

# **Feminism as a product of its environment**

**A comparative study on feminist organisation and activism in China and  
Sweden**

Ivan Hanse

Supervisor: Michael Schoenhals

Lund University

Centre For Languages and Literature

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## **Abstract**

This case study attempts to analyse the dynamics, focus and progress of the feminist movements in Sweden and China today in order to pinpoint possible differences and similarities, and reasons behind them. This is done by comparing the agendas and actions of feminist networks in the two countries, as well as response in mainstream media and politics. I have also met and talked to a number of politically active feminists in both countries in order to get a clearer picture of their work. Many similar tendencies can be found in the way that organisations operate. At the same time this study finds certain differences in methods used to protest and influence, as well as in what specific changes in law and politics feminists propagate. Furthermore a number of possible historical, political and legal explanations to these differences are discussed.

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# 1. Introduction

There are many factors that can influence the way in which social movements develop and function. One can assume that the core ideology of a movement such as feminism, with the fundamental political goal of women's equal rights with men in all aspects of society, is similar in most parts of world today. Nonetheless, even if the ultimate goal is similar, there can be many differences in the most immediate needs for change, and the current possibilities for change. In short, the history, culture and current political development that shape a movement vary in different parts of the world. Throughout the years that I've spent in Sweden and China I have noticed both similarities and differences in the manifestation of gender inequality and discrimination. The most fundamental aspects seem similar. Girls are taught to be more graceful, play it safe, tend more to their appearance and choose wisely who they end up having sex with. Men are taught to be more aggressive and adventurous, and to pursue sex in a more active manner. The differences are sometimes in the intensity of the stereotypes, but also in the way inequalities manifest themselves in society in fields such as economy, legislation, politics and cultural peculiarities. The prevalence of such similarities and differences in gender roles is one reason why I have chosen to study feminism, as it is a reaction to such inequalities. Another reason is the current political atmosphere in Sweden, with political parties and ideologies far to both left and right on the political scale growing in popularity, feminism included, and that in China, with rapidly growing income gaps and social unrest to match.

## 2. Theory and research questions

A wide range of literature exists on feminism in both China and Sweden, some of which is included in this study. For more literature on feminism in China not included in paper see for instance Tani E. Barlow, and for Sweden see for instance Ulla Manns. With my own study I hope to provide an example of how the same political movement uses different methods in propagating different immediate changes depending on its historical and political context, in this case the contexts of China and Sweden. I wish to contribute to a deeper understanding of how feminists in two different countries, despite a similar core ideology, operate in different ways, and possible reasons behind such differences. The term feminism is used throughout this study in its most basic sense of a movement for women's equal rights with men in all aspects of society. I use the term in both present and historical contexts for individuals and groups that have fought for such rights, despite the fact that it might not always have been actively used by those groups and individuals themselves. This is done for reasons of simplicity, in order to have a general term to use when referring to individuals and groups with the above stated agenda, but only when I consider this basic criterion met. The term patriarchy is used in this study when referring to a culture in which men traditionally hold a position of more authority than women within the family and in society at large.

The purpose of this study is to analyse and compare the feminist movements in China and Sweden today. Besides being a comparative study, this should also in a double sense be regarded as a case study. It is focusing on feminism in the cases of Sweden and China, a choice based much on my own limitations and language skills. This selection allowed me to meet with feminists and activists in both countries in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the work that goes on within their organisations. The study also focuses on a selection of organisations and individuals based on the criterion that they are relevant to compare to their counterparts in the other country, or that they can contribute to the understanding of feminist activity today within their own territory. It does however not represent all such organisations, nor does it claim to include all aspects of the feminist movement. There is for instance a wide range of feminist ideas expressed on stage and in literature, of which very little is included in this study.

In my analysis I am trying to answer the following questions:

The feminist movements in China and Sweden seem to be experiencing both popularisation and increased radicalism today, how does this manifest itself in the two countries?

What differences can be found in how feminists maneuver within and around the legal and

political framework that they operate within, and in what specific issues feminists in China and Sweden emphasise today?

### 3. Feminism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

When analysing a political movement the importance of its history should not be underestimated. In this chapter I will discuss the history of feminism as a movements in China and Sweden in order to compare their activity in the past and also to better understand the nature of feminism today through its historic context. Feminist ideas existed long before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but I have chosen to focus on this period because at this point feminist women in both countries had started to struggle for women's rights and liberation in an organised way and started to influence and be influenced by a more global feminist movement.

