국제학석사학위논문

Women's Rights Movement in China

: Focusing on the New Generation of 'Young Feminists' since 2012

중국의 여권신장운동에 관한 연구:

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손수경의 국제학 석사 학위논문을 인준함

2022 년 8 월

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Women's Rights Movement in China

: Focusing on the New Generation of 'Young Feminists' since 2012

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Abstract

Women's Rights Movement in China

: Focusing on the New Generation of 'Young Feminists' since 2012

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After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, there have been a variety of top-down efforts for improvement of women's rights in China. Chinese women, however, have been still faced with gender discrimination in every sphere of Chinese society.

A new generation of young feminists, since 2012, has emerged to raise public awareness about gender issues and raise their voices for improvement of women's rights and achievement of gender equality in a bottom-up manner. Young feminists, in this sense, have brought about a huge wave of grassroots feminist movements, including the beginning of young feminist activism in 2012, the emergence of the Feminist Five in 2015, the spread of Me Too Movement in 2018, and continued efforts as post-Me Too Movement.

Young feminists have met a wide range of challenges, yet their efforts for improvement of women's rights never end. Young feminists still endeavor to make their voices heard inside and outside China, while encouraging more ordinary Chinese women to build up a sense of solidarity for engagement in feminist activism. Young feminists' efforts also include that they call upon the Chinese authorities to take top-down action to implement relevant laws and policies for promotion of women's rights.

This study aims to find an answer to the following question: what sociocultural factors in

China have given rise to the emergence of a new generation of young feminists in 2012. This study also introduces what efforts young feminists have made for improvement of women's rights and achievement of gender equality. It then explores what challenges have hindered young feminists from making efforts for women, and further targets to investigate characteristics and significance of young feminists.

Keywords: Young feminist, Young feminist activism, Me Too Movement, Chinese feminist, Chinese Feminism

Student Number: 2020-22363

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List of Acronyms

ACWF	All-China Women's Federation
ADVL	Anti-Domestic Violence Law
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	Chinese Central Television
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
FUNCW	Fourth United Nations Conference on Women
GCAP	Global Call to Action against Poverty
GGGI	Global Gender Gap Index
LGBT	Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgenders
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PRC	People's Republic of China
WEF	World Economic Forum

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Chapter I. Introduction

Chinese women, throughout China's long span of history, have experienced gender discrimination in every sphere of Chinese society. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, there have been a wider range of state-led efforts through top-down legislation for improvement of women's rights and achievement of gender equality in China. Yet, Chinese women have been still faced with sexism in household, education, or employment, and they even have been exposed to sexual harassment and violence in their everyday life. These social circumstances have influenced young feminists to start raising their voices and fighting against gender discrimination. Young feminist activism, in this sense, has captured a greater level of attention from general public, media, and the Chinese authorities through bottom-up mobilization of women and a variety of grassroot feminist movements.

This study, first of all, introduces top-down efforts for improvement of women's rights focused on three specific periods: Maoist China (1949-1976), the Deng Xiaoping era (1978-1992), and the Jiang Zemin era (1992-2002). The Hu Jintao era (2002-2012) and the Xi Jinping era (2012-present) will not be covered, since Hu's leadership has not provided a wider level of efforts for improvement of women's rights in comparison with the Mao, Deng, and Jiang era; Xi's leadership has even controlled and repressed young feminists, while imposing sociopolitical pressure on their activism.

State-led efforts for women include: social movement for women's liberation through women's active socioeconomic participation in production in the Mao era; active legislation for achievement of gender equality since 1978 Reform and Opening-up (*gaige kaifang*) in the Deng era; announcement of gender equality as a basis state policy (*jiben guoce*) and emergence of feminists and feminist NGOs after 1995 Fourth United Nations Conference on Women (FUNCW) in the Jiang era.

Although there have been a variety of top-down efforts for improvement of women's

rights since 1949, Chinese women have experienced sexism at every corner of Chinese society. A new generation of young feminists, therefore, have emerged and called for bottom-up efforts to improve women's rights that can better represent what ordinary Chinese women really desire and need. There are also three sociocultural factors that have given rise to the emergence of young feminists: (1) online platform development, (2) shared values and experiences within similar age cohort, and (3) phenomenon of leftover women.

Influenced by the sociocultural factors, the new generation of young feminists begins to draw a huge attention from the public, mass media, and even the Chinese authorities. The year 2012 witnessed four significant campaigns of young feminist activism: "Occupy Men's Toilet," "Bloody Brides," "I Can Be Slutty, But You Cannot Harass Me," and "Bald Sisters." The four campaigns have brought about a new form of feminist movements into Chinese society, raised public awareness about gender issues, and turned feminist discourses into a heated discussion in China. Young feminists also have shown distinct characteristics of their activism: (1) body politics, (2) online activism, and (3) coalition politics with LGBT communities.

Along with young feminist activism since 2012, the Feminist Five started to capture public's eyes in 2015. The Feminist Five, a group of five young feminists in China, were arrested and detained for 37 days only because they planned to carry out a campaign for anti-sexual harassment on public transportation. The arrest and detention of the Feminist Five have attracted both domestic and international attention from the public and media, while showing the rest of the world that feminists exist in China despite its patriarchal and authoritarian regime. The Feminist Five have become one of the significant symbols of Chinese feminism that represents bottom-up social mobilization and grassroot movement in China.

In addition, both young feminists and ordinary Chinese women started to participate in a global wave of Me Too Movement in 2018, and they began to break silence, share their experiences in public, and build up a sense of solidarity with each other. Chinese Me Too

Movement first began to protest sexual harassment and violence against women, but the spark of Me Too Movement made it possible for ordinary Chinese women to raise their voices to address all kinds of gender-related issues in Chinese society. Me Too Movement has also provided ordinary Chinese women with a new venue to speak out for themselves and build up a sense of solidarity with other women. Young feminists, in that regard, have helped inspire Chinese women to take a greater level of collective actions for promotion of women's rights and women's empowerment.

Young feminists have carried out a variety of bottom-up feminist activism. They, however, have encountered several challenges: ideological and political repression, media censorship and control, victim-blaming, lack of legal devices, and marginalization of women. Yet, young feminists have continued to take active and courageous actions for improvement of women's rights and achievement of gender equality in Chinese society, regardless of all the challenges.

This study aims to find an answer to the following questions: who are young feminists? What sociocultural factors have given rise to emergence of a new generation of young feminists? What efforts have young feminists made to promote women's rights and gender equality in China? It then investigates what challenges have hindered young feminists from making bottom-up efforts for improvement of women's rights and further explores characteristics and significance of young feminist activism.

This study mainly takes an approach of online ethnography to conduct participant observation on young feminists, since they have carried out a variety of feminist campaigns via online platforms. It, unfortunately, has been difficult to find solid primary sources in Chinese. It is because 'feminism' has been considered a politically-sensitive issue since the beginning of the Xi era (2012-), so a number of Chinese literatures, including keywords such as 'feminism' or 'Me Too,' are not allowed to access. Feminism-related news articles or social media posts in Chinese media were often deleted or not available to search either. This study,

in that regard, makes a primary use of relevant literatures written by non-Chinese scholars, international news articles, and online resources based on non-Chinese media platforms.

Chapter II. Literature Review

The origins of efforts for improvement of women's rights in China is dated to the early twentieth century when China opened its port to the world, while it encountered "economic and military onslaught" from Japan and the West (Shen, 2016: 2). Yet, this chapter aims to have a chronological review of previous discussions on efforts for improvement of women's rights in China after the establishment of PRC in 1949. Many researchers, including Leung Alicia (2003) and Shen Yifei (2016), have argued that there are three significant periods to discuss the efforts to promote women's rights in China: Maoist China (1949-1976), the Deng Xiaoping era (1978-1992), and the Jiang Zemin era (1992-2002).

There also have been efforts for achievement of gender equality and women development in the Hu Jintao era (2002-2012) through a continuous process of amendment and institutionalization on legal devices, such as the *Law on Women's Protection* and *Chinese Women's Development Outlines (2001-2010).* Hu's leadership, however, has not brought about a greater level of efforts for women and social influence in comparison with the era of Mao, Deng, and Jiang. Xi Jinping's leadership (2012-present), in addition, has stated that China targets at women's empowerment, improvement of women's rights, and achievement of gender equality. Xi's leadership, in contrast, has imposed sociopolitical control and pressure on Chinese feminists and their discourses/movements, while framing them for political dissident forces against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and a potential threat to maintenance of social stability.

This chapter, in this sense, aims to investigate what efforts have been made to improve women's rights in China since 1949, yet only focuses on the three periods: the Mao era, the Deng era, and the Jiang era. It also examines limitations of the efforts that have influenced the emergence of a new generation of young feminists since 2012, while answering the following question: who are young feminists in China?

1. Efforts for Improvement of Women's Rights in Maoist China (1949 - 1976)

Women, throughout pre-modern Chinese society, had been excluded for sociopolitical participation and access to higher education due to traditional and patriarchal values and culture. Yet, along with the defeats from Opium Wars and Sino-Japanese War in the ninetieth century and subsequent treaties with the West in the early twentieth century, China should have opened its door to the world, so it had been influenced by a variety of western ideologies, including feminism, that had brought about the concept of women's liberation and gender equality into Chinese society (천성림, 2020: 54-56).

Mao Zedong, after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, opposed traditional values and perspectives imposed on Chinese women, and he emphasized the significance that women should be free from staying at home and participating merely in domestic chores. Mao argued that women should take active participation in social, economic, and political spheres, while advertising his famous slogan "Women hold up half of the sky (*funv neng ding banbiantian*)." [1] Mao desired to achieve women's liberation and gender equality in Chinese society, in hope of construction of a great socialist state. In order to establish a strong socialist country, Mao believed that women, as a "great resource" of labor, can be a solution to overcome the lack of labor force and help achieve rapid economic growth (Leung, 2003: 365; Shen, 2016: 9).

Women's liberation, in this sense, had become a part of state policy, and diverse efforts for promotion of women's rights were made through "progressive legislation" (Gregory, 2010: 159-160). As one of the first steps for improvement of women's rights, All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), under the leadership of the CCP, was established in April 1949 in order to facilitate a policy called '*Women's Work*,' ensure gender equality, and encourage women's active participation in production process (Hou, 2015: 80). Also, in order to socialize women

[1] In Chinese, "妇女能顶半边天."

into belief of gender equality, women were given "equal rights" to men in socioeconomic fields and an image of "iron women," a "proud" image of "masculinized women," who can work as hard as men (ibid.). This image of iron women was a state-led image implying that women had been liberated by the state. Also, Article 6 of the *General Provisions of the Joint Programme*, enacted in September 1949, specified that women's rights, in every sphere of Chinese society, were protected by the state. Women were also able to be liberated from traditional values and norms through their active participation in socioeconomic production, state-led movements for women, and achievement of economic independence via labor.

In addition, Mao, as one of the primary efforts for promotion of women's rights, sought to provide women with autonomy over their own body and choice. *The Marriage Reforms*, in so doing, was implemented in 1950 to guarantee women's rights to decide upon marriage and divorce, and it further brought about the end of "polygamy and prostitution" (Leung, 2003: 364). A policy of '*Equal Pay for Equal Work*,' in January 1954, was enacted as well, so it helped prevent women from being discriminated in their economic activities. During Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), discourses on feminism and gender equality were further developed and enriched. Women were able to be regarded as active participants both in economic production and politics. Also, women were remodeled into a stronger figure that were able to accomplish anything men can do, exactly behave as the same as men, and overcome gender differences. Women, in that regard, were motivated to be more active in every corner of Chinese society.

2. Efforts for Improvement of Women's Rights during Reform Era (1978 - Present)

Reform and Opening-up (*gaige kaifang*) in 1978, along with the beginning of the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, had opened a new phase of socialist market economy in China. Reform and Opening-up enabled China not only to achieve a remarkable economic growth, but

also to be exposed to Western values, perspectives, and influences. Deng's reform brought about a wider range of changes, including discourses on feminism and gender equality, into every sphere of Chinese society. Feminist theories from the West were introduced to Chinese society, and feminist discourses began to capture the Chinese' eyes. Deng's leadership, in December 1981, also joined the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in order to pursue a globalized perspective towards gender equality and universal standard of women's rights (Wang and Zhang, 2010: 45-46). The rapid economic development of China further facilitated emergence of diversified social groups and middle classes, and it brought about a greater range of complicated social demands for their rights and interests.

Women, in comparison with the Mao era, began to remodel their awareness on themselves from a desexualized image of iron women to a female identity of subjectivity, while seeking for their own interests and success rather than for "political rights" and women's liberation in general (Zhang, 2000: 94). Women were given opportunities to emerge as a new agent of growing middle class and to pursue career in education or profession (Leung, 2003: 368).

Market economy, however, had brought about intensified discrimination against women and issues of gender inequality in all spheres of China. Women, along with market liberalization, were faced with unfair treatments in terms of "hiring, rewards, promotion," and resignation from work (ibid.). A new kind of discrimination against women emerged, such as a greater level of gap in male and female employment ratio and wages. Many women, in this sense, lost their jobs, and they were also pressured to go back to kitchen for taking traditional roles of women: taking care of house chores and family (ibid.).

Deng's leadership, in this sense, began to put efforts to promote women's rights and solve the increasing problem of gender discrimination through top-down legislation. There were a greater range of laws and policies made in order to assure women's interests and protect their

rights. To be more specific, the state-led efforts for improvement of women's rights in the Deng era included "*Health Standards for the Design of Industrial Enterprises*" in 1979, "*Rules on Protection of Female Employees*" in 1988, "*Regulations on Work Restrictions for Female Employees*" in 1990, and "*Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests*" in 1992 (Leung, 2003: 267; Shen, 2016: 11).

When it comes to the Jiang era (1992-2002), the year 1995 opened a new chapter of Chinese feminism. In September 1995, the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women (FUNCW) held in Beijing, while bringing about significant changes that included the introduction of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and emergence of feminists in China (Hou, 2015: 81). FUNCW provided Chinese society with a variety of new approaches and opportunities to improve women's rights and achieve gender equality. Jiang's leadership, first of all, declared that gender equality was a basic state policy (*jiben guoce*) in China. Jiang then pledged to put efforts for improvement of women's rights, by disseminating the concept of gender equality to general public, empowering women, and including women's rights in human rights (정준호, 2011: 191).

1995 FUNCW gave rise to a variety of dramatic changes in Chinese society. First of all, Jiang's leadership initiated various top-down efforts that included establishment of state-led organizations in charge of gender equality and implement of systemic changes of laws and policies for gender equality. Jiang's leadership also initiated the policy of gender mainstreaming that aimed to reflect both female and male understanding, experiences, and values onto policy-making process for gender-equal laws, policies, and programs (두팡친, 2016: 145). It facilitated an approach of anti-discrimination against women, while integrating women into all agendas of gender equality in economy, politics, and society (김유미, 2019: 97-98). Jiang's leadership also advanced systemic institutionalization of laws and policies for

promotion of women's rights, along with a deeper understanding of specific and professional knowledges and nature of gender equality (Zhou, 2003: 71). It, moreover, amended a wider range of laws and policies to promote women's interests and rights, while reforming law enforcement, legal responsibilities, and legal procedures.

