

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

SITE: CHINA

Transcript of Xueqin (Sophia) Huang

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Original Language: Mandarin**

**Location: Ann Arbor, USA
Date: May 30, 2019**

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

Interviewer: Xueqin, I'd like to know your general experience in journalism. When did you go to *China News Service*¹?

Xueqin Huang: That would have been in 2009, before I graduated.

I: Wow, you still hadn't graduated in 2009?

XH: I was a junior in 2009. Before I even graduated as a junior I had started an internship at the *China News Service*. After graduating in 2010, I went directly to the Guangzhou branch of the *China News Service*. After working there for over two years, I went to *Ta Kung Pao*², where I worked for half a year. After that, there was a gap period for half a year. Later, I went to the *New Express*³. I worked at the *New Express* between 2013 and 2015. In the middle of 2015, I resigned, and then went abroad to study for a while.

I: Let's go directly to the questions we want to ask.

XH: Right, right.

I: To say the least, I noticed the WeChat Public Account you started to build?

XH: (Its name is) "ATSH."⁴

I: Right, was it the first anti-sexual harassment activity you did? Or did you do anything else related to gender equality before this?

XH: Actually, it wasn't the first thing I did. The first thing involved the Cheng Xi incident⁵ at *Southern Daily*.

I: Cheng Xi?

XH: He was accused (of sexual harassment).

I: Where were you during that time?

XH: At that time, I was actually in between things. I had just left my job. That should have been 2016, right? I had just resigned from the *New Express* and went abroad to study; after I returned, I learned about this incident. I found it very strange that most of the online comments questioned the female student's claims.

I: Was that 2016?

¹ China News Service (CNS), abbreviated as Zhongxinshe, is a People's Republic of China (PRC) national news agency. It's self-described as "a state level news agency whose primary news responsibility is focused on external reporting, and also an international news agency that has as its main service targets Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao compatriots, as well as overseas Chinese and foreign subscribers."

² The most prestigious newspaper in China's modern history. After 1949, it became a pro-Beijing newspaper operating in Hong Kong.

³ A metropolitan daily newspaper in Guangzhou.

⁴ The name signifies "Anti-Sexual Harassment."

⁵ This was a sexual assault incident that happened in 2016. Cheng Xi, a reporter from the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee's *Nanfang Daily*, was suspected of sexually assaulting an intern from the School of Journalism at Jinan University.

XH: Yes, this happened in 2016. I had just returned to China and saw the news. I didn't see the major news coverage in the mainstream media, but rather on the Women Awakening Network⁶ and some social media platforms. What I saw were many comments expressing doubt about the female student, saying things like she was tattooed and that she had a sex tape; there were just all these different kinds of things that were said that attacked the girl. At that time, I felt it was really baffling. How could this happen? After a girl was sexually assaulted by her internship teacher, people were still not talking about the teacher's problem, the man's problem. On the contrary, everyone was talking about the various "problems" that girl had, including her clothes, but what did her clothes say about her? These comments all implied that this girl had many reasons for being sexually assaulted. Therefore, I found it particularly difficult to accept this. I remember I went to Jinan University, because at the time I was actually a graduate student at Jinan University, and then later it became my alma mater⁷. I slowly realized that this was unacceptable; for one thing we were in the same profession and this was also my alma mater. I definitely had to go back and figure out what was going on. At that time, it seemed difficult to contact the girl involved, but I met some of her classmates, and then I went to do peripheral interviews and I made a video. The video recorded people's views of this incident.

I felt particularly uneasy about the fact that this was the School of Journalism at Jinan University; it was previously said to be the Huangpu Military Academy⁸, so later you didn't see this news in the mainstream media. I heard some of the older generation saying, "Oh, we don't want to report our own dishonorable side." I said, you go and supervise others, but in your own media operations, this sort of event happens, and you don't investigate? So I just went to the campus to do some interviews myself, and I also made some videos, which I posted on my auxiliary account. It seems that there are still quite a few online today. Because I used my own account to circulate them; they've had several thousand views. Later someone else posted them as well; I'm not sure on which platform, maybe Tudou or some other platform, but it wasn't me who posted them there. I had asked others to help me post the material to continue discussions about this matter. This was the first time I paid special attention to issues like sexual harassment and gender equality.

I: I see. Then what?

XH: After that, I had an opportunity, around 2016, to become a special correspondent for the *Southern Weekly*,⁹ and at that point I did some more investigative news stories. I went to Cambodia and reported on some of the victims in the landmine village, and also did other stories that had a transnational feel. Then I got an opportunity to visit the National University

⁶ The Women Awakening Network, established in Guangzhou in 2004 by a group of journalists, is a well-known media organization promoting gender equality.

⁷ An allegorical Latin phrase for a university, school, or college that one formerly attended.

⁸ Huangpu Military Academy was founded in the National Revolution of the early 1920s to train military cadets. Many of its graduates became prominent figures in either the Communist Party or Nationalist Party down the road. Huang mentions this well-known military academy in the Chinese history here to refer to the Jinan University's School of Journalism, which is recognized by the Chinese government as a prestigious journalism school whose graduates have played major roles in China's major official media.

⁹ A news weekly in Guangzhou.

of Singapore as a visiting scholar. When I was a visiting scholar, the university had invited 16 journalists from 13 countries.

I: This was March to May 2017?

XH: Yes. There were 16 journalists, of which only nine were reporters. There were also war correspondents and female anchors. On one occasion when we were discussing the career issues and difficulties faced by female journalists, everyone mentioned sexual harassment. I then raised the question, who has ever encountered this? Out of nine reporters, six female reporters told me that they had all encountered various levels of sexual harassment. Even a strong female war correspondent could be abused, like by an editor or supervisor, slapping her on the butt – this kind of sexual misconduct. There are also some anchors who were so beautiful that some men had directly proposed sex.

So at that time, I thought, wow, people perceive the media industry as so honorable and glorious, and it's so easy for female journalists, who are willing to speak out, to speak for themselves, but then we discover that we are also facing this kind of problem -- just like all women, and we too, are silent. Then I thought, I wanted to raise this question for everyone to discuss. When the #MeToo incident¹⁰ happened in October 2017 –since I was already doing related work before #MeToo– I wanted to do something like an investigative report on the trade of journalism. Then because of the timing of the #MeToo tide, I quickly seized the opportunity and said that I would also like to do this kind of thing.

I: I see. I remember that Chinese #MeToo first showed up on Zhihu.¹¹ That girl, Luo Xixi, answered a question about Chen Xiaowu. Was it because of her, after she answered the question, that you contacted her?