#### 3.1 Suffrage

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century women in many parts of the world were fighting for the right to actively participate in politics, and equal rights with men in general.<sup>1</sup> In Sweden women obtained the right to vote in 1919 and voted for the first time in 1921. They did this through relatively peaceful means, if compared to the suffragettes in England, or groups fighting for women's liberation in China. For Chinese women the road was rockier as the political atmosphere was more turbulent, and so women's struggle there developed more violent characteristics. A significant number of women participated actively in the revolution and the overthrow of the Qing dynasty after the turn of the century. Many did this as a part of their struggle for women's rights, in order to prove that they were fully capable of shouldering the same responsibilities as men. Women participated in all aspects of the revolution, many as members of Sun Yat-sen's (孙中山) Revolutionary Alliance (Tong Meng Hui, 同盟会), as journalists, soldiers, teachers, assassins and bomb makers. Many schools for women were established at the time, and women's newspapers, but also women's armies and women's assassin squads. Feminists also started exploring other political ideologies. For instance the anarcho-feminist He-Yin Zhen (何银震) and her Society for the Restoration of Women's Rights, based in Japan, saw the complete abolition of all forms of government as the only way to achieve true equality. She wrote several pieces for the society's journal, Natural Justice (Tianyi Bao, 天义报), and was probably the first to introduce a Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> For further reading on feminism in China or Sweden during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see: Louise Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy, Women's suffrage in China* (Stanford University Press, 2008); Barbro Hedvall, *Vår Rättmätiga Plats, Om kvinnornas kamp för rösträtt* (Barbro Hedvall, 2011); Yvonne Svanström och Kjell Östberg (editors), *Än Män Då? Kön och feminism i Sverige under 150 år* (Bokförlaget Atlas, 2004); Marina Thorborg, *Kvinnor i Kina, Pirater, järnflickor och finanslejon* (Bokförlaget Atlantis AB, 2014)

translation of The Communist Manifesto in China. While many feminists, reformists and republicans in China at the time considered Europe and the United States role models of both gender equality and freedom, He-Yin Zhen argued that they had only created a new form of oppression. She wrote that when a small number of women assume important political positions they will become part of the patriarchal capitalist power structure, i.e. part of the oppressors, rather than liberators of other women.<sup>2</sup>

The decades following the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912 were chaotic, for the feminist movement and for Chinese society as a whole. It would turn out that a lot of empty promises had been made from members of the Revolutionary Alliance, and that women's efforts during the revolution were not going to be enough to win them equal opportunities with men. This was a tough setback, politically and for many women also personally, as they had been fighting side by side with many of the men who now denied them political rights, or didn't stand up to those who did. Despite these setbacks the feminists remobilized and carried on with their struggle, this time targeting the newly established political institutions and its politicians. They wrote petitions and lobbied the new government in all possible ways, and some of the Chinese feminists employed radical and at times violent means. On several occasions they forcibly entered the parliament when political meetings were being held, and inspired by the suffragettes in England they smashed the windows of the parliament building when they were denied entry. Violent confrontations with police also occurred, and some of the feminists even threatened military action if their demands were not met. This violent approach to their struggle is not surprising considering the history of revolution in which many of the women had participated. Some of them had done so on the battlefield where many women had bled and died in their fight to overthrow the Qing dynasty, and to secure women's equal rights with men in the political system that was going to replace it.

Throughout the following decades women kept on fighting for equal rights. Yuan Shikai seizing power and reinstating a more conservative rule posed a major setback and forced many feminists to keep a low profile, but after his death in 1916 feminists reignited their struggle. During New Culture Movement the oppression of women was once again widely questioned, and in the 1920<sup>th</sup> some women within the feminist movement also started to seriously question double standards of sexual chastity as well as the discrimination of women who weren't virgins. In 1921 women's suffrage was won and implemented in Guangdong, and in 1922 a new legislation giving women the right to vote came into effect in Hunan.

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<sup>2</sup> For further reading on He-Yin Zhen's work, see: Lydia H. Liu, Rebecca E. Karl and Dorothy Ko (editors), *The Birth of Chinese Feminism, Essential Texts in Transnational Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2013)



Chinese women never got an opportunity to take part in any nationwide elections during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The country was divided, and the rivalry between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT, abbreviation of Kuomintang) grew stronger. With Chiang Kai-shek's brutal campaign against radical elements within the party during and after the Northern Expedition in 1927, the feminist movement saw another serious setback. During the 1930's however feminist activity saw a new increase. The same tendency can be seen in Sweden in the 1930s, with a significant increase in women organising in both political and apolitical manners.

Feminists in Sweden had more success in their struggle for suffrage. In 1902-03 the Associations for Women's Suffrage (FKPR, abbreviation of Föreningar för Kvinnans Politiska Rösträtt) and the National Association for Women's Suffrage (LKPR, abbreviation of Landsföreningen för Kvinnans Politiska Rösträtt) were established. Sweden saw an increase in radical political organisation during the first decade of the century, although predominantly a peaceful one, with significant increases in unionising among workers and growing social movements in general. In 1909 universal suffrage for men was achieved, and this was also the year of the Swedish General Strike, in which over 300,000 individuals were involved. Many new women's organisations were also formed during this period.

The next peak of radicalism in Sweden started in 1917, this time more violent with the bread riots that were a reaction to shortage of food. Women were more often than not the initiators of these riots aimed at taking bread from those hoarding it, and many held key positions as spokespersons and organisers throughout the protests. Despite this, similarly to what happened in China after the Qing dynasty had been overthrown, once the riots were over almost no women were given positions within the political organisations that had gotten involved in the later stages of the protests. Throughout this period and up until the vote was finally won, the Associations for Women's Suffrage kept working for women's right to vote. They gathered signatures and lobbied the parliament and its politicians, and in 1919 the third proposal on women's suffrage submitted to the parliament was accepted. LKPR was disbanded after the first election in which women were allowed to vote in 1921. The right to vote was undoubtedly an important step in the struggle for gender equality, but it was only one step, and as history has shown reformation of laws and politics do not automatically lead to changes in traditional values or attitudes. The feminist struggle continued.