Another change after 1995 FUNCW, along with top-down legal efforts for improvement of women's rights, was emergence of feminist NGOs and its legalization (Shen, 2016: 9). There was no denying that Chinese feminism lacked a variety of platforms or channels for women to raise their voices. Although ACWF was a "representation" of top-down efforts for improvement of women's rights and state feminism, it had been often "questioned" since it, under the CCP's leadership, always put state ideology and national interests before feminism (Wang, 2005: 545-546; Shen, 2016: 18). Yet, 1995 FUNCW facilitated emergence of feminist NGOs that were able to include diversified voices of women and improve socioeconomic status of women in a practical manner, while having a huge influence on formation of the first generation of feminists in China.

A continued growth of feminist NGOs enabled the first generation of feminists to gain legitimacy by the Chinese authorities, to launch more NGOs for women empowerment, and to carry out feminist movements for improvement/protection of women's rights. 1995 FUNCW, moreover, provided feminists with an opportunity to raise their voices via NGOs, introduce the concept of NGOs to ordinary Chinese women, encourage them to participate in feminist activism, and connect with the international community of feminists.

Both feminist NGOs and feminist activism were ensured under Jiang's leadership. Feminists, in that regard, were in coalition with ACWF and the CCP, and their activism aspired to include their voices and opinions in policy-making process. Feminists were often "located" in the "official system" of the state, including government, ACWF, universities, or research centers, along with an easier access to social resources and power "in the system" (Wang, 2015:

477-478). Feminists, who emerged along with 1995 FUNCW, are now veteran feminists that have influenced young female individuals to become a new generation of feminists and have "backed up" young feminist activism with their social resources and systemic power (Hou, 2015: 79). 1995 FUNCW, in this sense, facilitated a China-distinct form of efforts for improvement of women's rights: top-down feminist activism in an "entangled triangular" cooperation among NGOs, ACWF, and the CCP, while establishing a foothold for emergence of bottom-up feminist activism (Hou, 2020: 341; Shen, 2016: 18).

3. Limitations of Efforts for Improvement of Women's Rights since 1949

As discussed above, there have been a variety of state-led (top-down) efforts for improvement of women's rights since 1949. Despite all the efforts, however, Chinese women are still faced with a harsh reality. According to The World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) report[2], China's rank has continued to fall: 64th in 2006[3], 103rd in 2016[4], and 107th in 2021[5]. WEF's GGGI report may indicate that there exists an entrenched and unsolved problem of gender discrimination and inequality in Chinese society, in spite of a wide range of top-down efforts for improvement of women's rights. This section, in this sense, answers to the following questions: what are the limitations of the efforts? Why were the efforts not able to achieve gender equality in China?

There is no doubt that the efforts for improvement of women's rights in Maoist China were the remarkable first step to promote women's rights, enhance women's status in Chinese society, and provide women with an opportunity to be liberated from the traditional, oppressive, and patriarchal society. The efforts yet met various limitations.

First of all, Mao's leadership targeted to achieve women's liberation, but it was never an

[2] It is an assessment of performance on gender gap in the following four aspects: educational attainment, economic participation and opportunity, health and survival, and political empowerment.
[3] Out of 144 countries.
[4] Out of 149 countries.
[5] Out of 156 countries.

ultimate goal for the promotion of women's rights, but a mere means to conduct sociopolitical reforms and revolutions for national interest and economic growth. Also, the efforts, under Mao's leadership, were carried out by male revolutionary intellectuals and the CCP through top-down legislation under the name of state feminism. Women, in this sense, were motivated to take a part in economic production for "agricultural reproduction" and economic growth in support of a prosperous socialist nation-building, however there was no further "distinct" efforts aimed for the ultimate emancipation of women (Leung, 2003: 363-364).

Second of all, Mao's leadership locked women up into a stereotyped image of iron women, while being masculine became the universal standard in Chinese society, and female identity or "subjectivity" were "eliminated" (Li, 1999: 270). Women, in effect, were desexualized, and their characteristics and diversity as female individuals were marginalized and ignored. Yang (1999) added that women, not married over in their thirties, or women with sexual "abnormalities," including lesbians, were "demonized."

Last of all, along with mobilization of women in economic activities, women were given equal and same rights as men in workplace, yet the gender equality "remained" merely at work (Du, 2002: 7; Shen, 2016: 9). Women, while taking responsibilities of economic production in workplace, still were required to take traditional roles at home as a daughter, mother, wife, and grandmother to deal with domestic chores, which imposed women a "double burden" (Hou, 2015: 80). It cannot be denied that ACWF carried out a number of efforts for women, including women's movements and establishment of legal devices that aimed to prevent women from taking "double burden" and improve women's socioeconomic status (ibid.). However, ACWF was not able to fully satisfy popular demands of ordinary Chinese women, since it was not an independent agent, but a mere proxy under a direct guidance of the CCP that had no understanding of true reality that ordinary Chinese women have faced.

When it comes to the Deng era, women, in spite of diversified state-led efforts for

promotion of women's rights, were faced with a shortage of "initiative" to raise their own voices for their interests and rights since state feminism "monopolized" feminist discourses (Shen, 2016: 18). Also, Deng's leadership seemed not to have a deeper understanding of how to deal with gender discrimination and gender inequality properly, because it enacted legislations for women not based on social differences on gender, but merely based on biological differences on sex (Leung, 2003: 367-368). Women, in so doing, cannot help but to continue encountering unsolved issues of gender discrimination and gender inequality in education, employment, and so forth. Indeed, since the 1990s, women's participation in labor was hugely declined, while facing lower social, economic, and political "recognition" of women (Eastin and Prakash, 2013: 156-157).

Furthermore, the efforts for improvement of women's rights in the Jiang era, in spite of remarkable changes since 1995 FUNCW, were faced with several limitations. The efforts, after all, were again top-down in general, and there was few bottom-up feminist activism carried out by feminists and feminist NGOs. Due to the triangular relationship among NGOs, ACWF, and the CCP, the feminist activities were too dependent on cooperation with the authorities (Hou, 2020: 341). It was not allowed for feminists and feminist NGOs to discuss sensitive and "politically incorrect" issues, including "nudity" or homosexuality, even though the issues were highly related to women's rights and called upon to discuss (Hou, 2015: 81).

The first generation of feminists, emerging after 1995 FUNCW, conducted feminist activism to call upon the authorities to establish relevant policies for improvement of women's rights, but had to work with the authorities in cooperation (박자영, 2020: 111). Feminists, in this sense, should put more stress on building a good and cooperative relationship with government organizations, rather than raising their own and independent voices.

There have been a variety of top-down efforts to improve women's rights and achieve

gender equality, yet Chinese women are still faced with gender-related issues in their everyday life. This has given rise to the emergence of a new generation of young feminists since 2012, while calling for a need to raise real and diversified voices of ordinary Chinese women and to make efforts for improvement of women's rights in a bottom-up manner.

4. Who Are Young Feminists?

Despite top-down efforts to promote women's rights and achieve gender equality since the establishment of PRC in 1949, the party-state system under the authoritarian regime has not guaranteed the rights of women, brought justice for women, and promoted gender equality. As shown above, Chinese women still have been faced with gender discrimination at every corner of their life at home, school, and job market. Under these circumstances, the alliance of young individuals (mostly female), have appeared in recent years, while claiming that they are feminists to raise their voices about gender-related issues, protect women's rights, and achieve gender equality. This alliance, as referred as a new generation of young feminists[6], has brought about a new form of feminist activism into Chinese society.

As discussed above, the first generation of feminists, emerged after 1995 FUNCW, has made efforts for improvement of women's rights in a triangular cooperation with NGOs, ACWF, and government organizations. They, in this sense, have made use of "social capital or networks" and "professional qualifications" within the "official system" in China, while they, somewhat, have detoured to raise their voices for women due to the triangular coalition (박자영, 2020: 100; Li and Li, 2017: 58; Wang, 2015: 477-478).

The new generation of young feminists, however, has taken a direct and an independent participation in feminist activism (as referred as young feminist activism) for improvement of women's rights. They, as also known as the second generation of feminists, have emerged since

[6] In Chinese, 青年女权行动派 (*qingnian nǚquan xingdongpai*).

2012 and shown distinct characteristics in comparison with the prior generation.

First of all, the new generation of young feminists consists of both female and male individuals that are college students or graduates in their late 20s or early 30s, yet most of them are female individuals. Young feminists have recognized that it is highly difficult for them to make a huge impact and bring about a wide range of social changes because they are too young to form social resources. Young feminists, in this sense, have made use of new strategies that were never seen in the history of Chinese feminism, while carrying out creative and grassroot feminist activism in large cities (i.e., Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai). Young feminists have come into public view in 2012, since they have gone out into streets, conducted performance arts, and carried out guerrilla-style actions to provoke public awareness of gender-related issues in Chinese society and to call for a need to improve women's rights (박자영, 2020: 95-96).

Second of all, young feminists are individuals who are familiar with social media and the Internet, so they have facilitated a 'making news' strategy, by making the most active use of social media, raising public awareness, and impacting the process of "policy agenda-setting" (Li and Li, 2017: 64). Young feminists are aware of the fact that it is difficult for them to conduct feminist activism without sociopolitical capitals, while keeping in mind that both their activities and themselves should not be regarded as something politically sensitive by the authorities. Young feminists, in that regard, have used online platforms for their own sake and appealed the public to support them, while establishing good "alliances" with media journalists (Han, 2018: 734-740). Online platform helps young feminists, in much easier and faster manner, share their experiences, opinions, and voices with general public. Social media indeed provides them with a new channel to post 'visually shocking' pictures and videos or 'vivid' messages and stories to address gender-related issues and provoke public awareness of gender equality.

Even though the year 2012 witnessed the emergence of a new generation of young feminists, many scholars have pointed out a problem of insufficient quantitative data on how

large this new generation of young feminists is or how many young feminists actually exist in China. To be specific, Wang (2018) and Wei (2015) state that there are young individuals who have participated in young feminist activism since 2012. Yet, this activism, indeed, was not "strictly" well-organized in a collective level, and it sometimes consisted of "a single individual" or few numbers of young feminists in an individual level (Wang, 2018: 61). This study, however, still claims that there has, regardless of its scale, number, or ability of organization, emerged a new generation of young feminists, and targets to look deep into young feminists and their activism emerged since 2012. This study defines 'all young individuals' who have raised their voices for improvement of women's rights or taken a participation in feminist activities/campaigns as 'young feminists,' regardless of their gender, scale, or numbers.

Chapter III. Beginning of Young Feminist Activism in 2012

The year 2012, indeed, was not the first time for Chinese women to take actions for promotion of women's rights, since there have been efforts made by the first generation of feminists and feminist NGOs in China. Yet, 2012 was a crucial year for Chinese feminism in that a new generation of young feminists began to capture public's eyes for the very first time. Young feminists, along with their emergence, started to gain a greater level of attention and support from the general public and media, while introducing a new model of bottom-up feminist movement to the ordinary Chinese.

This chapter, first of all, aims to explore what sociocultural factors may have given rise to the emergence of a new generation of young feminists in 2012. It also investigates four major street performances led by this new generation of young feminists in 2012: "Occupy Men's Toilet," "Bloody Brides," "I Can Be Slutty, But You Cannot Harass Me," and "Bald Sisters." It then discusses characteristics and significance of young feminist activism.

1. Sociocultural Factors of the Emergence of a New Generation of Young Feminists

1.1 Online Platform Development

One of the most direct factors to give rise to the emergence of a new generation of young feminists is the development of social media, while providing the Chinese with a perfect platform to express their opinions, build up social network, and further carry out relative campaigns (Yin and Yu, 2020: 1-2). Along with launch of Weibo and WeChat, in 2009 and 2011 respectively, there was an explosively increasing number of internet users, and there is no doubt that the 2010s has often called 'the era of the Internet' in China.

As shown in Chapter 1, most young feminists are young individuals who were born in late 1980s and early 1990s, and they are so-called 'a generation of digital native' that is familiar with the Internet, social media, and digital technology (박자영, 2020: 109). Young individuals, in that regard, are able to make the best use of the Internet and social media as a platform to

express and share diverse opinions in a faster and wider level of communication.

Young individuals, with the rapid spread of their shared opinions and experiences via online, have been exposed to discourses of gender discrimination in Chinese society that ordinary Chinese woman, including themselves, have experienced. It has made it possible for some young individuals to create a "feeling of solidarity" and empathy towards women, and it has made them realize that they need to do something to raise their voices against social discrimination based on gender.

Online space, in this sense, has taken a crucial role for young individuals to form a group of people to raise their voices to improve women's rights and achieve gender equality in China. This formation of a group of people has been developed into a new generation of young feminists that emerged in 2012, and young feminists began to "promulgate" a new form of feminist activism based on social media (Zeng, 2020: 173).

Social media is a perfect medium, as sociocultural capital and asset, that enables young individuals to build up a community of young feminists to "circulate" the need for feminism in China (Yin and Yu, 2020: 3). Social media also offers a favorable condition to the emergence of a new generation of young feminists in that it provides young feminists with a channel to vocalize their opinions, easily capture public's eye on them, and form public opinions that are beneficial to them.

1.2 Shared Values and Experiences within Similar Age Cohort

Another factor to make a huge impact on the emergence of a new generation of young feminists is young individuals' shared values and experiences within similar age cohort. Young feminists are so-called the millennial generation, and a number of young feminists, in general, are young female individuals in their late 20s or early 30s.

This similar age cohort of young feminists also has another characteristic that they were born under one-child policy in China. Along with rapid economic development after Reform

and Opening-up in 1978 and the implementation of one-child policy since the 1980s, the generation of young feminists have grown up with much love, “high expectation,” and support from family (Wang, 2017: 160-165). They, often referred as “little empresses,” have been “highly valued” by their parents or family members (Wang, 2017: 166-168; Wang, 2018: 62). They have also received a higher level of education, and some of them even have been able to gain an opportunity to go abroad for education or career. The young empresses, in this regard, have grown up with a higher expectation on themselves, while having confidence and faith in their social roles, contribution to society, or future career.

The reality in Chinese society, however, was different when they became grown-ups and stepped into the society. Young female individuals had never experienced discrimination based on gender from their parents or family members. Yet, they have met unexpected sexism and gender inequality against them, and they began to realize that gender discrimination has prevailed at every corner of Chinese society in education, profession, and everyday life. In comparison with the old generation in the Mao era that highlighted “collective-oriented values,” this new and young generation focuses on “individual-oriented values” (Yan, 2010: 2-3). Young individuals, in this sense, are more inclined to prioritize self-realization and pursue their own happiness.

This gives rise to a community of young female individuals that has aspired to call themselves ‘feminists,’ while they aim to social changes for their self-fulfillment and happiness. They, as well-valued and well-educated individuals, may not be able to put up with sexism and gender inequality within Chinese society. A new generation of young feminists, therefore, have been emerged based on a great level of encouragement to express their unsatisfaction with unfair treatment on women in Chinese society.