XH: Actually, that wasn't the case. The matter of Luo Xixi was sexual harassment at Beihang University, and she was the one who took the initiative to contact me. Yes, because in 2017, didn't I say I would for sure take this on? I then established and worked on ATSH, and after it was set up, I sent out a questionnaire online. In fact, I had already talked to a group of female reporters about sexual harassment before doing the questionnaire and asked them if they would like to come forward, especially raising the #MeToo sign like what was happening abroad) to discuss the issue of sexual harassment. Many reporters told me at that time that they couldn't stand up in public for various reasons; first, their personal experience of sexual harassment happened a long time ago; second, they said they were now married or have children and that their identity was not just that of a journalist, but also now a wife or mother. They thought about a series of issues. Even a fellow journalist and good friend who had agreed to stand up with me to hold a sign publicly ended up backing out after she received a call from

¹⁰ The phrase Me Too was first used on social media in 2006 by activist Tarana Burke to expose sexual harassment she experienced. It became a # MeToo movement against sexual assault and harassment in various locations transnationally, gaining momentum in 2017 with many US celebrities joining the cause by exposing powerful perpetrators. The first Chinese feminist organized anti-sexual harassment campaign occurred in 2014 when the cases of sexual harassment by a professor at Xiamen University were exposed by survivors, his graduate students (see also Footnote 14). Huang Xueqin's investigative report in collaboration with the survivor Luo Xixi ignited a second round of nationwide anti-sexual harassment movement since the beginning of 2018. This time the young feminists adopted #MeToo to name this movement and many of the survivors, following the example of Luo Xixi, bravely revealed their identities when exposing the perpetrators.

¹¹ Zhihu is a Chinese online Q & A website, similar to Quora, the English online platform.

her husband's mother that night, who said don't do this kind of thing anymore, and this kind of thing is reckless. Her mother-in-law didn't think it was something to be proud of, and it seemed that her family would be ashamed, so she didn't do it. Later, I went alone to hold up a #MeToo sign on my own, and then I still felt...

I: Where?

XH: At that time, I was still in Singapore. I took many photos of people holding signs.

I: Oh.

XH: Then I asked them, what method would make you feel more secure and protective of your privacy? They said, how about a questionnaire? They were willing to do this; it had a protective quality; you could either use your real name or be anonymous. So when I designed the questionnaire, I left one question at the end: you could either use your real name or be anonymous, both were OK, but after you tell me your story and leave your contact information so I can get in touch with you. So after I sent out this questionnaire, Luo Xixi contacted me after she saw it. She told me this story, and she told me that she saw on Zhihu the filled questionnaires. She realized that she had collected some stories or testimonies from some of those involved. It seemed that at the time she started to negotiate with Beihang University, but talks had stagnated.

I: Right, so there were such things. . .

XH: The university didn't pay much attention to her, and they kept delaying their response. She said this isn't right, but she didn't know what to do. Then she saw (the questionnaire) I sent out. She felt that I was a journalist who had media experience, and also that I should be able to understand her heart; she saw that I had stood up because I had seen many colleagues sexually harassed but no one dared to talk about it. I felt that I could speak out because I didn't care (about possible consequences), and she had the same mentality. She also saw that many junior female students were sexually harassed by the same professor. She was very angry and also mad at herself...

I: Mad about why she herself didn't come forward at the time?

XH: Yes, why didn't I stand up at that time. Because at that time she was a senior female student, and she was among the first group of doctoral students he accepted. Later she felt that if she came forward, then the younger students coming up behind her wouldn't have this kind of problem. I also had this same kind of feeling.

I: Yes.

XH: When I was in the news media, I was sexually harassed by a colleague who was quite respected by others. When I left my job, I just said that I found another, and was changing jobs. Other people thought I had found a better job opportunity. I didn't tell them it was because I was being sexually harassed. This perhaps wasn't the most direct cause, but it was one of them.

I: Right.

XH: The two of us quickly understood we shared the same things in common. We were both very angry and indignant and thought we could do more. She found me and said that she wanted to do something. She got in touch with me in October 2017.

I: Did she formally lodge a complaint in November?

XH: At the end of October. With the university?

I: Yes, with the university.

XH: She raised her complaint to the university in October.

I: She complained to the university in October, then in November she spoke about it outside of the university?

XH: Right. In November, she began to speak about it outside of the university.

I: Starting in November, initially it was their, which account, what was it called? Small...?

XH: Xixi Small Room.

I: Oh, Small Room, right.

XH: That was on January 1, 2018; we're talking about this time period.

I: Right, I remember, it was about that time. What did you do before then?

XH: Before that, because I was still a journalist, I had to verify some facts and what she said. As a journalist, I had to respect the facts and check their veracity. After she gave her account of events, I contacted the victims she spoke about, and talked with them. For each victim, I asked for two witnesses who could prove that she had previously spoken about the incident. For instance, there were some details, such as what she told others and when, so I asked if I could get in touch with those people. I wanted to fully grasp what she described. Since I came from a media background, as a journalist, I didn't want others to question the veracity of my account. Moreover, this was not only about me, but more importantly, if there were many holes in their stories, they would be attacked by others, so I was trying to protect those involved. When I gained their trust, I would verify those details that could be verified, which I did. So I brought these four young women together, and those that they spoke with . . .

I: In person or online?

XH: I certainly didn't meet them in person. People like Luo Xixi were in the United States; some women were in Nanjing, other women were in Hangzhou, and some were still there. So everyone, wherever they were in the world, used WeChat to speak via phone. The people that they offered who could verify their stories I also connected with via WeChat, so then I corroborated their stories one by one.

The first thing I had to do was understand what happened. The second thing was to verify whether the story was true, and the third thing was to find those Beihang students who were involved and ask them to share their opinions of Professor Chen Xiaowu. Then I asked them if

they were present at the places the girls described, whether they were forced to drink, when they started drinking, whether they witnessed the assault– this was because some girls said that there were other people present (a third person and a fourth person), so I brought them together to understand what happened.

Then when Luo Xixi and Beihang negotiated, Chen Xiaowu made many moves to prevent people from exposing this matter. It just so happened that when he was taking these actions, the students involved were all there. He would demand the students to call Luo Xixi or he took actions to block them from posting things online. I verified all these actions, and then found many witnesses and even screenshots as proof. That’s why I said that, at a minimum, I recorded this story completely; moreover, it’s quite detailed, and the evidence is sufficient. I also obtained some recordings and photos. Even though Chen Xiaowu said that he didn’t do or say anything like this, I was able to expose him. Two or three days after he made a public denial, I released the audio recordings and materials . . .

I: I have to figure out the order in which you released the materials publicly. That was January 1st?

XH: January 1st was the first day.

I: What Luo Xixi posted, did you write it or did she write it by herself? I recall that she wrote it herself, using the first person? It seems either you or someone else showed it to me. I saw it in advance, and what I read was written by her. Then, which account of yours did you post it on? I forget since it was deleted.

XH: I think it was this way. She first asked me how to go about doing this. I saw that many #MeToos came out and spoke on their own. I told her to first write down her experiences, and after she finished, she showed it to me. I added and deleted some things based on some of the facts I knew. We definitely revised her draft many times. But for the most part it was her voice, in the first person.

I: First person?

XH: Like it was mainly based on her perspective.

I: Right.

XH: I respect her logic and style of speaking. I only just checked the facts. So I posted it in her own name, Luo Xixi. I just posted this article on the first day, the article with her own account as told by her. Thus, that first essay was her own statement; you could say it’s her accusation. The next day I put the evidence out, because in Chen Xiaowu...

I: It was posted on your account?