### **3.2 *Feminism and communism***

The Communist Party started out showing great support for the cause of women's liberation, but this was partly a tactical move to win the support of women. This is not to say that leaders of the party didn't believe in women's liberation, but many considered the cause secondary to that of the revolution, and thought of women's liberation as something that would come naturally once communism was established. The fact that the party's top leadership was exclusively male should not be underestimated as both a symptom and a cause of the problem. Once Chiang Kei-shek and the remnants of the KMT had fled to Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established, the CPC began to centralize. The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) was established as the government arm responsible for promoting gender equality and implementing government policy related to women. Feminist thought and ideology continued to develop under the CPC, as can be seen for instance in the work of Ding Ling, but it was largely confined to the ideology and rhetoric of the party. The enthusiasm with which the CPC promoted gender equality in the decades following its rise to power varied greatly depending on how well it coincided with other campaigns the party carried out. At times the party would promote women's full participation in labour with all its might, only to turn around and tell women to stay at home and do "women's work" a few years later when unemployment was too high. A feminist debate did continue in mass media and within the party, and at times increased awareness and criticism of discrimination lead to government action. For instance when grave mistreatment of women in the labour force was exposed, measures were taken against such discrimination.

Sweden saw a new wave of radical political thinking and ideas in the 1960s and 70s, and feminism was an important part of it. The feminist-socialist Group 8 was established in 1968 as a study circle, but in 1970 the group opened up to the public and started expanding as a political organisation, and in 1971 the group started publishing its own paper, the Women's Bulletin. Socialism, communism and feminism are some of the political ideologies that flourished in the 70's, and by some China and Soviet were admired as role models, an admiration that would prove largely misplaced as the west gained more insight into the situation in the two self-proclaimed socialist states. Some of the important demands raised by feminists at the time were women's right to employment on equal terms with men, six hour working days and free abortion, the latter of which was legislated in 1975. A six-hour workday was added to the social democrat party's platform in 1975. Since the 70's the question has been debated from time to time in Swedish politics, and today it has once again entered public debate, something I will return to in a later chapter.

During the Cultural Revolution that started in 1966 China saw an extreme wave of

radicalism. Movements within the revolution often developed strong fanatical tendencies with mass-persecution of people harbouring the wrong political sympathies or allegiances. During this period China saw a strange mix of feminist and anti-feminist ideals. Women's full and equal participation in labour and in the revolution was encouraged, if not enforced, with the “iron girls”, tough girls participating in hard labour on equal terms with men, as an ideal. At the same time, to focus specifically on women's issues was considered bourgeois as the general idea was that revolution and class struggle automatically included women's liberation. On top of it all there was an obsession with conservative ideals of virginity and chastity.

### **3.3 Chinese feminism today**

After the reforms started in 1978 femininity was used as a sort of weapon by feminists in China in their effort to separate feminism from the party ideology. The CPC had championed women's participation in “men's work” and to some extent the eradication of traditional femininity as the way to equality. One problem with the old CPC ideology was that it never really questioned masculinity or men's reluctance to share the burden of “women's work”, and never succeeded in actually eradicating discrimination against women who did participate in the hard labour. As mentioned earlier the government was also very inconsistent in its own attitude towards gender equality. After the reforms started Femininity was encouraged and praised as a reaction to former devaluation of it, and women of the old generation were even made a mockery of because of their perceived masculinity. All this along with an increased freedom of choice and individuality in some aspects of life saw a sudden search for separation of men and women in dress, social roles and behaviour, largely through the feminisation of women.<sup>3</sup> What some feminist scholars embraced as a way to establish an independent women's movement in the early days of reform has today become one of the movement's main obstacles to overcome. The female stereotype seen in media today is often emotionally or economically dependant on men, while sexism and objectification of women in advertisement and media in general has become the new standard. As pointed out in an article published on the Women's Media Watch Network, modern tv shows more often than not picture marriage as the only way for a woman to achieve true happiness, and today both male and female stereotypes are frequently the targets of feminist criticism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Wang Zheng, “Maoism, Feminism and the UN Conference on Women, Women's Studies Research in Contemporary China”, *Journal of Women's History*, Volume 8, Number 4, Winter 1997, pp. 136-139

<sup>4</sup> “Leftover women'-anxiety on TV and film: Getting married as the only way out” (Yingshiju Li de Shengnü Jiaolü: Bu Jiaren Jiu Mei Chulu) (<http://www.genderwatch.cn:801/detail.jsp?fid=303973&cnID=90010>)

Just as the economy has gradually opened up to private enterprising since the reforms started, so has civil society gradually opened up to private initiatives. In the 1980s a new, independent women's movement was born through partial separation from the state and the ACWF. A prominent women's studies scholar at the time was Li Xiaojiang (李小江), who in 1985 initiated the first women's research NGO established in China since 1949, the Association of Women's Studies, in Henan, and in 1987 she initiated the Center For Women's Studies at Zhengzhou University. She also publicly questioned the necessity of the ACWF's existence in the new reform era, pressing the federation to question its own position and function.<sup>5</sup> Since the 1980's a multitude of centres for women's studies and research have been established across China, and many feminist organisations and networks have been formed.