1.3 Phenomenon of Leftover Women

'Leftover women (*shengyu nvxing*)'[7] is a negative term to indicate unmarried Chinese women "beyond marrying age," mid 20s to early 30s (Shen, 2016: 17). The most noticeable characteristics of leftover women imply that they, in general, reside in urban cities, have received a higher level of education, and have a stable financial status on their own. Leftover women, in this sense, do not need men in their life, so they often prefer remaining single or being reluctant to getting married. Leftover women sometimes desire to marry, but fail to find an ideal partner to choose since it is too late for them to get married in their age or to find anyone left, even though age range from mid 20s to early 30s is not late for marriage.

This phenomenon of leftover women is related to the CCP. The CCP, since 2007, has encouraged Chinese women not to pursue a higher career in education or profession, but to get married. It has been one of the current propagandas of the CCP to highlight the importance of Confucian values, while encouraging women to return home, bear children, and take traditional roles of women (Fincher, 2014: 15-19). The CCP has even regarded the phenomenon of leftover women as a sociopolitical problem, while providing women with a possible solution: marriage. China has encountered a serious problem of low birth rate and aging population, so the CCP has pointed out that family is "the basic cell of society," as the very cornerstone to maintain sociopolitical stability of China (Fincher, 2018: 168). Chinese women, in that regard, seem that they have had a duty assigned to bear and raise children to form a hard-working generation in the future for stability and strength of China's party-state regime.

This whole phenomenon of leftover women seems too old-fashioned and even improper to young female individuals in China, since they are a "little empresses" generation and younger

[7] In Chinese, 剩余女性.

generation whose thoughts, lifestyles, life values have been changed, including a perspective towards marriage and childbirth (Wang, 2018: 62). Such discussion on leftover women, in that regard, provides young female individuals with an impression that Chinese society, full of traditional and male-dominated values, has imposed social repression on women to get married and bear children. 'Leftover women' frame, therefore, has made young females realize this phenomenon is a typical case of gender discrimination against women, and they have begun to raise their voices in order to break traditional roles and notions based on gender.

2. Four Landmarks of Beginning of Young Feminist Activism in 2012

As mentioned above, a new generation of young feminists has emerged, with formation of matched identity, under sociocultural contexts and circumstances in China. It has been developed into actual actions and eventually marked the beginning of young feminist activism in 2012, along with four landmarks of feminist campaigns.

2.1 "Occupy Men's Toilet"

"Occupy Men's Toilet" campaign, happened on February 19 2012 in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, was the very first performance art that let the public and media in China know the beginning of young feminist activism and the emergence of a new generation of young feminists.

One of the primary aims of "Occupy Men's Toilet" campaign was to build a bond of sympathy of inconvenience that Chinese women faced in daily life, waiting for longer lines to use public toilets than men. In fact, the male-female ratio of public toilets was unreasonable in China. Chinese women, indeed, were faced with shortage of toilet facilities in public, and it has been a "long-standing" problem of discrimination based on gender against women (Li and Li, 2017: 65).

Another main goal of the campaign was to gain nationwide support from ordinary Chinese people and call upon the government to install more public toilet cubicles for women. Also,

young feminists had to emphasize the need of systemic change to solve the problem of shortage of public toilets for women. To that end, the issue of lack of public toilets for women should not be viewed as a "politically sensitive" issue, and their campaign should not be regarded as an activity led by a group of dissidents against the CCP (Fincher, 2018: 7).

The campaign was supposed to be led by the alliance of both male and female students that consisted of approximately 40 young individuals from Guangzhou, Wuhan, Xi'an, Beijing, and Chengdu (Wang, 2018: 61).

<Image 1> "Occupy Men's Toilets"[8]
Photo courtesy of China Daily
(https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/photo/2012-02/20/content_14646961.htm)

Young feminists[9], during the campaign, held pickets in front of the public washroom and called for more public toilet cubicles for women, while occupying vacant cubicles in men's

[8] The slogan "女人更"方便" 性别更平等" written on the picket stands for "More convenience for women, more gender equality."
[9] As mentioned above, 'young feminists' in this study refer to unspecific individuals who got involved or have been getting involved in any form of young feminist activism. In this section, 'young feminists' are referred to the participants in "Occupy Men's Toilet" campaign.

washroom and letting women have "prior use" of toilets (China Daily, 2012/02/20). The campaign targeted to call on high-level law/policy makers to install more toilet cubicles for women and build more "asexual toilets," so women "no longer" had to wait for a longer time to use public washroom (Li and Li, 2017: 65). The campaign was introduced by newspapers all over China, including People's Daily and China Daily, and it gained a great extent of attention from media, while influencing young individuals in "nine other cities" to carry out "Occupy Men's Toilet" campaign in their cities (ibid., 65-67). The campaign itself became a hot issue in Chinese online platforms, especially Weibo[10] and WeChat[11], since it made it possible for connectedness in "multi-city" level and for "resonance" by appealing the public, media, and government (ibid.).

In addition, there appeared a number of young feminists who did not participate in in-person "Occupy Men's Toilet" campaigns, but desired to provide support "behind the scenes" (Wang, 2018: 61). They wrote letters, petitions, and reports to call on the media and government to regard the issue of insufficient facilities for women not as an individual problem, but as a social problem, demanding the authorities to make actual actions for women. Along with direct and indirect engagement in nationwide "Occupy Men's Toilet" campaigns, local governments began to respond to these efforts. Taking officials in Guangdong province as an example, they expressed their empathy with the issue of lack of female public toilets and pledged their support and implementation to establish more public toilets for women (Fincher, 2018: 18).

Local governments, indeed, failed to meet the promises made to young feminists and ordinary Chinese women. Yet, "Occupy Men's Toilet" campaign is still considered a significant movement of young feminist activism in that it facilitated collective actions in cities nationwide for improvement of quality of women's life, while making their voices heard.

[10] Weibo is a Chinese version of Twitter, one of the largest social media platforms in China.
[11] WeChat is the most used messaging/calling and social media app in China.

2.2 “Bloody Brides”

Domestic violence has been one of the common and chronical problems in Chinese society. A quarter of people in China have reportedly experienced domestic violence, including verbal, physical, and sexual abuse (Fincher, 2018: 79-82). Most victims of domestic violence in Chinese society are women who have chosen to remain in silence or endure violence, and they have not been able to gain “sufficient” protection and support from the state (Qi, Wu, and Wang, 2020: 383). In addition, according to statistics released by ACWF, female victims of domestic violence, on average, tend to tolerate 35 violent incidents before calling the police (刘茸 and 张雨, 2015).

Most female victims of domestic violence in Chinese society still choose to stay silent or compromise, and never ask for help since they want to maintain stability and peace within their family (Qi, Wu, and Wang, 2020: 383-385). Victims often think that domestic violence is not a serious problem since it is so common in Chinese society that they regard it not as a social problem, but as private affairs within household.

Young feminists began to consider that one of the prior jobs to do was to let ordinary Chinese people to understand how serious the issue of domestic violence in China was or has been. They also realized the need to call on the authorities to understand the importance that actions, to deal with the problem of domestic violence, were needed. Young feminists, in this sense, planned to conduct a street performance, as referred as “Bloody Brides (Injured Brides)” campaign, to demand attention and actions opposing domestic violence.[12]

On February 14 (Valentine’s Day) 2012, three young feminists (Li Maizi, Xiao Meili, Wei Tingting), dressed in wedding gowns stained with fake blood, appeared on Qianmen Street in

[12] “Bloody Brides” campaign was planned and carried out by Li Maizi, Xiao Meili, Wei Tingting who were well-known young feminists in China.

Beijing to raise awareness about seriousness of domestic violence in Chinese society.

<Image 2> "Bloody Brides"[13][14]
Photo courtesy of Lü Pin, Media Monitor for Women Network
(https://apps.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/aboveground)

There was a special reason for the three young feminists to plan to carry out the campaign on Valentine's Day (V-Day). They claimed that V-Day was represented as a symbol of romantic love in most countries in the world, but they wanted to make a different symbol for their campaign that the letter "V" referred "Victory over Violence" (Li, 2012). Li, Xiao, and Wei, walked along Qianmen street and chanted their slogan "Love is no excuse for violence," while their supporters for the campaign handed out cards and flyers opposing domestic violence to passers-by (Fincher, 2018: 19).

As seen from "Bloody Bride – V-Day Performance Art @ Beijing" uploaded on YouTube,

[13] "打不是亲, 骂不是爱, 不要暴力好好爱!" represents "Beating is not intimacy, swearing is not love, violence should not be a sign of love"; "暴力在身边, 你依然沉默?!" represents "Violence is around us, why do you stay in silence?!"; "爱, 不是暴力的借口" represents "Love is no excuse for violence."
[14] Li Maizi, Xiao Meili, Wei Tingting (Left to right)

which is a recorded video of “Bloody Brides” campaign, many of the passers-by were curious about the “Bloody Brides” parade, and some of them expressed their concern and support towards Li, Xiao, and Wei (Li, 2012). One of the male bystanders in the video admitted that “Bloody Brides” campaign was a significant action needed to raise public awareness of domestic violence in Chinese society, yet he also expressed his concern that it was not easy for the Chinese to raise their voices regarding this issue (ibid.). Another female bystander in the YouTube video (2012) agreed that the problem of domestic violence surrounded women all over spheres of Chinese society, and she also delivered her sympathetic words to Li, Xiao, and Wei, saying that they were brave to carry out this kind of campaign in public.

“Bloody Brides” campaign targeted to shed light on the problem of domestic violence against women, raise public awareness about it, and urge the government to establish legal devices to protect ordinary Chinese women from domestic violence. In comparison with “Occupy Men’s Toilet” campaign, unfortunately, “Bloody Brides” campaign did not attract much public attention at first. It is assumed that “Occupy Men’s Toilet” campaign consisted of more numbers of young feminists at a collective level, but “Bloody Brides” campaign included smaller numbers of young feminists at an individual level.

“Bloody Brides” campaign, nevertheless, succeeded in raising public awareness about the issue of domestic violence in Chinese society. It also influenced more young feminists to continue raising their voices and pushing authorities to support victims of domestic violence and protect them (Qi, Wu, and Wang, 2020: 383-384). One of the examples of continued actions led by young feminists, was “Nude Photo Against Domestic Violence” campaign led by Xiao Meili in November 2012, including 16 supporters’ participation (박자영, 2020: 99).

<Image 3> Xiao Meili – "Nude Photo Against Domestic Violence"[15]
Photo courtesy of Lü Pin, Media Monitor for Women Network
(https://apps.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/aboveground)

It was an online campaign to encourage people to post their nude pictures with "anti-domestic violence" slogans written on their bodies and call upon authorities to bring about legislative changes opposing domestic violence. This online movement was to initiate a signature-gathering campaign collecting 10,000 signatures to urge the authorities to implement legislation of Anti-Domestic Violence Law (ADVL) (ibid.).

This campaign gained widespread attention from a number of young feminists and ordinary Chinese people all over China, and it again aimed to raise public awareness about the need for ADVL. Along with all the efforts of young feminists, China enacted the first ADVL in 2016 (Xinhua.net, 2015/12/28). Many Chinese feminists, including veteran feminists and

[15] "反家暴法" reads "Anti-domestic violence law"; "立法" reads "Legislation"; "平胸光荣, 家暴可耻" reads "Having small breasts is an honor, domestic violence is a shame."; "万人签名征集中" reads "Collecting 10,000 signatures."

young feminists, believed that legislation of ADVL was a victory that they achieved after years of feminist activism and public advocacy (Rauhala, 2015).

"Bloody Brides" campaign in 2012, at first, did not gain a huge public attention, yet continued actions for anti-domestic violence led by young feminists made their voices heard by the authorities. Young feminists, after all, were able to bring about legal devices to protect women from domestic violence, as referred as the implementation of ADVL at the year of 2016.

2.3 "I Can Be Slutty, But You Cannot Harass Me"

"I Can Be Slutty, But You Cannot Harass Me" campaign started in response to a sexist post uploaded on the official WeChat account of Shanghai No.2 Subway Co. (上海地铁二远) on June 24, 2012. The post included a photo of a woman who dressed in a see-through skirt, waiting on subway platform. The post captioned "It is strange not to be sexually harassed if you wear like that. Please be careful, miss!" (青年女权行动派, 2019).

The sexist post on WeChat went viral, and it sparked a heated debate online. Some agreed that women should dress in a more conservative and proper manner when in public, yet others criticized that requiring women what to wear or how to wear was gender discrimination against women (BBC News, 2012/06/26). There was, however, no discussion or debate on what men should wear or how they should wear.

As the online controversy intensified, the subway operator, who uploaded the sexist post on WeChat, claimed that the post was not meant to discriminate women. He added that it was his responsibility to caution women against "potential danger" of being sexually harassed on subway, since there had been an increasing numbers of sexual harassment cases on subway (ibid.).

A group of young feminists in Shanghai, in response to this controversial issue, cannot help but to fight for discrimination and sexual harassment against women, so young feminists

protested in a subway station in Shanghai (ibid.).

<Image 4> "I Can Be Slutty, But You Cannot Harass Me"[16]
Photo courtesy of Lü Pin, Media Monitor for Women Network
(https://apps.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/aboveground)

More young feminists began to appear in platforms and escalators in subway stations in Shanghai. "I Can Be Slutty, But You Cannot Harass Me" campaign aimed to raise public awareness that sexual harassment, in public transportation or anywhere else, should never be justified by how women dressed. It also highlighted that women had freedom what to wear at whatever time, and the problem of sexual harassment was not caused by women, but by perpetrators (박자영, 2020: 98).

Both the sexist post uploaded on WeChat and the campaign led by young feminists went viral online, so it enabled young feminists to enrich discussions of sexual harassment in Chinese society. The enriched discussions included that we all should not judge women based

[16] "要清凉, 不要色狼" stands for "(Women) want to be cool, but (they) don't want perverts."; "我可以骚, 你不能扰" means "I can be slutty, you can't harass me."

on how they dressed since they had freedom, liberty, and autonomy over their own body (Hou, 2020: 348; Shen, 2016: 19). The discussions also covered that we all should throw away the attitudes of victim blaming on women when it comes to the issue of sexual harassment since what and how women dressed cannot justify the action of sexual harassment (Hou, 2020: 348).

Young feminists continued to call upon the public to advocate for their actions, while posting photos and videos of "I Can Be Slutty, But You Cannot Harass Me" campaign via social media platforms. Their continued actions, in fact, were not able to change sociocultural attitudes or atmospheres in China in that both sexual harassment against women and victim blaming on women, in general, still prevail. However, it was still significant for young feminists to keep raising their voices for anti-sexual harassment against women in public transportation and anywhere else, while advocating women's freedom over their garments and their own body.

2.4 "Bald Sisters"

Gender discrimination against women in education, especially in college admission, has been also a long-standing problem in Chinese society. Many programs at Chinese universities require women to "score higher" than men on National College Entrance Examination (*gaokao*) to be "accepted," and it is one of the certain cases of gender discrimination against women (Fincher, 2014: 166-167).