XH: It was on my account, and at the same time, she also posted it on her account. Because after she came forward and spoke out, in order to establish her authenticity, I then entered the picture as a journalist, and could verify what she said: “Yes, she once said that; yes, I previously verified this and that; what evidence I have.” Therefore, the second article includes the

evidence, and the events that Chen Xiaowu denied. I released the evidence; I was the one who posted the recording. The third article reviews the whole process. At that time, when I wrote the third piece, it was from the perspective of a journalist; I no longer wrote from Luo Xixi's perspective. I showed how Chen Xiaowu obstructed them, or how he made the students in his laboratory prevent Luo Xixi and other people from exposing him. Once I understood these details clearly, I made plans for the first, second, and third articles. The fourth article, I just released it-- after thinking through the first three articles--we had to issue a jointly signed letter. So yes, the fourth article is a joint signature.

I: I recall that this jointly signed letter was about a mechanism to deal with sexual harassment, right?

XH: Yes.

I: Did this involve other feminist organizations at the time? Or was it just the two of you discussing this on your own?

XH: This was actually the case. Although we had a little bit of contact with others, at the beginning there wasn't much involvement of others at all. In the beginning, Luo Xixi was able to find me because I mentioned in my article that my purpose in investigating sexual harassment was that after investigating the cause, we needed to establish a mechanism to prevent more sexual harassment. She felt that having such a mechanism was good, and that she not only wanted to seek justice for herself after she told her story, but also the construction of such a mechanism. Previously, she actually didn't know much about these things, and felt that maybe this kind of mechanism should be created at university. I said right, this is exactly how we'd proceed. So actually, we'd thought about these aspects of the joint letter beforehand, but concretely, what kind of joint letter should we do, and the logistics of a joint letter? I did consult some feminist organizations later, or someone like Wei Tingting;¹² yes, in fact, at that time, I consulted with Wei Tingting more than others, because I didn't really know anyone else.

I: How did you come to know Wei Tingting?

XH: We met in 2016. Actually before 2016, Wei Tingting did a sharing session, that sort of thing, relating to sexual harassment. I went because at the time the incident at Jinan University ...

I: Where?

XH: In Guangzhou, I think in the office of Shandao.

I: Oh

XH: Yes, it was the Shandao office.

I: I know.

¹² One of the "Feminist Five," a feminist who is active in the fields of gender equality and gender diversity.

XH: I also went there and spoke about sexual harassment, and so it was at that time that I began to establish contact.

I: I see the overall picture now. But after that, in terms of #MeToo, you were mainly verifying this incident before January 1st, right?

XH: Yes, the main thing was to verify what happened. Originally, I didn't really want to use social media to expose this incident because it wouldn't have much credibility, nor receive much attention. In the beginning, I was looking for traditional media, but people in traditional media all told me, "You must first verify this matter or expose this matter, then we will follow up." Actually, this is what everyone said. So I ended up saying that's okay, then we will expose it first. After we went public with the story, some traditional media, such as "The Beijing News" (Xinjing bao),¹³ followed up on the story.

I: Later on, I think you went deeper; it wasn't just this incident – you got more deeply involved in the #MeToo movement...

XH: Right.

I: Can you talk a bit about what you specifically did in the #MeToo movement? It's important to have you personally summarize your involvement.

XH: Hmm, what did I do specifically? Many people later said that I was the driving force behind #MeToo; in fact, frankly speaking, before reporting on #MeToo, and before I got involved in the matter of Luo Xixi, when I sent out the questionnaire, I already had collected a lot of stories. Originally, I was thinking that I could use the #MeToo tide to launch China's #MeToo, to make Chinese people pay attention to this matter. I had previously seen in the news incidents like sexual harassment at Xiamen University,¹⁴ but in the end, it seemed that nothing came of these reports; they did not create a storm. So when #MeToo appeared, I had already thought about writing news stories, because reporters are news points, and #MeToo could be advanced via these news points. I didn't expect #MeToo to start from the realm of higher education. So once the case involving a university came out, I began to think that more cases would emerge. There was Luo Xixi's case, but to my surprise, Luo Xixi's individual case didn't require me to dig out other cases, they just popped up one after another on their own, like ...

I: For example, which cases?

XH: The Beida (Beijing University) case involving Shen Yang and Gao Yan.¹⁵

I: Did Shen Yang's students seek you out?

¹³ A famous metropolitan daily newspaper in Beijing.

¹⁴ In 2014, a prestigious archeologist at Xiamen University was accused of sexually assaulting and harassing at least three female graduate students. After the feminist organization and new media outlet Women's Awakening Network launched a news survey and coordinated feminist groups to conduct accountability actions, which lasted for more than six months, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the first anti-sexual harassment regulation.

¹⁵ The Shen Yang incident involved many alumnae of Beijing University (Beida), using their real names online in April 2018, who reported that then associate professor at Beida's Chinese Department -- who later became the chair of the Chinese Language Department of Nanjing University and a Yangtze River scholar-- (Professor) Shen Yang, 20 years earlier sexually abused a Beida undergraduate in the Chinese Language Department. The student, Gao Yan, committed suicide in 1998.

XH: Yes, they also found me. Right, and later even Tao Chongyuan's friends and family¹⁶ also reached out to me. After that, who else came forward? Oh, before Li Yiyi and her group,¹⁷ there were other cases of sexual harassment that occurred in universities, which appeared suddenly out of the blue.

I: Wasn't Li Yiyi just that case, the Beida case?

XH: No, Li Yiyi was another incident; Li Yiyi was a young woman who committed suicide by jumping off a building in Qingyang [Gansu province].

I: Oh, I know about this.

XH: She was molested by a high school teacher.

I: Right, she jumped from a building. Later,

XH: She had already jumped.

I: Her parents found you?

XH: Actually, first they found a lawyer, Lawyer Dou, then Lawyer Dou contacted me. Afterwards, I also passed some cases to Chen Shaoyuan who is in Guyu. Because there were too many cases, I had to send some out to other lawyers, and then there were more; it could be said that many of these cases suddenly broke out from nowhere. After that there came the incident at the Sun Yat-sen University.¹⁸ Actually, all of them found me, so I didn't need to dig up all the cases by myself. For cases like the one at the Sun Yat-sen University, which was within close proximity to me, I was able to follow whenever, so I conducted my own investigations and interviews.

I: The section on NetEase called "The Livings" (*renjian*)¹⁹ posted an article.²⁰ Do you think this article was useful? This article from NetEase, it seems that earlier, women got on all kinds of social media²¹ to talk about what was happening.

XH: Yeah.

¹⁶ Tao Chongyuan, a male PhD student at Wuhan University of Technology, committed suicide on March 26, 2018 by jumping off of a building. His family and classmates revealed publicly that he had been exploited, harassed and controlled by his male academic advisor, Wang Pan. This incident sparked a discussion among young people and the higher education community about the unrestricted power of academic advisors. Although Wang Pan only received a very light punishment from the school, and related accountability actions were suppressed, pressure from the public helped the family to receive private compensation from the perpetrator.

¹⁷ A young woman from Gansu province who jumped off a building in public and killed herself after becoming severely depressed because she was forcibly molested by the head of her class during middle school and the school authorities and police took no action.

¹⁸ An incident, extensively protested by students, of a professor who was accused of many occasions of sexual harassment of women students, and whose misbehavior was not seriously sanctioned. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/12/world/asia/china-metoo-professor-sexual-harassment.html>

¹⁹ A non-fiction writing column on the news portal called NetEase.