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in 1995 provided an important opportunity for feminism and civil society to evolve in China, and a large number of NGOs were established around that time. Having said that, not everything about the event was positive, and prior to the conference there was great uncertainty with regards to how it would turn out. Due to fear of protests, prior to the conference the government suddenly decided to move the NGO forums, one of the events of the conference, away from Beijing, and Chinese delegates were subjected to strict rehearsals. The reason the party wanted to host the conference in the first place was one of publicity, as often the case when a country hosts any major international event. Some feminists feared that the conference would only remove focus from the problems that they were trying to emphasize as efforts started to focus on showcasing progress instead, and perhaps they were right. On top of that, due to the government's paranoia Chinese organisations had to keep a low profile during the event itself in order not to draw any negative attention to the feminist movement from the government, as such attention would surely affect future feminist work.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of all this, positive effects of the conference seem to have been significant. In fact, when I asked Feng Yuan about the short and long term impact it had on feminist organisation, she told me that although not all of the more active organisations today are related to the Conference in 1995, directly or indirectly a large number of them, perhaps the majority, definitely are. Feng Yuan is a feminist scholar who's been involved in the founding of several women's rights organisations, such as the Women's Media Watch Network (Funü Chuanmei Jiance Wangluo) and the recently disbanded Stop Domestic Violence Network (Fandui Jiating Baoli Wang), both of which I will

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<sup>5</sup> Wang Zheng, "Maoism, Feminism and the UN Conference on Women", published in *Journal on Women's history*, Volume 8, Number 4, Winter 1997 (Johns Hopkins University Press), p. 133

<sup>6</sup> Wang Zheng, "Maoism, Feminism and the UN Conference on Women: Women's Studies Research in Contemporary China", *Journal on Women's History*, Volume 8, Number 4, Winter 1997 (Johns Hopkins University Press), pp. 142-146

return to later in this study. Organisations established around the time of the UN Conference or within a few years after include the Women's Media Watch Network, the Peking University Women's Legal Research and Service Centre, which is the direct predecessor of the Women's Legal Aid Centre, and the Stop Domestic Violence Network. Furthermore, Feng Yuan also told me that feminist organisations in China today rely largely on funds from foreign organisations or foundations, which was the case with the organisations I interviewed in Beijing, and much of this foreign funding was enabled through the FWCW. This is of course not to say that none of these organisations could have been established without the conference, but is rather evidence of the awareness and will to organise that existed within China. The FWCW provided opportunities and channels to speed up the development of organised feminism in China.

### ***3.4 A summary of the century***

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century more radical feminists in particular have often combined their struggle with other political ideologies such as socialism, communism or anarchism. During the century's first half China saw a wave of new political thinking as the old system was crumbling, with a multitude of ideologies competing for popularity. Feminists existed within all camps but also pushed their own agenda. With the CPC emerging as victors and new leaders of China, the party's communism became the standard ideology and feminism had to toe the line. In Sweden the political environment has at times been more inclined towards socialism and at other times towards liberalism, but broadly speaking the social hierarchy of different ideologies has remained relatively unchanged, at least compared to China. Feminism was institutionalized in the popular political parties from an early stage, in the form of women's federations, “kvinnoförbund”. Similarly to what happened in China both before and during the CPC era this institutional form of women's organisations often had to conform to the political organisations they were part of, and women's issues were often given low priority. More radical and independent feminism has been existing alongside its institutionalized forms in Sweden, often cooperating with socialism or other similar ideologies, and these movements have expanded during periods of increased political radicalism. Feminists in China today have been trying to separate their ideology from that of the CPC, and the organisations that I've been in contact with all seem to more or less stay clear of the ideologies that radical feminists often associate with in Sweden. Possible reasons for this will be discussed further in a later chapter.

## **4. Problems to the answer: targets of feminist criticism today**

The foundation of inequality that feminism is responding to is a cultural inheritance of patriarchal norms encouraging gender-specific roles and behaviour from birth. Sweden and China share a strong patriarchal tradition, thus it comes as little surprise that the general nature of gender inequality in the two countries share many similarities. Nevertheless there are many differences in the nuances of discrimination and oppression. The issues that feminists try to address and what methods they use to do it might also differ depending on what changes are perceived as the most urgent, or the most feasible. In this chapters I will discuss a few of the common targets of feminist criticism in China and Sweden today, and common feminist arguments.

### ***4.1 Marriage and legislation***

The Marriage Law of The People's Republic of China was legislated in 1950, and this law formed the foundation of the Communist Party's efforts to promote gender equality. Recently a new interpretation of the law has been widely criticised, but before getting to that I will give a quick introduction of the history of the law. The purpose of the new law was to abolish the old feudal traditions of forced marriage, valuing men over women and ignoring the rights of children, by implementing a new marital institution of monogamy, freedom of choice and gender equality, protecting the rights of women and children. Old customs such as bigamy, keeping concubines, adopting young girls into the family as future daughter-in-laws and using marriage for material gain were prohibited. It was made strictly forbidden to force someone into marriage or for any third party to interfere with this someone's freedom of choice in marriage. A minimum legal age for marriage was introduced, twenty years for men and eighteen for women. All husbands and wives were given the right to choose profession, take part in all aspects of society, work and social actions, and equal rights to family property. Husbands, wives, sons and daughters were also given equal rights to inheritance. Children born out of marriage were given the same rights as those born within marriage.<sup>7</sup>