For instance, Le Ouyang, a female student from Guangzhou, scored 614 on her *gaokao* and was rejected from her program at the University of International Relations (Riviera, 2012). It is because the required score of *gaokao* for the program she applied was 628 for women, however it was merely 609 for men (ibid.). If she were a male student, she should have been accepted into the program she aspired.

In July 2012, in support of female students who had been faced with discrimination based

on gender in college admission, Lü Pin[17] and Huang Yizhi[18] wrote a "formal letter" to the Ministry of Education in China to address the issue why many programs at Chinese universities offered men an easier path to be admitted (Fincher, 2018: 19). The letter, which Lü and Huang wrote, also included complaints that requiring applicants different score based on gender was a certain case of gender discrimination. The Ministry of Education responded that one of the main reasons to favor men in college admission was that women, nowadays, "outnumbered" men in both undergraduate and post-undergraduate programs (ibid.). The Ministry of Education also argued that they had to take basic and "affirmative" action towards male students in order to "protect national interest" (ibid.).

The Ministry of Education responded to the letter, at least. However, it failed to provide sufficient reason and clarification on why many programs in Chinese universities required women to gain higher score to be accepted and why this procedure of college admission, favoring men, was related to protection of national interest.

[17] A feminist-journalist and founder of Feminist Voices (*nvquan zhisheng*), the largest feminist media in China (2009-2018).
[18] A well-known feminist lawyer in China.

<Image 5> "Bald Sisters"[19]
Photo courtesy of Lü Pin, Media Monitor for Women Network
(https://apps.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/aboveground)

Young feminists believed that procedure of college admission, including Le's case, was unfair to women, and they took an action to address this issue in public. On August 30 2012, "Bald Sisters" campaign was carried out by young feminists in southern Guangzhou to address the issue of gender discrimination in college admission. Four young feminists including Le, as a part of their campaign, shaved their heads in public and uploaded pictures and videos of "Bald Sisters" campaign via social media. The story of their campaign received a great attention on Weibo, especially (Riviera, 2012).

"Bald Sisters" campaign influenced a young woman named Xiong Jing and her two female companies to take the same "Shaving Bold Head Action" in Beijing on the following day (Hou, 2015: 79-80; Riviera, 2012). Moreover, after the campaign gained a greater attention

[19] "亮出你的特殊专业" means "clarify your special majors."; "教育部回复=0" means "The reply from the Ministry of Education is zero."

in media, young female individuals in other cities such as Shanghai and Tianjin also started to shave their heads to protest gender discrimination against women in college admission.

Young feminists continued to raise their voices to address the issue of gender inequality in college admission and called upon the authorities to implement relevant policies to deal with this issue. In 2013, the Provisions of Admission of Entrance Examination of Institutions of Higher Education in China, in order to prohibit discrimination based on gender, eventually provided a "clearer" requirement and guidelines for procedure of college admission (Chen, 2015).

"Bald Sisters" campaign was a crucial movement to raise public awareness of one of the long-standing problems in China, gender discrimination against women in Chinese education system. It started with Le's case at an individual level, but it became a collective-level action that called for a need on systemic and legal changes for a clearer and fairer process of college admission.

3. Characteristics of Young Feminist Activism

Young feminist activism, along with the four significant campaigns in 2012 discussed above, has shown three distinct characteristics: body politics, online activism, and coalition politics with LGBT communities.

3.1 Body Politics

As mentioned above, some researchers have argued that young feminists, who appeared in 2012, are mainly female college students or graduates in their 20s or early 30s, so they lacked "social capital, social networks, and professional qualifications" (박자영, 2020: 100; Li and Li, 2017: 58). The new generation of young feminists, in fact, include both male and female feminist activists, and their professions may vary, yet there is no doubt that they are a young generation with few social resources. It, therefore, is highly difficult for young individuals to raise their voices and mobilize the public since they lack social resources.

Young feminists have been aware of the reality that they face, so they cannot help but to find a new means to express their opinions, raise public consciousness, and put pressure on the authorities to take actions for promotion of women's rights. Under these circumstances, the only weapon that young feminists can possess is their own body, and their body becomes their politics to raise their voices to improve the reality that Chinese women have faced.

The strategy of body politics for young feminists is very simple: the use of their own body. They went out to the streets to carry out performance arts, while drawing public attention and demanding response from the authorities. Their body politics includes that they occupied public spaces; they dressed in visually-shocking outfits; they wrote "vivid" or "bold" messages and slogans on their naked body; they shaved their heads (Li and Li, 2017: 61-62). Direct engagement in performance arts on streets, moreover, helps young feminists deliver important messages for improvement of women's rights by singing, dancing, or chanting, as a more friendly approach to the public.

Young feminists, in fact, have no choice but to find another way to raise their voices since they lack social resources, and they are not in cooperation with government organizations. They, therefore, aspire to use their own body, one of the smart tactics of young feminist activism. Young feminists' strategy of using their own body, as a visually-shocking weapon of their activism, has drawn a huge attention from both the public and mass media, and their intended messages and stories have been heard, directly and properly.

3.2 Online Activism

Given that young feminists made use of their body as a weapon, social media and the Internet was their battlefield. Young feminists have succeeded to raise public awareness and capture attention from the media, but it is not enough for them. Young feminists, indeed, have desired to make their voices heard in policy-making process, so they can get involved in making practical and legal efforts for improvement of women's rights. Young feminists, in this sense,

have made an active use of social media, especially Weibo and WeChat, as a channel to express their opinions, making them heard by the authorities (Hou, 2015: 79).

Young feminists, during their direct participation in street performances, took a number of photographs and recorded short films of their campaigns. They then uploaded the photos and films on Weibo and WeChat in order to make their activism a hot issue in Chinese society. Along with increased attention from the public and media, it has made it difficult for the authorities to merely ignore them voicing out, so young feminists have succeeded in putting pressure on and eventually gaining "policy responses" from the government (Li and Li, 2017: 54).

Social media has enabled young feminists to carry out their activism in a much easier way, as an active channel for them to provoke debate in public, gain public support, and impose pressure on the authorities to react. It also has offered young feminists an opportunity to bring about more grassroots discussions and debates on gender issues in Chinese society, while propagating the reality that Chinese women have dealt with. Social media, in this sense, has taken a crucial role as an active and effective communication method of young feminists.

3.3 Coalition Politics with LGBT Communities

Another characteristic of young feminist activism is that young feminists have established coalition with Chinese LGBT communities (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgenders), and this coalition is built based on two specific factors: (1) development of social media and (2) empathy as social minorities.

First of all, the development of social media enables young feminists to cooperate with LGBT communities, especially lesbian communities. As mentioned above, online platform has taken a significant role as a battlefield for young feminists to bring feminist discourses into Chinese society. Social media, in that respect, has enabled easy and rapid spread of young feminists' voices, opinions, and stories via online. It has also facilitated extended discourses

from women's rights to human's rights, so LGBT identities have been included in discourses in Chinese feminism.

Social media is a new platform for young feminists to establish "open coalitions" that mobilize people with a variety of identities to support their feminist campaigns (Hou, 2015: 84-85). One of the noticeable examples, as shown in Chapter 3, is "Nude Photo Against Domestic Violence," an online campaign led by Xiao Meili in 2012. The campaign consisted of 16 participants that posted their nude photos to oppose domestic violence, and it turns out that the participants are members of LGBT communities. Social media is a "leaderless" and "non-programmatic" space where anyone, with no single fixed identity, can share their opinions, carry out campaigns, and form "open alliance" among different identities (ibid., 84).

Second of all, discourses on feminism and non-heterosexuality are a minor topic, and both feminists and LGBT communities are social minorities in China, since both have faced discrimination based on their thoughts, gender, or sexuality.

This new generation of young feminists, of course, include both male and female feminists, but most of young feminists are female individuals who have experienced discrimination against women in all spheres of Chinese society. They also have witnessed Chinese women in potential danger of sexual misconduct at home, school, or workplace. What's worse, young feminists, after the arrest and detention of the Feminist Five in 2015, have been regarded as a group of 'politically incorrect' individuals (ibid., 83). LGBT communities, in comparison with young feminists, have met heavier social prejudices, discrimination, and hatred. Discourses on homosexuality, "were" and "still are" tabooed in Chinese society, as shown in an official statement, made by the Chinese authorities in 2021, saying that homosexuality is "mental diseases" (Hou, 2020:346).

Both young feminists and LGBT communities, in this regard, may have had mutual empathy and a sense of solidarity, as social minorities that have had similar experiences of

unjust discrimination and treatment. It enables both to establish a cooperative relationship to raise their voices together in order to fight for improvement of their rights and protect their interests. Some young feminists, including Li Maizi and Wei Tingting, have worked at NGOs to advocate for rights of LGBT communities. Some members of LGBT communities also have participated in young feminist activism to fight against sexism and gender inequality (Wei, 2015: 322; Wu and Dong, 2019: 474).

Young feminists have been able to form a good connection and mutual empowerment with LGBT communities, since development of social media helps them include LGBT identities into feminist discourses. Also, both young feminists and LGBT communities, as regarded as social minorities, have conducted coalition politics to raise their voices and fight against discrimination based on their empathy for each other.

4. Significance of Young Feminist Activism in 2012

The prior generation of feminists, emerged after the 1995 FUNCW held in Beijing, was inclined to fight against gender discrimination and inequality through top-down establishment of relevant policies. In this sense, it was crucial for them to work in cooperation with ACWF and the CCP, and they had to build up a good relation with government organizations. It resulted that improvement of women's rights was often pushed back on the priority list, but interests of state always became a priority. In contrast, this new generation of young feminists directly raised their voices without affiliation with ACWF and the CCP, while being more grassroots and creative.

In 2012, young feminists, armed with their own body and alliance with LGBT communities, went into online platforms as known as their battlefield, while diverging and converging from online to offline, and vice versa (Hou, 2015: 80). They, in so doing, were able to capture huge attention and support from the public and mass media, while sparking with a visually-shocking performances on streets.

It, of course, was difficult for young feminists to make huge impact on Chinese society and influence high-level decision-making process, but they raised public consciousness of need for improvement of women's rights and brought about feminist discourses in Chinese society.

Young feminists have aspired to shed light on sexism in all spheres of Chinese society: home, education, and employment. The way that young feminists spoke out was a way of bottom-up feminist movements, while taking a creative approach to make their activities not as a political movement, but as a part of "culture" or "art" (Hou, 2015: 79). The new generation of young feminists has also paved the way for continued young feminist activism, while influencing the emergence of the Feminist Five, strong waves of Me Too Movement, and continuous post-Me Too Movement.

Chapter IV. Turning Point of Chinese Feminism: Emergence of the Feminist Five in 2015

The year 2012 witnessed a variety of feminist campaigns led by the new generation of young feminists. Since 2012, young feminists have made continued efforts for women, and these continued actions have enabled to mark emergence of the Feminist Five in 2015.

1. Continued Young Feminist Activism since 2012

In May 2013, the principal of Wanning Elementary School in Hainan Province was allegedly accused that he took six schoolchildren to a hotel and sexually harassed them (Tatlow, 2013). In response, Ye Haiyan, an advocate for rights of women, children, and sex workers, stood up to protest sexual harassment and violence on children in front of Wanning Elementary School.

<Image 6> Ye Haiyan – Protest Against Sexual Harassment and Violence on Children
Photo courtesy of Lü Pin, Media Monitor for Women Network
(https://apps.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/aboveground)

On May 27 2013, during Ye's protest, she was holding a picket that read "Principle, get a room with me. Leave the kids alone," and she left her contact information[20] on the picket (ibid.). The picture of her protest was posted online, and the post quickly went viral on social media platforms. It made it possible for the protest to gain widespread attention from the public, and many internet users participated in posting their own pictures that they were holding a picket to support Ye's protest sexual harassment and child sex abuse (ibid.).

Another continued young feminist activism was "Beautiful Feminist March" campaign that was carried out by Xiao Meili, one of the well-known young feminists.

<Image 7> Xiao Meili – "Beautiful Feminist March"
Photo courtesy of Lü Pin, Media Monitor for Women Network
(https://apps.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/aboveground)

[20] "联系电话 12338" that reads "phone number 12338."

In September 2013, Xiao started to trek from Beijing to Guangzhou. During her journey, she passed through six provinces and more than 50 cities, and covered 2,500 kilometers for almost three months (Fincher, 2018: 33). Xiao launched her march as a part of an effort to raise public awareness of opposing sexual harassment against women, so she trekked with a slogan "(We) oppose sexual harassment; women should be free." Xiao's march also aimed to break social prejudice against women that some things, including trekking, were too dangerous for women. Xiao believed that this kind of social prejudice indeed limited women's way of thinking and behavior, so she endeavored to show the public that she, by herself, completed her journey. Xiao further stopped by local government offices and submitted 165 proposals during her journey to call on local education ministries and governments to take actual and concrete actions for anti-sexual harassment (박자영, 2020: 100-101).

Furthermore, in 2014, there was an advertisement posted on Baihe, Chinese online dating service, that forced Chinese women into marriage. Young feminists, in response to the sexist advertisement, launched an online protest on WeChat to require the deletion of marriage-forcing advertisement on Baihe on February 14 2014 (ibid.). About 10 young feminists further conducted a street performance in front of the headquarter of Baihe against the advertisement (ibid.). Young feminists tried to raise public consciousness that forcing women to marry had been one of the political propagandas of the CCP. It is because the CCP, since 2007, had framed urban, highly educated, and unmarried women as 'leftover women (*shengyu nvxing*)' and forced them to marry and focus on taking traditional roles of women, such as childbirth and nurture (Fincher, 2014: 15-19). Young feminists, in this sense, called upon the public, media, and society to stop forcing women to get married, and they emphasized that it was also significant for Chinese women, as same as men, to focus on taking high-level education and building their career.

2. Emergence of the Feminist Five in 2015

Along with continued young feminist activism since 2012, the year 2015 became a great turning point of Chinese feminism due to the Feminist Five, five young female individuals. Based on Chinese Human Rights Defenders Network, these five women were Zheng Churan, Li Maizi, Wang Man, Wu Rongrong, and Wei Tingting, and they later became known as the "Feminist Five." Zheng Churan, as known as Giant Rabbit, was a staff at Yirenping Center[21] based in Guangzhou; Li Maizi was a manager of LGBT program in Beijing Yirenping Center, and she had led many feminist campaigns including "Bloody Brides," and "Bald Sisters" in 2012; Wang Man was a coordinator at Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) and Feminist Task Force; Wu Rongrong established Weizhiming Women's Center based in Hangzhou in 2014, and she was a former staff member at Beijing Yirenping Center for the program of women's rights; Wei Tingting, was a director of Ji'ande, a Beijing-based organization for LGBT rights.