²⁰ This article refers to the previously mentioned Li Yiyi incident, which was posted on the Chinese social media platform, "NetEase."

²¹ A general term for new media that conveys information to an unspecified majority or specific individuals by modern and electronic means through privatization, civilianization, generalization and autonomy.

I: Students also used social media, but it seems that after this article was released on NetEase, the school felt more pressure.

XH: Yes, that's right.

I: At the time, I didn't think of it, because the article that appeared on NetEase's "The Livings" was just one.

XH: Yeah.

I: What do you think the effect of that article was?

XH: I thought the outcome was really good, frankly speaking; moreover, the article was deleted three times but they promptly reposted it three times in succession. This shows that they took this matter very seriously; they also thought that...

I: The NetEase section posted it three times?

XH: Yes.

I: Oh.

XH: After the article that appeared on "The Livings" on NetEase was deleted –it's a WeChat client– then its web page, its platform, posted it on all three of them, then all three were deleted, and all were reissued, and later they encountered many difficulties. So I think it was very useful. At first, when students posted from their own accounts, it wasn't easy for them to garner attention. At Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU) while the students and the university administrators were in mediation, the university didn't really care about the students' posts. Later, I collected the materials and turned them into an article, and then I also obtained some more substantial evidence, especially video evidence of a student being quite seriously sexually harassed. I also got some video evidence of people going out. At first, the students didn't get the videos, but I was able to get them, and I was...

I: How did you get the videos?

XH: Well, it may not be very appropriate here to say how I got the videos. But I did get them, and I wanted to be protective, and there's only one person who knew that. It was this person who showed me this video. I wanted to copy the video, but the person said I couldn't copy it, I could only watch it. I understood and said that I only wanted to take a look at the timeframe to confirm the authenticity of the video. Anyway, because the article came together after I had this evidence, it had a relatively big impact, at a minimum it compelled SYSU; there was some pressure on the university to handle the complaints. Students began to submit complaints in March and April, and it wasn't until July that the university finally dealt with their complaints.

Those cases that were relatively close I could follow up on directly; if I have the energy to follow up, I just followed up on my own. However, those incidents that are somewhat further away, for example, the Li Yiyi incident in Qingyang [Gansu province], or the Shen Yang and Beijing University incidents, there are quite a few other media [interested in these cases], so I then

helped the students connect with media resources. For example, I told them “I trust this media, and I think you can let this media’s reporter follow up,” and this media’s reporter would come to follow up. Maybe it’s more about the function of helping them to link up with resources. Then in the later stages, in addition to reporting on the incidents, I connected on a relatively deep level with some of the victims, and found that many of them are still very much traumatized, suffering from many psychological problems or dealing with a lot of stress, so gradually during the course of interviewing them I gained their trust. They gave me a lot of trust. Later, I also connected them with lawyer resources, in case they wanted to pursue that channel, like the alum from Nanjing University; in fact, she also found me. And I also connected her to some lawyers. After the Li Yiyi incident there were also others...

I: How can there be so many lawyers? Actually, there was just one lawyer.

XH: Yes. There’s not much we can do, but ...

I: Only two or three – that’s all.

XH: Actually, more than that, but those few are really good,

I: There are very few lawyers who really have this kind of background...

XH: Yes, there are actually very few good lawyers who are gender-conscious and can handle these cases well, as you said. Although many lawyers have been connected, there really are just a handful of lawyers, switching in and out.

I: Right.

XH: There’s really nothing we could do about it. But later we had a training at the University of Hong Kong with a group of lawyers. The purpose of the training was to increase the gender consciousness of the lawyers. And to better truly understand the mentality of the victims. It was only later when I came into contact with so many victims that I understood their occasional reversals and confusion, or later even the idea of “falling in love with the victim,” or so-called “love the victim,” etc.; I’ve encountered victims with all of these kinds of thought patterns, and so gradually also introduced them to psychologists, and also linked them to all kinds of necessary resources, be it resources to expose incidents, or legal resources. Gradually, it seemed to be moving towards the role of an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization).

I: Uh-huh, you said NGO, when did you start collaborating with Wei Tingting on an NGO?²²

XH: Well, after we finished bringing Luo Xixi’s case to light, I cooperated with Wei Tingting a lot, and later we planned to issue a report. She made quite a few suggestions and had a lot of ideas. We then talked about building an anti-sexual harassment and anti-sexual assault network, hoping to provide victims with a supportive network, whether it’s psychological counseling, legal services, or media exposure. We hoped to integrate these resources and create a platform for them, so I’ve been working with her since 2017, or the beginning of 2018.

²² Wei Tingting founded Guangzhou Gender and Sexuality Education Center in 2016.

I: Hmm, so at the beginning of 2018, were you considered staff of their organization?

XH: I wasn't considered a staff member. I never received a penny. There was no money; the main thing was that the organization itself didn't have any money, so we operated in a project cooperation method. For my investigative report, however, they did raise a portion of the funds to print it since I didn't have any money to print it.

I: I understand. So later... Am I speaking too quickly?

XH: No.

I: I meant to ask when did you start encountering obstacles later on?

XH: The obstacles started in 2018, during the middle of 2018. In July, #MeToo had emerged on a large scale; just in the single month of July, 22 incidents appeared. Our NGO was the first to have statistical data. During July . . .

I: July was already the second wave,

XH: Right, the second wave.

I: July was the second wave; actually, the first wave,

XH: was the university incidents

I: The second wave mainly involved NGOs and media domains.

XH: Yes.

I: After, right.

XH: Yes, the media. Talking about the media, for example, I was the first to report on the case of "The Elf" suing [senior journalist] Zhang Wen.²³ She also found me first. These are also ... but when the second wave of sexual harassment or #MeToo reports appeared one after another, the government began to feel that there was something a little fishy about it. Was there anyone behind the scenes doing something, and they began "to invite us to tea."²⁴ They first came after Wei Tingting and me, and then later also looked for my family, my boyfriend, my relatives and friends.

I: When was this?

XH: Likely it started in mid-July 2018. It was in July and August that they began to frequently ask me questions... No, that's not right. My apologies for misremembering; it started in March 2018.

I: March was before you got involved in the Sun Yat-sen University incident?

²³ A senior male journalist, who was exposed during the #MeToo movement as having sexually assaulted a drunk female lawyer.

²⁴ To be summoned by the police is not an easily declinable "invitation." This is a form of disguised unlawful interrogation, frequently used by the police to question activists and human rights defenders.

XH: Yes, it was before the SYSU incident.

I: Sun Yat-sen was in April.

XH: Because I now remember more incidents, like the case of the university student at the China University of Petroleum (CUP),²⁵ who contacted me in March or April, and the student at SYSU also reached out to me around that time.

I: Do you think that the CUP incident was too sensitive...?

XH: No, I think it should be the Beida and Shen Yang incidents. Later, didn't we form an investigation team with Wang Ao and Lawyer Wan?²⁶ It was likely around that time that they began investigating me.

I: Because it's a matter involving Beijing University,

XH: Yes.

I: These incidents all involved people who were outside of China.

XH: Yes.

I: Both Luo Xixi and Li Youyou; it is Li Youyou, right?