The Marriage Law was replaced in 1980 by a new law, although the name remained unchanged. The new law was similar to the old one with a few changes. Late marriage was now encouraged, and the legal marriageable age was increased to 22 for men and 20 for women, which remains the legal age today. It was clarified that a couple can decide who will become a member of

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<sup>7</sup> The Marriage Law of The People's Republic of China, 1950 (<http://59.252.23.12/zcfg/xzfl/jb/589649.shtml>)

whose family upon marriage, and whose family name their children inherits. In 2005 the law was reviewed and a few amendments were made. While the old law did prohibit “abuse” or “mistreatment” of one's spouse, the legal term domestic violence was now added to the law as a punishable offence. The new version also more specifically regulated what to consider the common property of the couple, stating that income and property acquired within marriage should be considered common while property acquired prior to marriage should be considered private, which leads us to the problematic 2011 interpretation of the law.<sup>8</sup>

Concerning real estate property for which the property deed was signed prior to marriage, The Supreme People's Court's interpretation from 2011 states that if the property deed was signed prior to marriage by a single party, and that same party used only his or her own assets to cover the down payment and to get the mortgage loan, in the case of divorce the couple should reach an agreement regarding the ownership of this property. If the couple fails to reach an agreement the People's Court can rule that the property belongs to the party whose name is on the property deed, even if the couple's shared assets were used to pay off the mortgage while married. The remaining mortgage then becomes the debt of that same party, and the other party should be compensated for whatever share of the mortgage he or she can prove that he or she has paid, with adjustment according to relevant appreciation of the property.<sup>9</sup>

There are a few evident complications regarding the assumption that this interpretation would be gender-neutral and equal. First of all Chinese custom is still that a couple should buy a home before marriage, meaning that many couples will be pressured to sign a property deal before getting married. China also has a strong patriarchal tradition where the man is considered the head of the family and thus the head of the family's home. In her study “Leftover Women, The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China” Leta Hong Fincher discusses this issue, and there seems to be an enormous gender gap in ownership of marital homes in China. A survey of home buyers in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen found that men's names are on the property deed of 80 percent of marital homes, while women's are only on 30 percent. Another survey, this one nationwide, found that 51.7 percent of married men hold sole ownership of their marital home, compared to just 13.2 percent of married women having homes in their own names. Fincher's research further suggests that the total cost of marital homes are usually shared one way or another, and with the current real estate prices only very rich families could afford to buy property without pooling assets and sharing expenses. The law does state that any contribution should be compensated for in the

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<sup>8</sup> The Marriage Law of The People's Republic of China, 1980 (<http://59.252.23.12/zcfg/xzfl/jb/589648.shtml>)

<sup>9</sup> The Supreme People's Court's instructions on how to implement the Marriage Law of The People's Republic of China ([http://www.court.gov.cn/qwfb/sfjs/201108/t20110815\\_159794.htm](http://www.court.gov.cn/qwfb/sfjs/201108/t20110815_159794.htm))

case of divorce, but that requires legal evidence of contribution, and such documents are rarely kept over transactions between spouses in marriage. Following the new interpretation of the law many feminists and women's organisations raised criticism on the issue, including the Stop Domestic Violence Network and the Chinese Gender and Development network (GAD). During my conversations with Feng Yuan, co-founder of the Stop Domestic Violence she did however tell me that there has been a positive side to this, being the increased awareness on the issue, on the importance of putting one's name on the property deed and also on discrimination in general.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4.2 Gender-based violence and legislation**

Domestic and sexual violence are topics that have received a lot of attention in both China and Sweden recently. Both countries have seen repeated media reports on assaults on women, followed by debate on sexual and domestic violence as well as women's right to feel safe in public. One common target of feminist criticism is the commentary following media coverage on cases of rape or sexual assault. Reactions often focus on how actions and choices of the victim led to the incident, and what women should do to avoid ending up in such situations in the first place, rather than focusing on why someone would subject another human being to this type of coercion and what can be done to prevent such behaviour. Both countries have currently seen various campaigns by feminists to change the attitudes of people towards these issues. However, there are differences in the more immediate measures that feminists are pushing for in the two countries.

In one recent case in China 43 year old woman Li Yan was originally sentenced to death for murdering her husband after suffering months of abuse, but the Supreme People's Court overturned the verdict on the grounds that it failed to address the degree of abuse she had suffered, ordering a higher court to retry the case. Li Yan's lawyer Guo Jianmei, director and co-founder of the NGO Women's Legal Aid Centre (Beijing Zhongze Funü Falü Zixun Zhongxin), expressed hopes that this case could have an exemplary effect on future lawsuits. Future effects of this case remain to be seen, but the case does indicate a change in attitude towards the seriousness towards domestic abuse

