promote gender equality and social diversity by interactive community activities.

<https://wemp.app/accounts/38d7bb1f-6261-4643-94d9-d7e11cfeebcb>

⁴³ At the time of the interview, the theater group was already unable to perform in Guangzhou.

QK: First of all, it should be said that I don't have much of a plan for the future. As I just mentioned, because some of the activities that the Feminist Spring Society did under the management of the Civil Affairs Bureau⁴⁴ were considered to be a bit "sensitive," the Feminist Spring Society has been asked to stop its activities. Then our courses on campus were also cancelled. So my original working mode, some of the working methods I talked about earlier, have basically stopped. What I can still do on occasion is some gender-related training according to the needs of those seeking the training. In this way, our group can also be together during these trainings and there is still some learning. So for the future, if it can still be done, in the foreseeable future over the next two or three years, I think what we can do is only academic research. For now, academic research can still be conducted. I feel academic research is also a way for us to take a fresh look to better understand the gender issues in our society. After we have the research, when this society believes that conducting advocacy is possible, I think I can still look for opportunities then.

I: What plans do you have for the future of the group?

QK: The current organizations are either shut down (by the authorities) or restricted in terms of what they can do. Many women's groups at universities, and two women's organizations at Sun Yat-sen University have also been closed down. Then there are many organizations at other schools, which, if they are not canceled, then will be subject to stricter requirements. So in terms of the organizational aspect, I don't think it should be the current plan. Now we should break up the organization and once again be like guerrillas, or it's a personal effort to do some activities loosely from different angles. Or, let the originally very direct advocacy and very direct appeals become indirect, or it's the cultivation of young people, the personal growth of each of us, and even physical exercise –these things create a solid foundation. Because we are in a suspended phase. We should have a healthy body, live a good life, take care of family matters that perhaps we put off before, and then calmly wait for the right time.

At the same time, because activities were suspended during this period, some women activists who were very committed actually suffered a lot of frustration and a lot of trauma. I think it takes some time for everyone to face these problems, and to repair this trauma. I have also run a writing camp with my friends. At this time, I may calm my mind to write and reflect, first to do some personal writing, as a restorative process, and it also allows the community to achieve a certain degree of unity. The way we work now cannot be the same as before; when there were social problems, we would discuss a solution to these problems. Instead, now we are returning to ourselves more and doing some new constructive work in terms of self-growth and forging links to communities.

⁴⁴ The Civil Affairs Bureau is responsible for handling matters such as the affairs regarding the registration of companies and organizations, marriage registration, notarization, judicial scriveners, land and house investigators and the planning and drafting of civil legislation. <http://mzj.gz.gov.cn/>