XH: Yes, Li Youyou, Wang Ao.

I: They are all overseas, why is that? All of the people that were exposed by those abroad are actually Yangtze River Scholars²⁷ at universities in China, therefore, this matter also involved universities; it was mainly because of this. In fact, the government didn't care about exposing cases in NGOs.

XH: Yes. At that time, they started looking for me; actually, it should be said that at first, in March, they hadn't approached me directly. They were looking for some of my previous leaders, editors-in chief, or editors who had edited my articles, who were frequently asked, "so what is

²⁵ See, for example, <https://www.dpa-international.com/topic/student-takes-police-university-chinas-metoo-movement-grows-urn%3Anewsml%3Adpa.com%3A20090101%3A180801-99-373238>

²⁶ Wang Ao is an assistant professor at Wesleyan University. During the #MeToo movement, he exposed sexual assault incidents involving Xu Gang, a former professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and was active on social media regarding allegations against Xu. Wang Ao is currently being sued by Xu Gang in China for infringement of right of reputation, and Wang subsequently supported victims who sued Xu Gang in the U.S for sexual abuse.

Lawyer Wan is a public interest lawyer, who has supported victims in many gender-based violence cases, especially #MeToo cases, and represented a large number of those who spoke out during #MeToo in litigation involving infringement of right of reputation (i.e., in suits brought by the perpetrators) and handled the victim's counterclaims against the offenders for sexual harassment.

²⁷ Refers to the first reports of sexual harassment involving professors in institutions of higher education, including Chen Xiaowu of Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics (aka Beihang), Shen Yang of Beijing University, and Zhang Peng of Sun Yat-sen University--all of whom hold the highest academic honor of the Yangtze River / Young Yangtze River Scholar, and the first people to expose them had all been working and living in the United States for a long time. Officials who were responsible for investigating the #MeToo incidents believed that this meant there was behind the scenes support for (China) #MeToo from foreign anti-China forces.

Huang Xueqin doing? Why does she always write these kinds of articles?” I learned this from them. But it was July 2018 when they really came for me. At that time, they were . . .

I: They often first wandered around the periphery (one’s circle of social relations); they often do this.

XH: Right. The real trouble began for me in July 2018. Later, they also asked Wei Tingting what her relationship was with me, and also asked me about my relationship with her, and asked me if I knew her background. Using these tactics, they hoped I wouldn’t write so much about these kinds of things, etc.

I: Well, I was thinking that as you encountered these things, that is to say, do you think that in this process, that you had any changes in your thinking about gender equality and women’s rights? Or earlier, what writings influenced you to pay attention to such topics? After such intensive actions, do you feel now that you have somehow changed?

XH: Actually, I don't. One reason is probably because of my background when growing up. Let me give you an example. When I was young, really young, probably in primary school, my parents both worked during the day, and when I got home from school, I would see my father watching TV with his legs up, one over the other. My mother cooked, and when her dishes were salty, he would say “your food is salty.” I would say to him directly, “then you cook yourself; what basis do you have -- you both have to work, but when you come home you watch TV with your legs crossed, but let mother do all the chores” This has been the case since childhood, and then later, when my mother said that girls should do the housework and wash the dishes, I always said, “who said girls should do the dishes, on what basis? If I have to do the dishes, OK, then, my brother must sweep the floor.” So, our family is....

I: You have an older brother?

XH: So our family is... yes, I have an older brother; I’m the second child. I’ve had this kind of awareness ever since a very young age. I’m not even sure how it came about, but maybe it has to do with the fact that I grew up in my grandfather’s house, with more freedom and independence. It’s always been about...

I: There was an emphasis on fairness in everything.

XH: Yes, there was a stress on equity; so in my family, between my brother and I, the two of us divided up all of the housework. It was never the case that I had to do something that he didn’t have to do. If he wiped the windows, I swept the floor. If I was assigned to wash the vegetables, then he would wash the dishes. I have always demanded that it be this way, later my parents thought how could this little girl ask for so much, but they also respected my wishes. They thought, that’s OK, if you want things to be like this; older brother dotes on his younger sister, and little sister also wants her big brother to do things, so you two divide the work. They let us divide the work ourselves, and so this is how we divided things up. As a result, as I was growing up, I didn’t feel particularly unequal because my brother and I both attended school and we both went to college, we both went to graduate school. Whatever I ought to do, I did. Our parents didn’t say that girls shouldn’t have so much education; they didn’t have this kind of

mindset. Anyway, they said about the two of us: “whoever can study, whoever wants to go to school, you go, as long as you keep your grades up, you can go.” This was the concept, and so from the time I was young to adulthood, I actually felt that I was someone who had received a gender dividend.

I: Why, what is your gender dividend?

XH: So basically, when I was young, I already felt that I was the kind of person who could be the class monitor.

I: How is being a class monitor a gender dividend?

XH: It’s just maybe about work; when I’m at work, if a guy and I both raise our hands to do a job, then the leader will assign me to do it.

I: Oh.

XH: But later I found out that the leader actually had a feeling that girls were more likely to get along well with people. At that time, however, I thought it was because of my ability that he would send me out on assignments. Because at the first work unit I joined, I interacted directly with the director, and acted as the director’s assistant; wherever he went, he took me along. At that time, I thought it was because I was very good at my job, but later I slowly discovered that, especially after I experienced sexual harassment myself, I realized that they thought because you were a girl, taking you along seemed more

I: It’ll make him look good.

XH: Yes, exactly. At that time, in fact, I didn’t wear high heels before, but at work I had to wear high heels, because the leader said something I still remember, he said that if you want to be a reporter, a good reporter, then you need to do the “three accompaniments”: after accompanying the leader eating and drinking, then you must accompany him writing, and write a good draft. At the time, I thought that this was a work requirement for being a capable journalist. But slowly I found out that wasn’t it. Why would accompanying people in eating and drinking be required to be a good journalist? So I later told the leader, “No, I don’t want to take part in food and drink accompaniment. I don’t drink.” Later he said, it’s OK if you don’t drink; at any rate, your articles are well written. At first I felt that I had a gender advantage. Otherwise, a guy who was also excellent... Later, I felt that I was also pretty good...

I: This advantage also turned out to be,

XH: Right.

I: Sometimes it’s a pit.

XH: Sometimes it is an advantage, sometimes it is a pit and also a disadvantage. What he thinks my role is, and what I think my role is may be different.

I: Actually, I have a question. In fact, your time working on #MeToo wasn't long. It's been only one and a half years, from 2018 to now. During this process, which people did you primarily work with? How did this collaboration take shape?

XH: Who did I mainly work with? I cooperated frequently with lawyers.

I: Who, for example?

XH: For example, Lawyer Wan Miaoyan.

I: Only her? Who else?

XH: There's also Lawyer Fu Wei; do you know Lawyer Fu? I did not cooperate directly with Li Ying,²⁸ but I passed some cases to her. Oh, and there were several cases in which I let Lawyer Lü Xiaoquan²⁹ directly intervene, because many times when a lawyer formally gets involved, I found that I didn't need to do anything else, so I withdrew. I was tired.

I: Then that was their matter.

XH: Right, they used their specialized expertise to handle the cases.

I: Right.