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<sup>10</sup> Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women, The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (Zed Books Ltd, 2014), p. 46-53; "The Stop Domestic Violence Network and others' proposal on adjustments to certain sections of the 'Judicial instructions on the marriage law (three)'" (Fan Jiabao Wangluo deng guanyu xiugai hunyinfa sifa jieshi (san) bufen tiaokuan de jianyi) (<http://www.genderwatch.cn:801/detail.jsp?fid=301423&cnID=90020>); "Invitation letter to the GAD Network's small seminar concerning 'third judicial instructions on the marriage law'" (GAD Wangluo Guanyu Hunyinfa Sifa Jieshi San Xiaoxing Huodong Zhaobiao Shu) (<http://www.genderwatch.cn:801/detail.jsp?fid=300736&cnID=90020>)



and violence.<sup>11</sup>

Feminist and women's organisations in China have lobbied the government to draft a specific law on domestic violence for several years, and according to Feng Yuan, such a law is currently being reviewed and drafted for legislation. Domestic violence is already included as an offence in the marriage law, but many consider it too vague and domestic violence as an offence is rarely implemented in courts, since it has generally been considered family disturbance, i.e. a family's private business. Similar tendencies can be seen in Sweden, but recent increases in reports of sexual and domestic violence can be seen partly as a sign of an increasing acceptance to speak up on the issue. In China, a specific law on domestic violence has by many feminists been considered an important step in changing the status of related crimes and putting pressure on legal institutions to take them seriously.

Sexual harassment in schools is another important topic among feminists in China today. A large number of media reports on sexual harassment and violence have appeared in media recently. In September this year a seminar was held on the subject in Beijing, with members of different feminist organisations, including Women's Media Watch, participating.

While feminists in China have been working for a specific law on domestic violence for some years, the recent focus in Sweden has been legislation concerning sexual violence specifically. Following a number of cases where rape suspects have been cleared of all accusations, some of which have been widely criticised for being dropped on dubious grounds, and low rates of rape lawsuits leading to conviction in general, a discussion on a possible "law of consent" has emerged. Such a law would require that each person has given his or her clear consent when engaging in sexual intercourse, and that such consent can be withdrawn at any time if any party changes his or her mind. The idea of the proposed law is that the burden of proof should be put mainly on the defendant instead of the plaintiff. Some critics however argue that such a law wouldn't necessarily have the desired effect, and that it's more important to reassess the aspect of the current law that requires the plaintiff and prosecutor to prove that the defendant had the intent of raping the plaintiff. One suggestion is an extension of the law enabling a conviction for carelessness if the defendant cannot be proven to have had the deliberate intention of raping, but the plaintiff can be proven to have experienced it as a rape.

It is important to point out that many feminists, such as the members of Support Your Local Feminist that I have talked to, do not consider change in legislation the main objective. Legislation

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<sup>11</sup> "China's Supreme Court overturns death sentence for victim of domestic violence"  
(<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/24/us-china-crime-abuse-idUSKBN0EZ1GG20140624>)

is regarded as something that needs to be regularly reviewed and changed when necessary, but their focus is on challenging the culture and gender roles that nurse harassment and discrimination. In China feminists are no less aware of the cultural problems behind sexual violence and harassment, and they too work to change them and raise awareness through campaigns and media. It does however seem as if feminists in China more often emphasis change in legislation. One probable reason for this is a more conservative legislation and a younger legal system that, at least in its current form, leaves more room for change. Another reason that seems plausible is the higher prevalence of extra-parliamentary feminists in Sweden, as they are less likely to hold reforms of the current legal system as their main objective.

#### **4.3 “Leftover women”**

The term “Leftover women” started appearing occasionally on the Xinhua News Network (Xinhua Wang), the state press agency in China, in 2006, and the frequency increased radically starting from the end of 2007. The term refers to unmarried, usually educated women who have passed the age generally considered optimal for marriage, with 27 years frequently used as a dividing line. The word was officially acknowledged by the Chinese department of education in August 2007. At the time of writing, if one does a search on the term “Shengnü” (meaning leftover women), on the website of Xinhua News, search results will include headlines such as “Gynaecology research: 'Leftover women' more likely to develop gynaecological cancer” (“Fuke zhishi: “Shengnü huan exing zhongliu de jilü gao”).<sup>12</sup> This article claims research has shown that “leftover women” are more likely to develop gynaecological cancer and other gynaecological diseases compared to women who are already married with children. The reason is according to the article the lack of a normal sex-life. After listing a few diseases the article advices women to avoid leading a too busy life, and to end their single life as soon as possible in order to get a normal, regular sex life. It is curious that getting married is the only suggested option for a woman to improve their sex life, at least the articles I found on the subject offered no other solutions to the problem.

Another common article is “What five types of women become 'leftover women’” (Na wu lei nüren hui chengwei shengnü).<sup>13</sup> Traits that supposedly increase the “risk” include fear of sex, setting the bar too high in search for a husband, low self-esteem and a too strong or confident

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<sup>12</sup> “Gynaecology research: 'Leftover women' more likely to develop gynaecological cancer” “Fuke zhishi: ”Shengnü” chuan fuke exing zhongliu de jilü gao” ([http://www.cq.xinhuanet.com/2014-04/28/c\\_1110446195.htm](http://www.cq.xinhuanet.com/2014-04/28/c_1110446195.htm))

<sup>13</sup> “What five types of women become 'leftover women’” (“Na wu lei nüren hui chengwei shengnü”) ([http://www.fj.xinhuanet.com/jiankang/2014-04/16/c\\_1110271703.htm](http://www.fj.xinhuanet.com/jiankang/2014-04/16/c_1110271703.htm))

surface scaring men away. What the alleged five types of women have in common is that the alleged reasons why they tend to become “leftover” are largely described as negative. One older article on the subject that used to be frequently reposted is “Eight ways to let you quickly escape the 'leftover women' trap” (“Ba zhao jiao ni cong 'shengnü' xunsu tuwei”).<sup>14</sup>