[21] Yirenping Center, founded at Beijing in 2006, is an independent and non-profit NGO. This Beijing-based organization has its offices in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Hangzhou. The main goal of this organization is to eliminate discrimination in education and employment against the disabled and weak who suffered from hepatitis B and AIDS and promote their rights and health. Three feminists out of the Feminist Five-Zheng Churan, Li Maizi, and Wu Rongrong- worked or had worked at Yirenping Center.

<Image 8> The Feminist Five[22]
Photo courtesy of Chinese Human Rights Defenders Network
(https://www.nchrd.org/2015/03/chrb-5-womens-lgbt-rights-activists-detained-in-escalating-clampdown-on-ngos-36-1215/)

For the annual celebration of International Women's Day on March 8, the Feminist Five organized an advocacy event for anti-sexual harassment in different cities, including Beijing, Guangzhou, and Hangzhou. They planned to carry out their campaign on the eve of International Women's Day, so their campaign was often referred as "*Sanqi Tietietie*," which read "March 7 Stick Stick Stick" (Guo, 2015). It was because the five young feminists were supposed to place stickers and flyers on "public transport vehicles" for opposition to sexual harassment against women on public transportation (ibid.). The Feminist Five, with a larger group of young feminist activists, lawyers, and NGO staffs, were well-prepared for their long-waited campaign to raise public awareness about how often sexual harassment against women

[22] Zheng Churan, Li Maizi, Wang Man, Wu Rongrong, and Wei Tingting (clockwise from top left).

occurred on public transportation.

However, on March 6 2015, the day before their campaign planned for International Women's Day, the authorities took an unexpected action. The Feminist Five and a group of young feminist activists were arrested by the Chinese police merely for planning to "spread messages" in public (Wang, 2018: 59). The Feminist Five were "each arrested" from different cities and sent to Beijing Haidian District detention centre (Wang, 2015: 480). The arrests, in an instant, gained both domestic and international attention "within and outside" of the community of young feminist activism (Impiombato, 2020). The main reason for such attention is that the arrests of young feminists occurred twenty years after 1995 FUNCW in Beijing, the first UN conference held in China (Fincher, 2016: 85). Xi Jinping, in 2015, was also in preparation to "co-host a UN summit" on promotion of women's rights in New York to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of 1995 FUNCW in Beijing (ibid.).

It seemed extremely ironic that Xi's leadership had shed light on the significance of achievement of gender equality, fight for women's protection and empowerment, and improvement of social conditions for women, while appealing international leaders and communities. Yet, the Chinese authorities, at the same time, cracked down on bottom-up feminist movements. The Feminist Five might have remained a mere small group of anonymous young feminists, however the Chinese authorities "itself" made them represent a crucial symbol of Chinese feminism that fought bravely for improvement of women's rights against the patriarchal and authoritarian state (ibid.). If the Feminist Five had not been arrested, both they and their planned campaign may not have attracted such domestic and international attention.

3. Arrest and Detention of the Feminist Five

After the arrest of young feminist activists, including the Feminist Five, other arrested

feminists were released after a week, yet the Feminist Five were detained in prison for 37 days (Li and Li, 2017: 54). The Feminist Five had carried out a variety of feminist movements before, but they never expected that they would be arrested. The Feminist Five, however, ended up being arrested and detained for "disorderly conduct" and "picking quarrels and creating a disturbance" that were typical Chinese justifications to suppress dissidents against the authorities (Fincher, 2016: 85; Hu, 2016: 17). The Chinese authorities even accused the Feminist Five of spying for "foreign forces," especially the United States (Fincher, 2016: 84-87).

The detention of the Feminist Five became one of the most heated issues in the international community that went viral on social media such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and it inspired international citizens to take an online hashtag movement for promotion of their release (박자영, 2020: 102). Hashtag is a word or phrase that is prefaced by the pound sign (#) on social media platforms. To put it simply, a hashtag is a way for people to search specific words or phrases. For instance, if one search "#TheFeministFive" on social media platforms, one will get a list of all the posts including "#TheFeministFive," thereby it will get a lot easier for people around the globe to search specific subjects, topics, and issues. About 2 million global netizens, after all, used a hashtag #FreeTheFive in their posts on social media and invite their followers to use the hashtag to call for more attention and participation from the public (The Wall Street Journal, 2015.04.16).

The story of arrest and detention of the Feminist Five quickly spread all over the world through the hashtag campaign on social media, and the Chinese authorities was faced with much criticism from international leaders and organizations (Fincher, 2016: 85). For instance, Hilary Clinton uploaded a post on her Twitter, directly criticizing Xi for his ironic action that he was in preparation of an UN meeting for the improvement of women's rights, but persecuted

young feminists at the same time (Clinton, 2015). Also, a variety of pictures and videos calling for release of the Feminist Five were uploaded by supporters of them on social media. One of the significant pictures was that a group of young feminists covered their face with the photos of the Feminist Five, and they appeared on public transportation or streets, while expressing a feeling of solidarity and showing their support to the Feminist Five.

<Image 9> Masked Chinese Activists[23]
Photo courtesy of Asia Society[24]
(https://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/interview-masked-chinese-activists-show-solidarity-detained-feminists)

A number of feminists, human rights activists, and international leaders in the globe continued criticism against Xi's leadership and called upon the Chinese authorities to release

[23] "3月7日 女权倡导者被捕 第一天" represents "March 7 is the first day of the arrest of women's rights activists."

[24] The photography was originally posted by masked Chinese activists on Weibo and WeChat, but they gave the permission to Asia Society to share the photo(s) that they took, and some of original photos were deleted on their account on Weibo and WeChat.

the Feminist Five, thereby the authorities was faced with "diplomatic and social" pressure from the international community (Fincher, 2016: 84-86). On the 37th evening of detention of the Feminist Five, the Chinese authorities released the five young feminists on bail due to "media pressure" from the globe, while bending to transnational pressure (ibid., 88). The release of the Feminist Five was considered as the victory of everyone involved, including the Feminist Five, feminist and human rights activists, and all individuals who had shown their support to the Feminist Five.

4. Significance of the Feminist Five

The arrest and detention of the Feminist Five have become a turning point of Chinese feminism. This incident made the Feminist Five go through difficulties and injustice, however it also provided them with a "spark" of possibility in social mobilization for promotion of women's rights and gender equality in China (Fincher, 2016: 85; Wang, 2015: 476).

It cannot be denied that planning and engagement in feminist activism, after the arrest and detention of the Feminist Five in 2015, has been much more difficult since the Chinese authorities has undercut activities and movements of young feminists. There were few "safe spaces" for young feminists to carry out activities, raise their voices, and appeal the public and media (Impiombato, 2020). In addition, even though the Feminist Five were released, they have remained "criminal suspects" and under "continued" investigation since the Chinese authorities has suspected that they again may "disturb" social stability and oppose the Chinese authoritarian regime (Fincher, 2016: 85-86; The Wall Street Journal, 2015.04.16). In addition, the Chinese authorities has continued media censorship and control, crackdown, and other restrictions on feminist activism and activities of feminist NGOs.[25]

[25] One of the examples is that the Chinese authorities prosecuted Beijing Yirenping Center and charged them of law violation. Yet, it is believed the only fault of Yirenping Center in Beijing was allegedly that three of the Feminist Five (Zheng Churan, Li Maizi, and Wu Rongrong) worked or had worked there.

The Feminist Five, despite all the challenges, have encouraged ordinary Chinese women to pay more attention to gender issues (i.e., sexism, sexual misconduct) that prevail in their everyday life. They have further mobilized Chinese women to raise their voices and take actual actions to make their voices heard by the public, mass media, and political leaders inside and outside China.

The arrest and detention of the Feminist Five are often considered a crucial symbol of feminism in contemporary China, since it has become the very significant representation of bottom-up social mobilization and grassroot movement in China ever since 1989 Tiananmen Square Protest for Democracy (Fincher, 2016: 84-90). The Feminist Five, in this sense, have provided young feminists in China with a great opportunity to build up a sense of solidarity inside and outside China. They, in addition, have shown the international community that feminists, in spite of Chinese patriarchal and authoritarian regime, have existed in China along with efforts for improvement of women's rights and achievement of gender equality in China.

Chapter V. Chinese Me Too Movement in 2018

In October 2017, Me Too Movement began in the United States along with numerous sexual abuse allegations against Harvey Weinstein, a prominent Hollywood film producer. It had triggered nationwide Me Too Movement in the US and soon mobilized worldwide Me Too Movement in 2018, including China. The year 2018 witnessed that Chinese women, through their participation in Me Too Movement, started to break silence, share their experiences in public, and build up a sense of solidarity with each other.

1. Beginning of Me Too Movement

Me Too Movement in China was started by Luo Qianqian, a software engineer in California, US, when she shared her story via Weibo on January 1, 2018. Luo claimed that she was sexually harassed by Chen Xiaowu, her former Ph.D. supervisor in 2006 when she was a doctoral student under Chen's supervision at Beihang University, China (Liu, 2021: 2). Luo, inspired by the beginning of Me Too Movement in the US, found herself a sense of guilty in that she might have made other female students a victim of sexual harassment since she had remained in silence about the incident of 2006 (沈杏, 2018). Luo, in this sense, reached out 6 other female alumni who also had been sexually harassed by Chen, collected testimony and evidence from them, and reported it to Beihang University for investigation (Yin and Yu, 2020: 7). However, Beihang University disregarded Luo's request, claiming that there was no need for investigation on Chen (김미란, 2019: 157-158).

In November 2017, Luo found out that Huang Xueqin, a young feminist working as a journalist and non-profit activist in Guangzhou, was conducting a survey on sexual harassment against female journalists via WeChat. Luo then reached out to Huang, with a hope of that Huang might know how to initiate Me Too Movement in China. On January 1 2018, Luo uploaded a recording file of the whole story of her experiences on Huang's account on Weibo,

and Huang added more detailed descriptions on Luo's post. Luo's post on Weibo immediately reached more than 4 million views and 17,000 likes, and Luo gained 3,000 followers on Weibo just in two days (김미란, 2019: 157-158; Denyer and Wang, 2018).

Along with a huge public attention on Luo's story, only about two weeks after Luo shared her story of "Me Too" on Weibo, Beihang University fired Chen for his sexual misconduct against his female students (沈杏, 2018). On January 14 2018, the Ministry of Education of China took an "unprecedented action" in that it declared that it would never tolerate any sexual harassment and violence of professors against students, and it would fight against sexual misconduct in university and further academia (김미란, 2019: 157-158). Luo's case has been regarded as the very first case that marked the beginning of Me Too Movement in China. Luo's action has brought about Me Too Movement into China via social media platforms, and it has also inspired numerous Chinese women to be brave to break silence and raise their voices.

2. Spread of Me Too Movement

Along with Luo's brave action that initiated Me Too Movement in China, Li Youyou, an alumna from Peking University, accelerated the spread of Me Too Movement throughout Chinese society (Liu, 2021: 3). Being inspired by Luo's courageous action, Li decided to share a story of her friend Gao Yan who committed suicide in 1998 after being sexually assaulted (卢义杰 and 杨慧彩, 2018). Li and Gao were undergraduate students in Peking University at the year of 1995. Gao was a student under the supervision of Shen Yang, a professor in the Department of Chinese (김미란, 2019: 160-161). Shen, since 1995, had been sexually assaulting Gao, yet she had been remaining in silence about what happened. However, when Gao no longer put up with the "abusive relationship" and decided to break silence, Shen started spreading gossip that she had a psychopathic behavior (Liu, 2021: 3). Gao, after all, committed suicide in 1998, because she no longer tolerated.

After the incident, Gao's friends and family called upon Peking University to investigate on Shen, but the university treated it as a mere "improper relationship," and Gao's friends and family never received sufficient treatment and response (ibid.). However, after 20 years, Gao's friend Li took a brave action to share this unjustified experience and treatment that Gao had suffered, and Gao's story attained a huge amount of public and media attention. The Ministry of Education in China, several months later, deprived Shen's *Changjiang* Scholar Award[26] and fired him from his position at Nanjing University[27] (김미란, 2019: 160-161).

Inspired by Luo and Li's courageous actions as the first marks of Chinese Me Too Movement, a number of ordinary Chinese women, via social media platforms, began to share their own experiences with sexual harassment, abuse, and assault. They, moreover, started to realize that sexual harassment had prevailed at every corner of Chinese society within "interpersonal settings," household, school, workplace, and military (Denyer and Wang, 2018). Chinese women, in this sense, pointed out that their voices should be heard and respected by the public, media, and the authorities in order to make fundamental changes for eradication of sexual misconduct in Chinese society.

Since the beginning of Chinese Me Too Movement in 2018, there have been a great amount of stories, including 36 "notable" cases that Chinese women had been sexually misconducted by high-profile men in academia, NGO, media, and politics (Lin and Yang, 2019a: 119). Wu Chunming, a professor at the Department of History in Xiamen University, was MeToo-ed by his students since he committed regular sexual harassment against his former Ph.D. students (中国米兔展, 2019). In addition, Lei Chuang, a human rights activist who established a non-profit organization *Yiyougongyi,*[28] was MeToo-ed by several female volunteers that had worked

[26] *Changjiang* Scholar Award, as known as *Yangtze* River Scholar Award, is an award for scholars only with high-level academic achievement, and it is regarded as the highest level of honor in Chinese academia.
[27] Shen, in 2018, was working as a professor at Nanjing University.
[28] *Yiyougongyi* is a non-profit organization that aims to improve social circumstances of people with hepatitis B

for his organization（嘉远, 2019）.

Moreover, Zhu Jun, one of the most famous Chinese TV stars who had hosted New Year's Gala on CCTV (Chinese Central Television) for 20 years, was MeToo-ed for sexual harassment by Zhou Xiaoxuan who later became a pioneer of Chinese Me Too Movement (Huang and Sun, 2021: 677). Furthermore, the most recent and biggest Me Too allegation was erupted on November 2 2021. Peng Shuai, a Chinese retired professional tennis player, as called as "Chinese princess" and "golden flower," claimed that she had been sexually assaulted by Zhang Gaoli, a former vice-premier in China (Davidson, 2021).

It is difficult for victims of sexual misconduct to speak out their experiences in public. It is, indeed, more difficult for victims to vocalize in China where traditional values and patriarchal attitudes are still rooted in society, and media control and censorship also prevail. Chinese women, however, started to take courageous actions to break silence, and it made it possible for Me Too Movement to spread throughout Chinese society.

3. Pioneer of Me Too Movement: Xianzi

Along with the continued spread of Me Too Movement in China since 2018, Zhou Xiaoxuan, as known as Xianzi, recalled her experience of sexual harassment in 2014. Xianzi wrote a 3,000-word essay and uploaded it on her Weibo, to express her empathy and a feeling of solidarity to all victims of sexual harassment and violence (Ni, 2020). Xianzi accused that Zhu Jun, one of the best-known TV hosts in China, sexually harassed her in 2014. She claimed that she, when working as an intern journalist at CCTV in 2014, visited Zhu's dressing room to interview him, yet Zhu tried to touch her and kissed her by force (박민희, 2021: 206). Xianzi, on the very next day, went to a police station to report the incident. However, when she went back to the police two days later, the police, who seemed to be in higher rank, suggested that

and fight for their rights.

she better consider Zhu's position and role in Chinese society and drop the charges against him. The police even appeased her to consider her parents who were working as public officials in her hometown, Wuhan, so Xianzi decided to remain in silence (ibid.).