XH: Later on, there was a lot of cooperation with feminist activist groups; especially when we did many activities of collecting signatures for our demands, and later, when we wanted to talk to the president of SYSU, Luo Jun.

I: And then?

XH: Of course, he ignored us.

I: When was this?

XH: This was after the SYSU incident was exposed in July 2018, and Luo Jun was unwilling to face this matter. The news we got from the university was that when he was on the campus, he would say things to the students like, "You students, what are you doing, messing around. "How is this sexual harassment, what do you think you're doing?" The more we learned of this kind of inside information, the more we felt that Luo Jun was not a good university president.

I: That's impossible.

XH: Right, but we wanted to get him to talk to us, so we also wrote an open letter demanding that Luo Jun have a dialogue with us: "You said that there is no sexual harassment at SYSU, how can you say that? What do you believe is going on?" We did these things in addition to writing reportage, but he chose to ignore it. We also didn't escalate the situation.

²⁸ Li Ying is a feminist lawyer in Beijing specialized in defending women victims of domestic violence and sexual violence.

²⁹ Lü Xiaoquan is a feminist lawyer of the Qianqian Law Firm in Beijing, the first Law Firm in China specialized in defending women's rights.

I: That matter was organized by feminist activists?

XH: Well, it was Zhang Leilei. She invited me to do this kind of dialogue and asked if I was interested. I said that I was. She said we could do this jointly, Zhang Leilei and Huang Xueqin would have a dialogue with SYSU. I said okay, let's do it. So it was Zhang Leilei who proposed the idea, and I agreed. If Luo Jun was willing to talk with us, then we would have a dialogue. If he was unwilling, then I would write an article. It seemed that there wasn't anything else I could do besides writing articles, so I just wrote more articles. Then we planned some actions later, such as organizing collectively signed petitions, or sending out collectively signed letters. Later, we also collaborated in sending some petitions out to the delegates during the "Two Sessions."³⁰

I: "The Two Sessions" in 2018?

XH: Yeah, and also 2019. In 2019, we mailed out more than 390 letters.

I: Oh.

XH: Yeah, we worked together-- sorting out and packing the letters up, and then mailing them,

I: Together with the feminist activists?

XH: Yes, they are very motivated to act.

I: Then what part of this were you doing? In other words, did you still use your self-media or something else to spread the word?

XH: I still used a journalist's method, because I like to write things myself, and I like to use the power of words to record what happened. Although media censorship is very serious and many articles can't see the light of day, still I...

I: When was that WeChat account deleted³¹?

XH: February 28, 2018.

I: Such a short period of time.

XH: Yes, but that account wasn't because of sexual harassment.

I: Oh, I know, I understand. You mentioned this before. Did you save all your articles?

XH: No, I didn't save anything. I told you, I'm just that kind of person, so when I realized that there was something about this matter, I discovered that my articles weren't saved.

I: Uh.

XH: Now I realize how important IP is. I'm the type who is sort of late to catch on, learning through hindsight. When I looked for the articles, oh dear, all of the articles were gone! But I

³⁰ "The "Two Sessions" refers to two sessions in the annual March meetings in Beijing of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)"

³¹ This refers to her personal social-media WeChat public account, ATSH.

saved some things, especially the investigation report on sexual harassment. In fact, on the backend, they saved a lot of stories; there were a lot of them, maybe 80 to 90 stories.

I: Nothing left?

XH: I have a portion of them, because earlier, while I was writing I also copied them, and later used “Lingxi” software to record them.

I: What I mean is, did you save your articles?

XH: I still have my initial drafts. I have these.

I: Edited?

XH: I don’t have the edited versions. Sometimes the editor would revise my drafts in the editing process, and then I wasn’t able to directly copy the edited articles, so I felt particularly disappointed because of that.

I: So in terms of action, you made some case referrals to lawyers, right? And on another respect, you worked with feminist activists, but I still don't quite understand, so you were responsible for dissemination, and they were responsible for action, or was there anything else?

XH: Well, actually, it’s not the case that a particular person was assigned a responsibility; there was no clear division of labor.

I: No specific assignment.

XH: Yes, I went back by myself. Because I’m better at writing, I wrote, but still,

I: Where did you write for?

XH: Right, later I gave ...

I: Your account was gone though.

XH: The account was gone, so I sent my work to NetEase’s “The Livings” section, and Initium Media, which posted many of my articles. Because my articles would be censored domestically, I could only send them outside the mainland to the media in Hong Kong, and recently I was published in *Ming Pao*.³² I just hope... Sigh, this is also a source of income that supports my livelihood, so without my publications, I really am penniless.

I: What did you publish in *Ming Pao*?

XH: It's also about sexual harassment.

³² *Ming Pao* is a Chinese-language newspaper published by Media Chinese International in Hong Kong. In the 1990s, *Ming Pao* established four overseas branches in North America; each provides independent reporting on local news and collects local advertisements.

I: Are you only writing about sexual harassment now, or are you also writing about other topics?

XH: I have other topics and also write about them.

I: Is the majority of your writing based on your work as a reporter?

XH: Actually, I'm also writing about on-going "anti-crime campaigns,"³³ but these can't be published.

I: Have you realized that, if you want to continue working in media domestically, this might become an obstacle for your career?

XH: I know it will. Actually, when I was covering sexual harassment,

I: You actually already had this obstacle.

XH: There were already obstacles.

I: Then do you think it is unlikely that you'll return,

XH: I am very clear that I will not return to work in traditional media, because I think I have been in the trade long enough-- from the National News Agency to the local media to the cutting-edge media-- I have worked at them all. First of all, I don't think there is much space left, because the media censorship is too severe.

I: Yes.

XH: The second reason is that after I finished speaking up about sexual harassment, many former leaders asked me, "hey, do you actually want to return to work in the media in the future?" I asked, "What do you mean?" They said that I was now airing the dirty laundry of our own media, and they asked which media would dare hire me in the future -- "which mass media company does not have sexual harassment; what place has absolutely no sexual harassment?" After I came forward, how would they dare hire me? Because after I finished talking about sexual harassment, I found out later that some of the media leaders where I had worked had already held a meeting to discuss, who was it that had harassed Huang Xueqin. They had already done this, so they had... because I still have good relations with senior figures in many media outlets, they told me-- they disclosed this kind of news to me,

I: Oh.

XH: They already held a meeting! When all is said and done, would you want to stay in the media or not?

³³ The CCP launched a new round of "anti-crime campaign" in 2018 to enforce social and political control at the local society and lowest level of government administrations. While arrests have been made on the ground of actual crimes by law, cases of violation of human rights and political persecution are not uncommon. Huang's investigative reports in this regard are unlikely to be published. She learned how journalists were not supposed to touch "politically sensitive" topics (any exposé of officials' or powerful people's wrong doings) since she worked on sexual harassment cases.

I: Right.

XH: Because I spoke publicly about my trade, their view is that I betrayed the profession.

I: Actually, they are all accomplices.

Huang. Yes.

I: So what's next for you?