Ever since 2008 the frequency of articles concerning “leftover women” has remained incredibly high. Some of the most common subjects include reasons why certain women become “leftover”, usually putting the blame on women themselves, dangers of being “leftover”, and advice on how to escape the “leftover trap” by lowering one's standards or changing one's appearance. Some argue that although the term leftover women might seem discriminating, there is in fact an equivalent for men, “leftover men” (Shengnan). There is indeed such a term, but the common usage and qualities associated with it seem quite different. When doing a search on this term on the same Xinhua News website most of the headlines include both terms, leftover women and leftover men. These articles usually discuss more general reasons why people supposedly become “leftover”, such as economical reasons. Among headlines only including the term leftover men, such men ending up being scammed on large amounts of money by women in their search for a wife is a reoccurring subject.

In her book “Leftover Women, The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China” Leta Hong Fincher writes that up until 2012 the All-China Women's Federation was reposting many articles concerning “leftover women” similar to the ones mentioned above on its own website. However, “In December 2012, a woman tweeted on Weibo the Chinese translation of a New York Times op-ed I wrote, which criticized the Women's Federation's propagation of the term 'leftover women'. She attached the following comment in my op-ed: 'More and more, I believe in the saying, 'the Women's Federation is an evil organization'.' Her comment (along with my op-ed) was re-tweeted many hundreds of times, until the Women's Federation suddenly – with no explanation or apology – deleted many of its columns stigmatizing 'leftover women'.”<sup>15</sup> Fincher also comments on the fact that the first article on “leftover women” posted on the Women's Federation website appeared only shortly after China's State Council issued its “Decision on Fully Enhancing Population and Family Planning Program and Comprehensively Addressing Population Issues”<sup>16</sup>, and that the explosion of media coverage concerning “leftover women” occurred soon thereafter. The decision names both

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<sup>14</sup> “Eight ways to let you quickly escape the leftover women trap” (Ba zhao jiao ni cong ”shengnü” kuaisu tuwei) ([http://news.xinhuanet.com/fashion/2013-01/18/c\\_124245075\\_8.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/fashion/2013-01/18/c_124245075_8.htm))

<sup>15</sup> Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women, The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (Zed Books Ltd, 2014), p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> “Introduction About the Decision on Fully Enhancing Population and Family Planning Program and Comprehensively Addressing Population Issues” (<http://china.org.cn/e-news/news070123-2.htm>)

the sex ratio imbalance and the ageing population as urgent issues that need to be addressed.<sup>17</sup>

The use of the term “leftover women” in mainstream media, the way that leftover women are being portrayed and harassed for not marrying, has been widely criticised among feminists. Efforts have been made to discredit popular myths concerning “leftover women”, and also to turn the term itself into something positive, much as the basic qualities that it represents very well could be today. The feminists that I have been in contact with in China did however not seem to entirely buy into the government policy being the major cause of the leftover women phenomenon. They seemed to regard it more as a symptom of patriarchal norms in general, and as a reaction to the empowerment of women. Just recently a book was released on the subject, in which three authors have used different analytic methods to falsify the stereotypical images of “leftover women” in media, and also to analyse the commercial, cultural and political intentions behind the scene.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4.4 The six-hour workday**

While the idea itself can be considered both feminist and socialist, the six-hour workday was an important argument of Swedish feminists in the 1970's. Feminists have promoted shorter workdays with the argument that it will lighten the load of women, who do a bigger share of unpaid housework than men on average, and that it will clear the way for a fairer distribution of housework and childcare. According to statistics women still do a significantly larger proportion of unpaid work today, although the gap has narrowed. Another argument has been that it would give people in general more control of their own time and more freedom to pursue all things in life that are not related to work. The suggestion has been brought up occasionally since the 70's, and today the six-hour workday is once again up for public debate.<sup>19</sup>

The party Feminist Initiative includes six-hour workdays in its party platform, and not long ago this idea along with other parts of its party platform received a lot of attention in media in what started out as criticism and mockery, but counterarguments in support of the party's platform were soon raised as well. In the party platform shorter workdays are presented as a way to relieve work related stress, improve the general health of the population, and to give people more power over

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<sup>17</sup> Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women, The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (Zed Books Ltd, 2014), pp. 14-43.

<sup>18</sup> ”Exposing commercial, cultural and political interests behind the 'Leftover Women'-phenomenon” (Toushi ”Shengnü” beihou de shangye, wenhua yu zhengzhi mudi) (<http://paper.nandu.com/nis/201407/02/237509.html>)

<sup>19</sup> Ulrika Thomsson, ”Striden om tiden: Kvinnorörelsen och sex timmars arbetsdag”, *Än män då? Kön och feminism i Sverige under 150 år* (Scandbook, Smedjebacken 2004); ”Women and men in Sweden, facts and figures 2014”, Statistics Sweden ([http://www.scb.se/Statistik/Publikationer/LE0201\\_2013B14\\_BR\\_X10BR1401.pdf](http://www.scb.se/Statistik/Publikationer/LE0201_2013B14_BR_X10BR1401.pdf))

their own time. There have been experiments with six-hour workdays in Sweden before, the longest one was in Kiruna and had been going on for sixteen years when it was terminated in 2005. No extensive analysis on the experiment was carried out, but reports on the experiment have been largely negative. One problem in previous experiments has been that workers have been expected to carry out the same amount of work despite working shorter days, which seems to have worked in some industries but caused more stress in others. Toyota Center in Gothenburg implemented six-hour working days more than a decade ago, and the results have been overwhelmingly positive. Now the left wing coalition is preparing a new experiment in Gothenburg where communal workers in certain workplaces are going reduce their hours to six per day for at least one year starting in 2015, without reducing their wages.