However, inspired by continued Chinese Me Too Movement since 2018, Xianzi shared her experience of sexual harassment 4 years after the incident. In July 2018, on Weibo, she shared her experience and further delivered a crucial message towards Chinese women. Her post implied that it was highly important for Chinese women to speak up, talk about their experiences, and let the society know what Chinese women have encountered and suffered (ibid.). Her story and message on Weibo went viral, and it was something that she never expected. Tens of thousands of women all over China read her post and sent their messages to support her, show her a sense of empathy, and establish a feeling of solidarity with her (小安, 2020).

In August 2018, Zhu Jun denied all allegations and filed a lawsuit against Xianzi for defamation, arguing that there was no single evidence of sexual harassment. In addition, Zhu put Xianzi in a claim for damages of his reputation and mental health, and his lawyers framed Xianzi as insane (Ni, 2020). Xianzi yet decided not to step back, so she also filed a lawsuit against Zhu for a sexual misconduct (Huang and Sun, 2021: 677). Xianzi uploaded a post on Weibo, saying that she was ready to fight, and she defined herself as an advocate for victims of sexual misconduct. Xianzi, in this regard, created a Weibo account called "Xianzi and her Friends"[29] not only to record the process of lawsuit against Zhu, but also to vocalize for sexual misconduct victims with a goal of improvement of women's rights.

The case of lawsuit between Xianzi and Zhu became the very landmark of Chinese feminism, since there have been a number of Me Too allegations on social media platforms,

[29] The account is "弦子与她的朋友们" in Chinese. The link: https://weibo.com/u/6640656158

but there have been few cases that ended up making it to the court (Huang and Sun, 2021: 677; Liu, 2021: 1). It is, in general, believed that the stakes for lawsuits against sexual misconduct, gender discrimination, or "gender politics" are extremely high due to social atmospheres and law system in China (Huang and Sun, 2021: 677). This is why Xianzi became the pioneer of Me Too Movement in China, and became a "symbolic voice" of Chinese Me Too Movement, showing the public and society how far she can go and how far Chinese feminism can go (박민희, 2021: 207, 209).

< Image 10> Xianzi at the People's Court in Beijing[30]
Photo courtesy of Oah Y., SupChina
(https://supchina.com/2020/12/10/12-hours-outside-haidian-peoples-court-chinas-landmark-metoo-case/)

[30] Xianzi holding a picket with "必胜" that stands for "must win."

After two years, the case between Xianzi and Zhu made it to the first trial. On December 1 2020, the day before the first trial, Xianzi uploaded a post on Weibo saying that she wanted this lawsuit to become one of the important moments for Chinese women to break silence, support themselves, and fight for themselves (박민희, 2021: 209). She added that it was not too important whether to win or lose the trial since if she won, she could leave other women courage; if she lost, she could leave a question over Chinese history (ibid.).

< Image 11> A Supportive Picket for Xianzi at the People's Court in Beijing[31]
Photo courtesy of Oah Y., SupChina
(https://supchina.com/2020/12/10/12-hours-outside-haidian-peoples-court-chinas-landmark-metoo-case/)

On December 2 2020, Zhu refused to attend the first trial, and it was a closed court that lasted for 12 hours (Chen, 2020). More than 100 people gathered in front of the people's court in Beijing, Haidian District to show Xianzi their support. Many supporters were carrying a

[31] "弦子，历史人民在你身边！" written on the picket stands for "Xianzi, history and people are on your side."

variety of posters and pickets to show their support for Xianzi. State-run media in China were restricted to report the first trial, and the police were also present to ask Western media to leave from the gathering (Chen, 2020; Huang and Sun, 2021: 677).

The case of Xianzi, however, was unexpectedly covered by global media.[32]. It was the first time that a case of sexual misconduct in China attained international attention. Although the case was not reported by state-run media in China, the supporters of Xianzi took pictures and videos of the gathering and posted them on Chinese social media platforms, hash-tagging "The trial that Xianzi sued Zhu Jun for sexual harassment began today" (박민희, 2021: 209-210). [33]

Xianzi was just a mere un-known young female who once decided to remain in silence, yet she has become a pioneer of Chinese Me Too Movement, by breaking silence and inspiring sexual misconduct victims to take courage and speak up.

[32] According to Huang and Sun (2021), the global media includes "The New Work Times, the BBC News, The Guardian, ABC in Australia, and the South China Morning Post."
[33] The original hashtag is #弦子诉朱军性骚扰案今日开庭."

< Image 12> Xianzi's Supporters at the People's Court in Beijing[34]
Photo courtesy of BBC News
(https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55140026)

4. Characteristics of Me Too Movement

One of the remarkable characteristics of Me Too Movement in China is that it made it possible for Chinese young women to take "large-scale" participation and build up a feeling of solidarity (Yin and Yu, 2020: 13). Along with young feminist activism from its beginning in 2012 to emergence of the Feminist Five in 2015, young feminists have been faced with increased pressure of media censorship and sociopolitical repression from the authorities and society. Me Too Movement has provided young feminists with a great opportunity that they can reignite the fire of young feminist activism and enrich feminist discourses in public. Chinese Me Too Movement, similar to other young feminist campaigns since 2012, has been

[34] Xianzi's supporters were holding a variety of posters and pickets, including "MeToo" and "我们一起向历史要答案" that represents "We together want an answer from history."

developed and spread via social media platforms, especially Weibo and WeChat. Me Too Movement, in this regard, shows distinct characteristics: (1) the use of WeChat poll, (2) the active use of hashtag, and (3) the tactic of camouflage.

First of all, Huang Xueqin, a young feminist-journalist in Guangzhou, posted her photo of holding a sign #MeToo on her social media in November 2018 (Denyer and Wang, 2018). Huang, as a victim of sexual harassment, understood that it was highly difficult for Chinese women to go public and participate in Me Too Movement since Chinese society, with its patriarchal and traditional culture, is such a closed society for this kind of discourses. In this sense, Huang thought of a different approach to encourage Chinese women to speak up for themselves: the use of poll on WeChat. In order to offer Chinese women a platform to share their experiences, she made a poll on WeChat and "invited" 255 female journalists to ask whether they have been ever sexually misconducted, while the participants in the poll remained anonymous (ibid.). The poll showed that more than 80% of respondents said that they have had experiences of sexual harassment and violence (ibid.).

<Image 13> Huang Xueqin Holding a Sign #MeToo
Photo courtesy of Huang Xueqin
(https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/chinese-women-reveal-sexual-harassment-but-metoo-movement-struggles-for-air/2018/01/08/ac591c26-cc0d-4d5a-b2ca-d14a7f763fe0_story.html)

The poll, which Huang carried out, might seem a regular survey on sexual harassment against women. However, WeChat provided Chinese women with a more comfortable platform for them to vocalize their experiences and take a non-public participation in Me Too Movement. The poll, led by one of the victims of sexual misconduct, also enabled Chinese women to feel that they were not alone, and to have a feeling of connectedness.

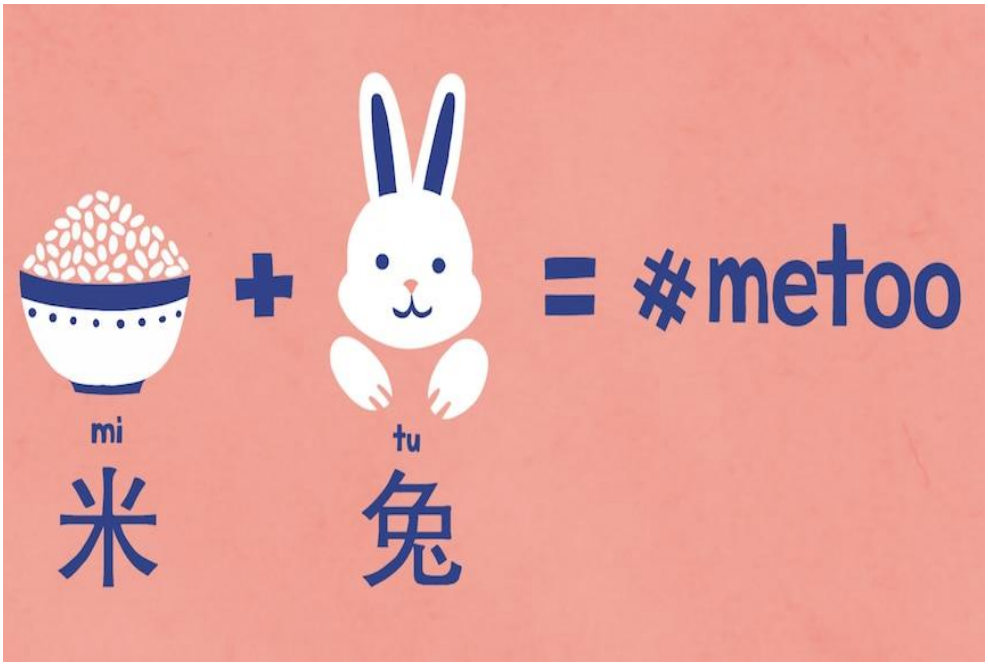
Second of all, Me Too Movement, in general, is referred to '#MeToo Movement' since hashtag activism has taken a significant role for the global success of Me Too Movement. The success of Me Too Movement in China has also relied upon hashtag activism. In this sense, '#MeToo' made it possible for Me Too Movement to become quickly viral and gain widespread

attention from all over the world (Han, 2019: 1). '#MeToo' has also allowed Chinese women to share their experiences with their friends, families, and followers, and further enabled them to connect with others in the globe in a short amount of time (Yin and Yu, 2020: 5).

'#Metoo' has also offered individuals, both female and male, an opportunity to show their support for victims of sexual misconduct and established a feeling of connectedness. Social media platforms provided victims of sexual misconduct with a great space to build up a sense of solidarity with a community of people who had similar experiences. Along with the development of the great space online, '#MeToo' has allowed Chinese women to explore "like-minded women" to be connected with each other and to enrich their discourses on Me Too Movement and feminism (Lin and Yang, 2019a: 118).

Last of all, Chinese Me Too Movement has the tactic of camouflage as the most distinct characteristics. Along with the development of Me Too Movement, the Chinese authorities strengthened its media censorship, so the posts, including #MeToo or #MeToo related stories, were censored and deleted to prevent Me Too Movement from spreading quickly throughout Chinese society. Young feminists had to employ a variety of tactics to keep spreading Me Too Movement to "counter" strengthened censorship (Liu, 2021: 3).

One of the most used camouflage tactics was the creation of homophones. For example, young feminists devised camouflaged hashtags such as #RiceBunny, #MiTu, and #米兔 to enable that the hashtags were not observed as "sensitive" and deleted by censorship (Liu, 2021:3; Zeng, 2020: 182). 'Rice Bunny,' written as '米兔' in Chinese, is "phonetically pronounced" in 'Mi Tu' in Chinese that pronounces as same as 'Me Too' in English (Zeng, 2020: 183-184).



<Image 14> Rice Bunny (Mi米+ Tu兔) = #MeToo
Photo courtesy of Marcella Cheng, The Conversation
(https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-06/ricebunny-metoo-how-chinese-social-media-users-campaign/9400106)

Also, when Xianzi MeToo-ed Zhu Jun for sexual harassment, all the posts on social media platforms, including 'Zhu Jun (朱军),' were unavailable to access or deleted. Young feminists, in response, devised an alternative word '猪菌' that had the same pronunciation to 'Zhu Jun,' but meant "swine bacteria" to continue spreading Me Too Movement and showing support to Xianzi (ibid.).

A group of young feminists also devised alternative hashtags such as *#WoYeShi* and #我也是, Chinese translation of #MeToo, and further created #IWillBeYourVoice to avoid censorship (Yin and Yu, 2020: 9; Zoo, 2018). Many alternative hashtags soon became censored on social media platforms, so young feminists again employed various tactics of camouflage, using an image of rabbit in rice bowl, emoticons of rabbit and rice, foreign languages or dialects (Liu, 2021: 3, Zeng, 2020: 182-184).

5. Significance of Me Too Movement

Me Too Movement has provided Chinese women with a new space for them to break silence. It is, in general, difficult for Chinese women to talk about their experiences of sexual misconduct within such old-fashioned values and patriarchal atmospheres in Chinese society, so most of sexual misconduct victims have chosen to stay silent. Yet, with the development and spread of Me Too Movement in China, Chinese women were able to recognize "seriousness" of sexual misconduct that prevailed throughout Chinese society and to decide to fight against it (Lin and Yang, 2019a: 117). Social media platforms, as a battlefield, helped Chinese women share their experiences and opinions and express their support to victims of sexual misconduct, by posting, reposting, and commenting (Yin and Yu, 2020: 8). Along with ordinary Chinese women's engagement in Me Too Movement, young feminists were able to mobilize a wider level of public participation in Me Too Movement.

Me Too Movement has also helped victims of sexual misconduct to achieve self-rescue. Sexual predators should be blamed on their misconduct, yet victims, mostly female victims, have been blamed in general. It affects victims to have complicated feelings such as shame, guilt, disappointment, sorrow, anger, and regrets (Lin and Yang, 2019a: 121). However, Me Too Movement has helped victims overcome their negative feelings, while they tell their stories, become united with other victims, and console each other (Lin and Yang, 2019b: 844). To be specific, as shown in Xianzi's Me Too case and her current legal fight, sexual misconduct victims were able to have a comfort feeling that they were not alone, and they started to raise their voices and support each other. They, in this regard, "no longer" feel any shame or guilt on themselves, empowering each other to "leave behind" all their negative feelings and wounded identity as a woman (Lin and Yang, 2019b: 844, 846).

Moreover, Me Too Movement began with a purpose of fighting against sexual misconduct against women. Yet, Me Too Movement later has extended a wider and greater level of

discourses in public, "engendered" more active public engagement, and raised public awareness about the issue of sexual misconduct, sexism, and gender inequality (Yin and Yu, 2020: 11). There was, indeed, no single channel for ordinary Chinese women to talk about this kind of discussion. Yet, the spread and development of Me Too Movement in China have facilitated more enriched discourses and actions, including pro-choice, anti-racism (i.e., #BlackLivesMatter), support for gender minorities, emergence of young feminists (both male and female), and overseas feminist activism (Feminist China, 2021/07/12; ibid., 2021/10/03).

6. Continued Young Feminist Activism after Me Too Movement

The year 2018 witnessed the beginning and spread of Me Too Movement in China. Chinese Me Too Movement was not a mere short-term movement, but it is a continuous movement. This section aims to introduce two specific cases of continued Me Too Movement since 2018: (1) Global4Jingyao Movement and (2) #FreePengShuai Movement.