XH: Next, I will study for a Master's degree in law (LLM).³⁴ Then I will also form a coalition against sexual assault with some other friends; we will provide assistance, to the best of our ability, to victims of sexual assault. On the one hand, I'll do these things; I think I should still do these offline activities because underlying the issue of sexual harassment not only power and discrimination, but also gender and rights issues are all mixed together. So this is still worth doing. I think I should also promote anti-sexual harassment legislation. The space exists for it, and it is also feasible. And although I don't think that law can prevent everything, it is better to have this law to rely on, than no law to rely on. Thus, I want to also push for this matter, so while I am preparing for my LLM studies, I'm also preparing to do what I can do within the best of my abilities.

I: Is it at The University of Hong Kong?

XH: Yes, I want to do something to assist sexual assault victims to the extent I am able, and also look at ways to advance the anti-sexual harassment law. This is my plan.

I: Because this is a feminist interview, I would like to know about your personal understanding of feminist theory, such as whether you have specifically read feminist theory, or if you have your own understanding, or related writings, or what do you think. Yes, please continue.

XH: I didn't make a special study of feminism.

I: Not specifically.

XH: At first, I didn't touch the word "feminism," because feminism is about gender equality. I just spoke about how I was the kind of person who demanded gender equality since childhood. I've thought of another thing that's even funnier. In 2018, I met my old kindergarten classmates. They also knew about the Luo Xixi incident. They said to me, "oh Huang Xueqin, it seems that you have been like this since childhood." I said, "What do you mean?" They said, "don't you remember? When you were young, you led the girls to fight with us boys." I said, "Why would I take the girls to fight with anyone? I'm a peaceful person." They said that, "at that time, didn't the boys like to bully the girls, like pulling their hair, etc.?" Those girls went to you to cry about these things, and then you brought a group of girls to fight with us. One of them said that I made his entire kindergarten experience a nightmare.

³⁴ LLM is a postgraduate academic degree for admission into legal practice.

I: Uh huh.

XH: It turned out that I didn't really remember these things because it was too long ago. It may be because of my own personality. I'm the kind of person who distinguishes relatively clearly between black and white, and I have a sense of justice.

I: Mm.

XH: Since the time when I was young, I wasn't the kind of person who was bullied and discriminated against, so I didn't feel it was particularly serious--whether it was gender discrimination or gender-based oppression--like you just said, it was probably after I started working, even though at first I think I didn't feel gender oppression; it was only later that I came to realize it.

I: Yeah.

XH: After I was sexually harassed, that night, I was very scared; because that person... Well, because in my work I came into contact with some high-level officials, Guangdong provincial officials, who would make comments like "you are very intelligent, remarkably bright" and so on.

I: Yeah.

XH: Some one would say "you can help me do this or that. This car and apartment are yours." Someone even showed me the car keys and said I could use it if I wanted to. Or someone brought a high-end camera, "you like taking pictures, so go ahead and take the camera."

I: Yeah, uh-huh.

XH: "You should work with me". Things like that. But later I actually sensed some different connotations, so I refused. Afterwards I began to think, such appreciation of me was not because of my talents as a reporter, but because I am a woman, and that I would provide other things besides my ability in journalism. I slowly realized this. I felt it from my own work, but at that time there was no specific feminist thought at play; it was only because of my own personality issues. When I was pursuing fairness and justice, I felt that this was very unfair, and so I wanted to expose it, I wanted...

I: Yeah.

XH: But actually, I dare not disclose it, because if I was touched by someone, I'd have no evidence at all. For anyone who's a reporter, if you want to report a case, it's better if you pay particular attention to the evidence. That night when I was harassed I called one of my police friends to come over, and I said something had just happened, could I report it? First, he said, I see that you haven't suffered any substantial injury at all. He's a policeman and I respect his professional judgment. Second, you are a very young woman, and you now are someone who's just beginning to rise in your career. That person is someone who's well established; he has achieved fame and has all the social and economic status. If you report it, others will look at you as if you wanted to seduce him instead of him wanting to sexually harass you. Third, you have no evidence. This

sentence was the most critical. He just touched you and hugged you for a moment; where is the evidence? We must pay attention to evidence when handling cases.

I: Right.

XH: So after he analyzed these things, I realized he was right, and I was really helpless.

I: Unless someone scared this person so that he admitted it himself.

XH: Yes, yes, otherwise no use. Right, and later this person, at first, he was unwilling to leave my room, so I intentionally called my friend. After the phone call, I told him that my friend was a policeman here, and he wanted to come and chat with me. And it had been a long time since I'd seen my friend. I asked him if he wanted to stay? It's only then that the guy was willing to leave. So that's when I realized that suddenly I was in a very disadvantaged position. Because in my work and in my personal growth process, I always felt that I was in a relatively advantageous position. At that moment, I discovered that I was, actually, in a disadvantaged position. Why was I in a disadvantaged position? Very slowly, I knew, oh, it's because I am a woman.

I: Yes, this is a pattern. I wrote some reports before on this issue. They like you not because you meet the classic standards of female beauty, but because you are a capable person. After he controls you through sex, you will be better able to serve his personal interests than male collaborators. This is one kind of pattern; this is definitely, yes, the same pattern that he used. As I said, this is almost a business model.

XH: He told me directly that a new group of young women came in at that time, and he said, "Huang Xueqin, you are not the most beautiful, but you are the smartest and the most energetic one."

I: Yeah, yeah.

XH: You are the one who is most capable, he said.

I: Right.

XH: It makes you think, what kind of discourse is this actually? Are you complimenting me or putting me down? It was from these things that I gradually grasped some gender issues. I didn't study feminist theory specifically, nor did I read any particular books. I probably slowly understood these things through my work, and then feminist ideas and my own experience seemed to merge naturally. I didn't need any sort of lengthy lectures with big theories, I just agreed with the ideas. Later, when things turned into action, it didn't matter to me because I am also a person who is very willing to act.

I: Yes, after you joined in some actions, you also connected with some feminists. Did you then come into contact with any feminist theory?

XH: I read some of the pioneering works by U.S. feminist legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon, as well as some of the ideas she raised about sexual harassment. She started to address sexual

harassment a long time ago, and she had a big influence on me. In particular, she believes that it's a power relationship; that is, in sexual harassment there's a structural, gendered power relationship that she deconstructed. This opened a door for me. Because my previous thinking did not focus on this aspect. Later, I would discuss how this aspect was constructed. This relates to the entire system; it's not simply a matter of one man and one woman. Rather, it is this system, or the system under patriarchy that has caused and enabled men to do these things. Like some of the people we discussed this afternoon – some said that maybe some men are not aware of their own privileges and their own power? I think it's impossible. They must be aware of their privileges and power. They just know that there isn't much of a price to pay for sexual harassment; they're not going to pay anything for, and they can easily take advantage of this position of power.

I: Yes.

XH: It's easy for them to use this kind of advantage to control you or to intimidate you. I don't think they are unaware. I think they are aware, and that they are consciously using this advantage to commit sexual harassment and to practice this kind of discrimination. Therefore, I feel that this is a systemic and institutional problem, and it is not a singular, individual problem; this realization had a pretty big impact on me.

I: Do you think that its impact on you will be translated into actions or results?

XH: The biggest impact is that it led me to want to study law. I think perhaps my career as a journalist is basically over, but I haven't stopped writing. But to be a journalist in the traditional media, to have a career in the media-- first, because I stepped forward and exposed the problems in the media, no one would dare hire me. Second, I also felt like there was no space given the situation of the domestic media, and I felt that in the foreseeable future there wouldn't be much media freedom or space. I also felt that whatever I would do in the future, I didn't want to stop what I was doing now, which was to join in some actions and then promote some of the anti-sexual harassment activities I just spoke about. I also felt that disclosure alone was insufficient. So now, in each case handled, we try to reach every individual, particularly each victim, and provide her with assistance. Actually, in addition to psychological help, there's also legal assistance. As we just discussed, there are many lawyers, but there are only a few who can handle sexual harassment cases, so I think maybe I can become a force in this regard, so I want to try. Some people have asked me if I've given up my career as a journalist. I said I haven't given up; I've just opened up a channel. As a reporter, I don't necessarily need a media identity.

I: Yeah.

XH: I can still write independently.

I: Right.

XH: But with the support of the law you have more than one door. I don't know what's in store there, but anyway, I hope to give myself more channels to promote this thing, because action makes me feel less weak. Writing can make you feel powerless; sometimes your articles can't be posted, or they'll be deleted; when that happens, you feel powerless. But when you actually

really do something, whether it's accompanying a victim, doing research, an advocacy action, legal advocacy, or anti-sexual harassment advocacy, you'll feel that at least you're not in such a lonely, powerless situation.

Taking action enables you to overcome a sense of powerlessness, therefore, I think I will continue to be engaged in actions. But where is the space now for action? What I can see at present is likely legal advocacy. Because, as you know, there was #MeToo, and also more than a decade of women engaged in anti-sexual harassment actions that opened up a small legal channel. The Civil Code was amended to include sexual harassment, and now we're also exploring concretely the detailed definition of sexual harassment.

I: Yes, right.

XH: Later, there were some general regulations issued by colleges and universities, although they haven't been very effective. I think there is a need for specific laws, whether it's an anti-sexual harassment law or an anti-discrimination law. I think there are several ways to get involved in this. But if they are introduced, at least, it will be a slow process. If we have something, then we can say, look, there's a law, you have to do this. Now, however, we don't even have a law, so how can you push? So I think there is still room for action.

I: Right.

XH: So, I would like to take a step in this direction.

I: Yes, I also think that the regulations, that is, the law alone is not enough, and the regulations that are there will change. For example, after the Xiamen University case, once the country had the "seven red principles,"³⁵ the cases that followed basically all were handled according to Xiamen University's method. Although the resolution of the cases was pretty trivial, it was definitely better than no resolution, and amounted to one more step forward.

XH: At least this put them on notice that the repercussions of their crime, or sexual harassment, is higher.

I: Right

XH: Instead of no repercussions at all.

I: Right, right, right.

XH: I think that this was something important that #MeToo also did.

I: One really important thing about #MeToo was that it truly changed the culture. I think it's because, from relatively early on, I saw this change, and I felt totally stunned until the

³⁵ These principles of "faculty morality" were adopted in 2014 to regulate and improve faculty morality, are outlined in Li, Jian (2020). *Comprehensive global competence for world-class universities in China*. Singapore: Springer, pp. 50-51.

media acknowledged it; that is, watching the change of this culture with your eyes wide open.

XH: What sort of changes?

I: For example, previously, there would not have been so many young women, particularly even those that were not at all “perfect victims,” who nonetheless spoke out confidently. This is the power of a group speaking out. Even though it was only a few years ago, the circumstances of the cases like Xiamen University, and the Cheng Xi case were somewhat different. Who thought this really could change -- this change has become just what I’m talking about. This change is another kind of change, so I feel that this is an unexpected space. Often, it’s a new business technology, and a new space is inexplicably created by various factors.

XH: I actually think that’s why sometimes frequent occurrences or frequent cases are needed; it also creates a kind of collective. No one is an island. When I come forward and speak, I can have an impact, and can change some things, and give everyone a kind of power that says we do things together. Especially women, I think women really are more empathetic, you know, and can easily feel for others. You can speak out confidently, maybe not for oneself, but for you, or for her. I’ve stood up for more women. This kind of heart has always been very exciting to me. I’m excited to see so many people rooting for each other; in the beginning, the first #MeToo, Luo Xixi appeared and came to find me. I thought there would be others who would speak out, but I didn’t think it would suddenly surge the way it did.

I: Truly.

XH: The cases erupted quickly.

I: Moreover, every person had her own small community that supported her. I think this is really interesting. Of course, I think that it was related to the work done previously by feminist organizations.

XH: It’s related.

I: But there are also some other new things.

XH: I think that the earlier cultivation -- tilling the soil-- done by feminist organizations was excellent. Later, when #MeToo broke out on a large scale, something that made me proud was that each time a case emerged, I set up a local group. For example, for Luo Xixi’s case in Beijing, I brought Luo Xixi, others involved, lawyers, and psychological consultants together into a small group, and this group then could discuss with each other about forming a support network, that kind of mutually supportive network.

I: Right.

XH: For the cases I dealt with at Sun Yat-sen University, I also pulled people into a small group. I found local social workers, local lawyers, and local reporters – those who I knew pretty well,

who would be better able to understand these kinds of things, or people who had gender consciousness --I pulled them in. Thus, I also made some small groups in various cities.

I: Right, but I think, my own feeling is that there is basically no way to help victims in terms of psychological assistance. There is no solution, is that so?

XH: I think that psychological...

I: Also there are very few social workers.

XH: There aren't many social workers, but there are some. Frankly speaking, I did a lot in 2018, and was really exhausted. Probably more of what I did wasn't journalist's work, but rather actually accompanying victims. I was so tired; probably three or four nights each week I would be up to three or four in the morning talking with them.

I: Right, right.

XH: Since I was the first person they contacted, and they trusted me, I couldn't just pass them along immediately to someone else.

I: I understand.

XH: If you want to hand off a case to someone else, you basically need to first have the kind of trust that you can gain by accompanying a victim for one or two weeks, and then you can tell her frankly, actually regarding your case, I have a friend who's done such and such kinds of things, and she can support you in such and such a way here, and can give you some kind of assistance locally.

I: Right.

XH: Actually, there was a subsequent case that I completely let go of. Someone involved connected the victim to a local person named Yanping, I think. That social worker did a great job accompanying the victim. She also got the parents of the abuser to apologize to her. She was very moved, and that time, it was actually useful; but there aren't many like this.

XH: Where's Yanping? If she's not in Chengde, then she's in somewhere named something "yang;" anyway, it's those two places. I didn't really follow up later. I was in contact with this young woman for two weeks; I also talked with her a lot. Once I understood her case well --but I was not in her locale-- she needed someone by her side, that sort of companion, to support her, so I passed her case to someone local who was very professional, and that was Yanping. Yanping had an organization, I forget specifically which one, but it had this kind of service center, so Yanping directly connected with this young woman, and also accompanied her personally, taking her for walks and chatting with her. She also took her to confront the man involved, found his parents, and convinced his parents to make an apology. I think, although there are not many examples like this, there are still some, and I think that it's important that every place should have an organization like this, otherwise it's too difficult to get to remote places. Yeah, so I gradually feel that I want to cultivate various groups. If there were such groups like this everywhere doing these kinds of things, then things would be much simpler.

I: Right.