6.1 Global4Jingyao Movement

Global4Jingyao Movement, one of the remarkable cases of continued Me Too campaigns, is a movement to support Liu Jingyao, an undergraduate student at the University of Minnesota, who accused Liu Qiangdong of sexual assault. Liu Qiangdong, as known as Richard Liu, is a Chinese billionaire that founded JD China, one of the largest e-commerce companies in China. In 2018, Qiangdong was studying at the University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management for a doctoral program designed for "Chinese executives" (Furst, 2020). In August 2018, Qiangdong was arrested by Minneapolis police for raping Jingyao, yet he was not pressed any charges and even released "within 24 hours" (Li, 2019; Furst, 2020). [35] Jingyao thought that the release of Qiangdong was so unjustified that she decided to follow the flow of

[35] Liu Jingyao and Liu Qiangdong are not related, yet both have the same last name "Liu." In this section, their first names, Jingyao and Qiangdong, are used to clarify who's who.

global Me Too Movement in 2018. Jingyao, in so doing, shared her stories in public that she was raped by Qiangdong, and further filed a lawsuit against him.

Yet, in December 2018, Minneapolis prosecution decided not to press charges on Qiangdong, since there was no sufficient evidence that he raped Jingyao. Qiangdong, after being freed, started to claim that there was, in fact, sexual intercourse between two of them, but it was "consensual" (Furst, 2020). The case of Jingyao captured a huge attention from the public and media in China, but it turned out that it was not one of the successful cases of Me Too Movement. Jingyao became "slut-shamed" by 800 million internet users via social media platforms in China (Li, 2019). Many netizens began to call Jingyao "a slut, whore, liar, and gold digger," and they started to accuse her that she voluntarily slept with Qiangdong, one of the most high-profile men in power, to blackmail him for money (Furst, 2020). Jingyao was devastated, since she was a victim of sexual assault, but she became a mere gossip that has been mocked and criticized from the public and media in China.

Young feminists, in this sense, cannot help but to take an action to show Jingyao their support and arouse public support to the case of Jingyao. They claimed that sexual wrongdoers should have been blamed and punished for their misconduct, and called on the Chinese not to blame Jingyao. In April 2019, along with support from young feminists, Jingyao again decided to sue Qiangdong for sexual assault and subsequent damages, and this trial is an ongoing case until the present. Young feminists, in order to support Jingyao, have been taking both online and offline actions.

<Image 15> Online Photo Rally for Jingyao
Photo courtesy of Global4Jingyao, Instagram
(https://www.instagram.com/p/B7be51YFmn2/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

As online actions, young feminists have begun to post pictures of themselves that were holding a sign that included messages such as “We support Jingyao (我们支持 Jingyao),” “We believe Jingyao (我们相信 Jingyao),” and “We are not perfect victims either (我也不是完美受害者).” (Global4Jingyao, 2020/01/18). They, in addition, made an active use of hashtag activism to encourage their friends, family, and followers to take a part to spread this supportive movement for Jingyao inside and outside China. The hashtags included “hereforjingyao,” “here4jingyao,” “global4jingyao,” and so forth (ibid.).

<Image 16> Offline Rally for Jingyao
Photo courtesy of Global4Jingyao, Instagram
(https://www.instagram.com/p/B7UeenhlWnD/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

As offline actions, young feminists, on January 28 2020, planned to gather in Minneapolis and hold a rally in front of Hennepin County District Court, Minneapolis, where the first trial that Jingyao sued Qiangdong was held (Global4Jingyao, 2020/01/15). About 25 young feminists, including male and female, gathered and held pickets and signs to support Jingyao (Furst, 2020). The participants in the gathering for Jingyao desired to let Jingyao know that she had not been alone during her tough journey against Qiangdong, and they had been always there for her.

Young feminists, in fact, are still in progress of supporting Jingyao until the present. They have continued to make their voices heard by more individuals inside and outside China, in order to make them witness what efforts young feminists have made to support victims of sexual misconduct and provide Jingyao with more attention and support.

6.2 #FreePengShuai Movement

Another case of continued Me Too campaigns is a movement to support Peng Shuai, a Chinese tennis star. On November 2 2021, Peng uploaded a post on Weibo that accused Zhang Gaoli, who was a former vice-premier in China, of sexually assaulting her 3 years ago, and her post immediately spread throughout Chinese society via social media platforms (艾莎 and Myers, 2021). Ever since the beginning of Me Too Movement in China, Zhang was the one with the highest level of sociopolitical position among sexual predators who were MeToo-ed.

Peng's accusation of Zhang, in this sense, became a very sensitive and uncomfortable subject to the current leadership of Xi Jinping. Peng's post was deleted in about 20 minutes after she uploaded, and Peng's Weibo account became unavailable to access due to censorship by the CCP. It was also banned for the Chinese to search "Peng Shuai" and "Zhang Gaoli," and the Chinese even were not able to search "tennis" on the Internet (Zhong and Buckley, 2021). It assumes that the CCP aimed to silence all discourses and debates in terms of this case.

After Peng's allegation on Zhang, what's worse, she completely disappeared for almost 2 weeks. A rumor, which she was detained or endangered, spread via social media and the Internet, and people in the globe began to be concerned about her safety and well-being (ibid.). Therefore, young feminists led both online and offline campaigns to show support for Peng and impose pressure on the Chinese authorities. They started hashtag activism, posting #WhereIsPengShuai and inspiring social media users to post, re-post, and share the hashtag.

<Image 17> #WhereIsPengShuai
Photo courtesy of Feminist China, Instagram
(https://www.instagram.com/p/CWcGaa4sARd/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=)

Young feminists, along with their online campaign, devised an offline "Rally for Peng Shuai." It was an overseas movement held in Washington Square Park, New York.[36] According to Feminist China 女权中国 (*nvquan zhongguo*) (@feministchina), an Instagram account run by a group of Chinese young feminists, young feminists cannot help but to break silence, so they planned to carry out an emergence rally on November 21, 2021. They also demanded guarantee of Peng's safety and a "transparent investigation" on the case of #MeToo accused by Peng (Feminist China, 2021/11/19). During the rally for Peng, young feminists held pickets

[36] "Rally for Peng Shuai" is an overseas movement held in New York, yet it was planned and carried out by Chinese young feminists who live in the US.

with “#FreePengShuai,” showing support for Peng and chanting “Free Peng Shuai” and “Let her speak” (ibid., 2021/11/23).

<Image 18> Offline Rally for Peng Shuai
Photo courtesy of Feminist China, Instagram
(https://www.instagram.com/p/CWlY47QLY2D/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

A few weeks after Peng’s disappearance from public, Peng was seen in public. There was a video shared in November 2021, where Peng had dinner with other people at a restaurant. In December 2021, she appeared in Shanghai to participate in a sport event, and had an interview with a Singaporean newspaper. Peng, during the interview, withdrew her allegation on Zhang and claimed that she had never been sexually assaulted by anyone. She said that there must be a “huge misunderstanding” of her post that she had written on Weibo, and she was never endangered or detained under “official watch,” saying that she was just resting at home (Wang and Song, 2022; Zhong and Buckley, 2021).

Young feminists, however, continued raising their voices for Peng and alleged that Peng, under control of the Chinese authorities, was only allowed to speak what she was told, especially “only direct quotes” by the authorities (Feminist China, 2022/02/07). Young

feminists further asserted that every single appearance and interview of Peng was a kind of a puppet show in that Peng had been forced to wear makeup, smile at camera, and say what she was told by the authorities (ibid.).

There have been a variety of feminist activities and campaigns as a part of post-Me Too Movement, besides Global4Jingyao Movement and #FreePengShuai Movement. Yet, this section targets to introduce two distinct cases of post-Me Too Movement, as the most noticeable and active efforts at the year of 2022 in present China. Young feminists' fight never ended yet. They, via both online and offline, have continued to make their voices heard and aspired to form a supportive, powerful network to fight against sexual misconduct in China.

Chapter VI. Significance and Challenges of Young Feminist Activism in China since 2012

1. Significance of Young Feminist Activism

The emergence of a new generation of young feminists in 2012 has brought about a new model of bottom-up feminist movements into Chinese society, while making a smart use of street performances, body politics, online platforms, and alliance with LGBT communities. The four significant feminist campaigns, carried out by young feminists in 2012, have marked the beginning of the emergence of a new generation of young feminists in China.

Young feminist activism in 2012 is the very foundation that has enabled to mark a turning point of Chinese feminism with the emergence of the Feminist Five in 2015 and brought about strong waves of Me Too and post- Me Too Movement since 2018. As shown in the development of Chinese Me Too Movement in 2018, young feminists have fought against sexual harassment and violence, while inspiring victims of sexual misconduct to take courageous actions and speak out. They further have tried to raise public awareness and call upon the public to engage in efforts for improvement of women's rights in China.

Young feminists, armed with smart strategies for their activism, have highlighted the notion of 'women empowerment' and 'women's rights,' while enriching feminist discourses in Chinese society (Tan, 2021: 1). Along with their "making news" tactic, they have made feminism as a heated topic in China, and asked for support from the public and media in order to gain legitimacy of their feminist activism (Hou, 2015: 79; Yin and Yu, 2020: 8). The enriched discourses of feminism in China include gender issues in everyday life of Chinese women: lack of public spaces/facilities for women, gender discrimination against women in education and employment, and a long-standing problem of domestic violence and sexual misconduct against women. The discourses also include criticism on old-fashioned perspectives and fixed structures in Chinese society, with its patriarchal and authoritarian

atmospheres in sociopolitical aspect, that have hindered Chinese women from speaking out for their rights.

Young feminists, moreover, never detoured. They directly speak out about their opinions, raise their voices, and gain attention from the public and media, while making an active use of social media. Young feminists have provided ordinary Chinese women with a new opportunity to build up a coalition that enables them to believe that power of a singular woman is limited, but power of a group of women is unlimited (Lin and Yang, 2019b: 845-846).

The development of solidarity of Chinese women, therefore, makes it possible for young feminists to have been able to form public opinion in a direct contact with them, and further impose pressure on the authorities to listen to their opinions and voices. Direct and active efforts of young feminists, in this sense, have resonated "fundamental messages" for improvement of women's rights and brought about larger-scale "collective actions" at grassroot level (Zeng, 2020: 175).

2. Challenges of Young Feminist Activism

There is no denying that young feminist activism, since 2012, has brought about a new wave of Chinese feminism and an important influence into Chinese society. Yet, this study finds six challenges that young feminist activism has faced.

2.1 Ideological Repression

China, despite its long span of history and "vast territory," has been able to maintain socio-cultural continuity and uniformity (Ward, 1985: 42). Confucianism, as the grounds for "Chinese-ness," "real Chinese way," or Chinese identity, has wielded a significant impact upon Chinese society and culture, and even influenced Chinese people's decisions, roles, behaviors, norms, and ways of thinking (ibid., 42-43, 49).

Confucianism, as a fundamental philosophy and an orthodox ideology, was and has been the mainstream of Chinese culture and society from traditional China to contemporary China.

Confucianism, however, is often blamed for oppression of Chinese women, and Chinese young feminists "criticize" that Chinese women's lower social status and poorer treatment, comparing to men's, have been "determined" by Confucianism (Clark and Wang, 2004: 395; Woo, 1998: 100). It cannot be denied that Chinese women, throughout a long span of Chinese history, suffered from utter "misery" – "female infanticide," "the binding feet," arranged marriages, polygamy, "widow suicides," obedience to men (i.e., father, husband, and son), and these sexiest norms and practices are deeply rooted in Confucianism (Clark and Wang, 2004: 395).

Confucianism historically "promoted" gender inequality in Chinese society – an androcentric and a patriarchal society – where sexual discrimination and inequality were taken for granted. (Jiang, 2009: 228). Confucianism, along with gender-biased practices, functioned and has functioned as the very ideological foundation of Chinese women's low status and "moral inferiority" in household and society (Tan, 2021: 1). Confucianism also contributed to gender inequality in Chinese society by marginalizing women and limiting women's role to obedience as a mere "follower of men" (Clark and Wang, 2004: 396; Lee, 2018: 145). As seen in *Book of Rites*, Confucius requires women to follow so-called "Three Obedience of Woman" that women should obey fathers, husbands, and sons – it implies unbalanced power relations between men and women.

Confucius, in addition, underscores that everyone has her/his own social roles in society, and individuals should do their own duties – it is the virtue. Confucius also considers that men are superior to women, so men have been able to gain more opportunities and active roles in profession, education, and politics in Chinese society (Jiang, 2009: 232-234). Yet, women, in general, have been expected to stay home, serve husband, take care of children, and do household chores (ibid., 233). Based on a survey conducted by *Zhilian Zhaopin* (智联招聘) in 2020, one of the HR service providers in China, about 60 percent of 65,000 Chinese women responded that they were still faced with gender discrimination in employment due to

stereotypes of traditional gender roles derived from Confucianism (Zuo, 2021). Most of respondents said that they, during job interviews in the "hiring process," were often asked if they were married and if they had children, or if their marital status or child-care responsibilities may hinder them from balancing work and family (ibid.). Yet, Chinese men, in general, are not asked with such questions.

Chinese women's roles, duties, and norms, throughout Chinese history, were "abused" and oppressed, and their roles are still limited under the name of becoming virtuous and taking proper roles of women in Chinese society (Lee, 2018: 140). It is undoubted that Confucianism, as the ideological foundation that gives rise to entrenched discrimination based on gender, is one of the biggest challenges that hinders Chinese women from enjoying the same opportunities and privileges as men. It further makes young feminists' journey to improve women's rights tougher and tougher, in terms of inherent and continuous conflicts between Confucianism and feminism.

2.2 Political Repression

China has faced a variety of serious internal and external challenges that have threatened legitimacy of Chinese party-state system (Baranovitch, 2021: 249-250). The challenges include economic slowdown, environmental pollution, aging population, pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, competition for hegemony with the US, 2022 Beijing Olympics boycott, and so forth (ibid.). Chinese current leadership under Xi, in this sense, cannot help but to highlight the significance of patriarchal authoritarianism for the survival of the CCP, thereby Xi has endeavored to become an ultimate strongman (Fincher, 2018: 13-14). Under current sociopolitical circumstances in China, Xi's leadership has taken a strong action not to tolerate any form of collective actions in order to ensure social order and stability and maintain legitimacy of the CCP (Fu, 2017: 500-501; Huang and Sun, 2021: 678).

The Chinese authorities has repressed young feminists since their activism has inspired women from various classes and professions to raise their voices, while building a community of solidarity and taking collective actions (Liu, 2021: 3). There is no denying that Xi's leadership has regarded young feminist activism as a "high risk" of overthrowing traditional "gender norms" that Xi has emphasized for the stability of patriarchal-authoritarian regime (Impiombato, 2020). Xi's leadership has begun to put pressure upon young feminists, their movements, and feminist NGOs, regarding all of them as dissident forces against the CCP and state that have been contaminated by Western values and ideas, or further foreign forces (Fincher, 2018, 13).

Wu Rongrong, for instance, is one of the members of the Feminist Five that were arrested by the Chinese police and detained for 37 days in 2015. The reason of her arrest and detention was only because the Feminist Five planned to hand out stickers and flyers for anti-sexual harassment on public transportation to celebrate International Women's Day. After her release, Wu applied a study visa to pursue a law degree in Hong Kong, but the visa was denied by the Chinese authorities under the name of "10-year travel ban" (Yang and Feng, 2017). Wu further was told that if she ever had planned any kind of similar actions that she had in 2015, the authorities would take it as "confrontation" against the CCP and state (ibid.).

Huang Xueqin, in addition, one of the well-known young feminists, helped Luo Qianqian share her experience of sexual harassment on WeChat, the very first case of Chinese Me Too Movement. Huang, as a victim of sexual harassment, also participated in Me Too Movement and provided ordinary Chinese women with a space to share their stories and opinions. Huang is a journalist based at Guangzhou, so she reported pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong in June 2019 to show support for the protesters, and she called upon Chinese women to show support for Hong Kong (Feminist China, 2020/03/22). Huang soon was arrested by Guangdong police officers, and her passport was "confiscated" in August 2019 (ibid.). Huang was detained

in October 2019 in the charge of her continued actions of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," one of the common charges that the Chinese authorities has used to "silence" feminists and human rights activists (ibid.).[37]

Along with political repression on young feminists, the Chinese authorities has also oppressed "civil society" organization and NGOs in relation with young feminists (Li and Li, 2017: 68). One of the noticeable examples was that the Chinese authorities, in 2015, prosecuted Yirenping Center, a Beijing-based independent and non-profit NGO that has fought discrimination against the disabled and weak (The Wall Street Journal, 2015/04/16). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China alleged that Yirenping Center "violated law" and stated that Yirenping Center will be punished, yet it never provided further details (BBC News, 2015/04/15).

Young feminists have stated that Yirenping Center has not done anything illegal. Yet, the only thing it did, which made the authorities offended, was that it had "lobbied" for release of the Feminist Five and put pressure on the authorities to withdraw all charges on the Feminist Five (BBC News, 2015/04/15; The Wall Street Journal, 2015/04/16). Also, three young feminists (Zheng Churan, Li Maizi, and Wu Rongrong) out of the Feminist Five worked or had worked at Yirenping Center, thereby it was assumed that the authorities had "threatened" to punish Yirenping Center due to its connection to the Feminist Five and feminist activism (BBC News, 2015/04/15).

The CCP has no choice but to prevent possibility of formation of civil society that may bring about the problem of legitimacy and survival of its party-state regime. The CCP has tried to undermine a space for young feminists to raise their voices and address gender issues entrenched in Chinese society: discrimination based on gender in every corner of society.

[37] Huang was released on January 17 2020.

Political repression both on young feminists and related organizations, therefore, has made a huge impact on young feminists to encounter difficulties to carry out sustainable feminist activism.

2.3 Media Censorship and Control

One of the most important priorities of the Chinese authorities is to maintain social stability and order, thereby the authorities is inclined to be intolerant of large-scale collective actions or gatherings, movements, or protests that are regarded to be a huge threat to stability of Chinese society (Li and Li, 2017: 55). In 2012, when young feminists first captured public attention, their gatherings or campaigns were not strictly banned. Yet, after the emergence of the Feminist Five in 2015 and outbreak of Chinese Me Too Movement in 2018, young feminists have been a primary target of the authorities. Their activism also has been restricted under intensified media censorship and control.

When Me Too Movement, in 2018, gained a huge attention from the public and media, the authorities quickly made a statement that it recognized the significance of the issues of sexual misconduct against women throughout Chinese society. The authorities added that it would improve the reality that Chinese women had encountered and further make relevant legislation and policies to fight against the problem of sexual harassment and violence (ibid.). Yet, the authorities' further actions turned out to be the opposite.

Taking #MeToo hashtag activism as an example, a number of victims of sexual misconduct posted their stories and opinions, including "#MeToo," through social media platforms, especially Weibo and WeChat. Yet, their posts that included "#MeToo" were watched by the authorities, and the posts were deleted in a very short time soon afterward (박자영, 2020: 106). In response to media censorship and control, young feminists employed a new tactic of camouflage that used alternative hashtags such as #RiceBunny, #MiTu, #米兔,

#WoYeShi, #我也是, and #IWillBeYourVoice (Liu, 2021:3; Yin and Yu, 2020: 9; Zeng, 2020: 182). Yet, in October 2019, the posts with #米兔 even became unavailable on Weibo, and a wide range of the alternative hashtags related to Me Too Movement were "blocked" or unavailable to search (Yin and Yu, 2020: 5). Not only were the posts of #MeToo censored and deleted on social media platforms, but the authorities started to monitor social media accounts run by young feminists. The accounts of young feminists were often watched, and some of the accounts were even shut down on a permanent term.

Social media has played a significant role for young feminists to carry out their campaigns, and further provided them with a space to raise their voices and attract the public and media. Social media accounts of young feminists, that is to say, have been a primary target of media censorship and control by the authorities. For instance, Feminist Voices (*nvquan zhisheng*; 女权之声), one of the most influential feminist media founded in 2009, was "forced" to shut down in March 2018, and its accounts on Weibo and WeChat, "with 180,000 and 70,000 followers respectively," were, for good, deleted in charge of violation of state's policy and law (Yin and Yu, 2020: 11). Yet, detailed contents, which policy or law was violated, were never explained by Weibo and WeChat operators.

The development of social media has provided young feminists with a new space for them to carry out creative and bottom-up campaigns for improvement of women's rights. Yet, it has also made their movement much more visible to the authorities that regards young feminists' online activism that may potentially threat the power and legitimacy of the CCP. Online repression, as referred as media censorship and control, has been putting pressure on young feminists and restricting their continuous activism.

2.4 Social Pressure of Victim-blaming

As shown above, due to influence of traditional Confucian values, Chinese society has

imposed pressure on ordinary Chinese women in many spheres of their everyday life. One of the examples is that women, in the current China, are pushed to bear more children since China has encountered a serious problem of aging population (Impiombato, 2020). Also, they are still expected to take traditional roles at home (i.e., taking care of family or house chores), while pursuing their own interests and opportunities in their career building. In addition, they are faced with "unrealistic" beauty standards set by the society, and they are exposed to gender discrimination at home, school, and workplace (ibid.).

There are few studies that examine how this kind of social atmosphere imposes a higher social standard on women and how it gives Chinese women unfair treatment. To be specific, victim-blaming, often seen in a variety of cases in Me Too Movement, imposes much social pressure on women in Chinese society in terms of purity and morality. One of the examples is that when Lei Chuang, a well-known human rights activist in China, was MeToo-ed by several volunteers that worked for the organization he founded. When his victims took courage to speak up about their incident, the first reaction from the public and media was not to show them empathy or support, yet it was to ask them whether they were ever in relationship with Lei, or to interrogate why they revealed the incident (김미란, 2019: 166-168). When Xianzi revealed her story and MeToo-ed Zhu Jun on Weibo, a famous TV star in China, she received tons of criticism and hateful messages from netizens (mostly male). Liu Jingyao, who MeToo-ed Liu Qiangdong, a Chinese billionaire, was stigmatized as an impure woman and called a gold digger or liar (Furst, 2020).

When sexual misconduct victims share their story to make their voices heard and raise public awareness, they are often asked why they did not resist offenders, what they did to stimulate offenders, what they were wearing, whether they seduced offenders, or even whether they were wearing short skirt or see-through clothes (Lin and Yang, 2019b: 843; Zoo, 2018). Most sexual misconduct victims are women in general, and it seems that many Chinese are

inclined to impose a double standard towards women. To be specific, many Chinese recognize that sexual harassment or violence is a wrongdoing, and they have a feeling of sympathy towards victims, yet many Chinese, at the same time, tend to consider that victims may give offenders an encouragement or may misbehave (Sun, 2020: 250).

Due to this social atmosphere of widespread victim-blaming in Chinese society, it has become much harder for young feminists to carry out continued actions for spread of Me Too Movement and post- Me Too Movement. It is because the success of Chinese Me Too Movement has relied on female victims' courageous actions to share their stories in public. Yet, speaking out about their stories may leave "public distain" on them, damage their reputation, or make their friends and family ashamed of them (Li, 2019). Young feminists, in this sense, are faced with a difficulty to encourage victims' engagement in sharing their stories and inspire the victims to build up an extended solidarity with both other victims and young feminists.

2.5 Lack of Legal Devices

Another challenge of young feminist activism is that China lacks legal devices on sexual offenders. Taking Shen Yang's case as an example, Shen, a professor at Peking University, was allegedly MeToo-ed by Li Youyou who claimed that her friend Gao Yan, Shen's former student, committed suicide because Shen had raped Gao (Liu, 2021: 3). After Li's case of Me Too captured attention from the public and media, Shen was fired from his position as a professor, but there was no further discussion on the need for legal devices that can prevent the recurrence of sexual misconduct accidents (김미란, 2019: 160-161). There was neither discussion on a long-term legal improvement to deal with or punish sexual offenders.

The proper devices to deal with sexual misconduct should be subjected to legal punishment, but Chinese Me Too Movement has shown that sexual offenders have been merely stepped down from their profession – a mere administrative penalty (ibid., 160-161, 163). A bigger problem is that Chinese social atmospheres consider that sexual misconduct is a personal

problem caused by lack of a moral responsibility of individuals, even though it is important to view it as a legal crime and pursue a legal action against it. “Institutional mechanism,” therefore, is an urgent need to eradicate sexual crime in Chinese society (Lin and Yang, 2019a: 128).

Young feminists, with the purpose of improving women’s rights, have fought against sexual misconduct in the manner of bottom-up activities. Yet, there is no doubt that their efforts at grassroot level, to raise their voices and make their voices heard, meet a realistic limitation that their efforts do not bring about practical and proper legal devices (i.e., appropriate regulations and penalties on sexual offenders). This limitation, in this sense, hinders young feminists from maintaining long-term attention from the public and media and from achieving their goal of improvement of women’s rights.

2.6 Marginalized Women’s Voices

Young feminists have encountered the problem of marginalized women’s voices. They, in a larger sense, have carried out feminist movements at grassroot level, by inspiring ordinary Chinese women from different social classes and professions to take collective actions for improvement of women’s rights (Yin and Yu, 2020: 13). Young feminist activism, however, cannot represent all the voices of Chinese women, since it has been led by elite females. Most young feminists, who are university students or graduates, have received higher education and had easier access to universities or “intellectuals” (Shen, 2016: 3; Yin and Yu, 2020: 13). Young feminist activism, in one sense, may not be considered the real meaning of bottom-up feminist movement.

Young feminists have also made an active use of social media platforms to carry out feminist campaigns. They have tried to offer a platform for ordinary Chinese women to raise their voices and build a feeling of solidarity, yet voices and opinions of “rural and working-class” women have been absent (Sun, 2020: 246). Along with the emergence of a new generation of young feminists since 2012, feminist issues and discourses have been

unprecedentedly enriched, but “underprivileged” Chinese women have been marginalized or “even” excluded within a huge wave of young feminist activism (Yin and Yu, 2020: 1, 13).

The new generation of young feminists viewed themselves as representatives of ordinary Chinese women, so they have carried out a variety of creative and significant campaigns at bottom-up level to make women’s voices heard in Chinese society. It, however, seems that there are unheard voices of marginalized women throughout Chinese society, even though they are more inclined to face gender discrimination in their everyday life and they are more exposed to domestic violence or sexual misconduct.

Chapter VII. Conclusion

The year 2012 has opened a new chapter of Chinese feminism, along with the emergence of a new generation of young feminists. Young feminists have invented a new form of feminist activism, while providing ordinary Chinese women with a new channel, both online and offline, to raise their voices and make grassroot efforts for improvement of women's rights.

Young feminist activism since 2012 has influenced the emergence of the Feminist Five in 2015, and it has enabled ordinary Chinese women to take an active participation in further grassroots feminist movements, such as Me Too Movement and post-Me Too Movement. Not only have young feminists encouraged ordinary Chinese women to participate in a new wave of Chinese feminism, but they have raised public awareness about gender-related issues in China. Young feminists, in addition, have called upon the authorities to take part in making top-down efforts, such as legislation and institutionalization for improvement of women's rights and promotion of gender equality.

Young feminists, however, have been faced with a wide range of challenges and limitations. Not only have the Chinese been affected by traditional Confucian values, limiting women's role and social status in their everyday life, but young feminists also have been under political pressure from the CCP. A greater level of media censorship and control has made it harder for young feminists to carry out feminist activism via online, one of the primary tactics of young feminist activism. Social pressure, such as victim-blaming, also has made it more difficult for young feminists to inspire ordinary Chinese women to engage in feminist activism. Lack of legal devices and marginalization of rural and working-class women's voices have undermined legitimacy of young feminist activism, while hindering more numbers of Chinese women from active participation in feminist activism.

Young feminists, despite all the challenges and limitations, still have continued to raise their voices for improvement of women's rights and promotion of gender equality in China.

Young feminists, without a doubt, have brought about a new wave of feminism in a bottom-up manner into Chinese society, and they have been surfing the wave in order to achieve both women empowerment and gender equality in China.

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국문초록

1949년 중화인민공화국 수립 이후 중국 내에는 궁극적인 여권신장을 위한 '위에서부터(top-down)'의 다양한 노력이 있었다. 그럼에도 불구하고, 중국 여성들은 여전히 중국 사회 내 만연한 성차별에 직면해왔으며, 이는 '위에서부터'의 여권신장과 양성평등을 위한 노력의 한계를 여실히 드러냈다. 이러한 상황 속에서 2012년 이후 중국 내 새로운 '영 페미니스트' 세대의 등장은 중국 안팎 세간의 이목을 집중시켰다. 이들은 '아래서부터(bottom-up)' 중국 사회 내 젠더 이슈들을 공론화하기 시작했고, 궁극적인 여권신장과 양성평등 실현을 위한 노력을 지속해왔다. 2012년 새롭게 등장한 '영 페미니스트' 세대는 2015년 페미니스트 파이브의 등장, 2018년 중국 사회를 강타한 미투 운동의 물결과 더불어 중국 페미니즘의 새로운 장(場)을 열었다. 이들 세대는 중국 당국의 이념적, 정치적, 사회적 압박 및 미디어 검열과 통제 등 많은 도전에 직면해왔다. 그러나 이들은 대중, 학계, 미디어 등 중국 사회 전반에 걸친 관심과 지지를 바탕으로, 중국 여성들을 위한 '아래서부터'의 목소리를 지속적으로 내고 있다. 따라서 본 연구는 중국 정부의 지속적인 여권신장을 위한 노력이 있었음에도 불구하고, 어떠한 사회문화적 요인이 2012년 이후 '영 페미니스트' 세대의 등장에 영향을 끼쳤는가에 대한 조사질문에 답한다. 또한, 이들이 궁극적인 여권신장을 위해 실행하고 있는 다양한 노력을 소개하고, 이들 세대의 특수성과 정당성, 그리고 이들이 직면한 문제와 어려움에 대해 논의한다.

주요어: 영 페미니스트, 영 페미니스트 운동, 미투 운동, 중국 페미니스트, 중국 페미니즘

학번: 2020-22363