## **5. Tools of the trade: activism and other ways to raise awareness**

### ***5.1 Working within the system***

Organisations such as the Women's Legal Aid Network and the former Stop Domestic Violence Network work more or less exclusively from within China's political system. The Stop Domestic Violence Network was established as a research centre, with a mission statement declaring its purpose to raise awareness on gender equality, promote reforms of relevant laws, form a network with other organisations that can effectively intervene in cases of domestic violence, and to promote women's rights through research, advocacy, training and other services. The Women's Legal Aid Network is set up as a non-profit law firm focusing on providing legal assistance in cases related to gender discrimination, and its lawyers take on lawsuits related to gender discrimination or violence against women non-profit. When I interviewed Lü Xiaoquan, one of the lawyers working for the organisation, I learned that the organisation also channels legal cases to other lawyers who are willing to take on such lawsuits. Both of the organisations, as well as Guo Jianmei and Feng Yuan personally, have been involved in advocating legal reforms, one example being the law on domestic violence. This work has included presenting complete draft proposals for such a law to the National People's Congress in 2003 and 2009. Feng Yuan explained that although the law is currently being reviewed and drafted, she and many others continue to lobby the government in order to make sure that the content of the final law turns out as legally effective and implementable as possible. Other feminist organisations and individuals have also been involved in pushing for new legislation on domestic violence, and two such cases will be discussed further in the chapter on social media and activism.

The Swedish organisation whose work appears to be the most similar to that of the Stop Domestic Violence Network is the Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres (SKR, Sveriges Kvinno- och Tjejjourers Riksförbund). As stated on their website, SKR is an association of over 120 women's shelters, young women's empowerment centres, rape crisis centres and other organisations working for a society free from violence. Apart from providing shelter and support for women exposed to different forms of gender-based violence and abuse the goal of the association is to promote gender equality in all aspects of life and work for a society free of violence. This year staff from the association met with leaders of all political

parties in Sweden individually, with the exception of two parties that didn't accept the invitation, and discussed gender issues and what needs to be done in law and politics to promote equality and provide support to exposed women.<sup>20</sup>

One initiative in Sweden that started partly as an effort to lobby for a change in legislation on sexual violence is FATTA, founded by Crossing Borders and Femtastic. The former is an organisation that keeps full time staff and partly relies on funding from companies and other organisations. They promote equality through public debate as well as seminars and educational classes which they offer to other organisations and institutions. Femtastic is a feminist collective of women working with urban culture. FATTA started as a reaction to a series of rape lawsuits that ended in the release of the defendants without any legal consequences. The goal of the movement is to raise awareness on sexual violence, to promote a sexual culture of consent and push for a law of consent to be legislated. As a foundation to their work they have used 150 anonymous individuals' stories about their experiences of sex that did not take place on their own premises. Some of the artists involved in the movement wrote a song based on the stories in an effort to raise awareness. In another campaign carried out by FATTA one hundred more or less well known people posted pictures of themselves with tattoos of the FATTA logo, of which ninety nine were fake while one was real. The leader of The Left Party who originally participated in this campaign with a fake tattoo later followed up by making a real tattoo of the logo.

Feminist Initiative is the Swedish feminist party founded in 2005 that became the first exclusively feminist party to win a seat in the European Parliament in 2014, with 5.3 percent of the votes in Sweden. In the 2014 national elections the party got 3.2 percent of the votes. The most famous spokesperson of the party is Gudrun Schyman, who was previously leader of The Left Party from 1993 to 2003. The party's platform focuses on issues such as promotion of women's equal pay with men, individualised parental leave and measures against all forms of discrimination and gender-based violence, as well as reduced working hours and open borders. It is the only party except for The Left Party that actively supports a general six-hour workday, which is hardly surprising seeing as the six-hour workday traditionally has been just as much a feminist question as a left wing one, perhaps even more. The party is considered radical by some, especially among voters of the major political parties in Sweden, while some extra-parliamentary radical feminists are sceptical, concerned that the party is conforming to mainstream politics. Nonetheless the very existence of Feminist Initiative and the number of votes it attracts provides an important indicator of the popularisation of feminism in Sweden.

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<sup>20</sup> "SKR meets Beatrice Ask" (SKR träffar Beatrice Ask) (<http://www.kvinnojouren.se/skr-traffar-beatrice-ask>)

## **5.2 The popularisation of feminism**

One of the founders of Support Your Local Feminist, Jessica Haskell, says that she perceives an increase in women organising independently, and increased awareness concerning issues such as violence against women. At the same time there have been strong counter reactions to feminism as well, with people frequently trying to discredit feminist arguments, and as Jessica puts it when one is inside a movement it can sometimes be difficult to perceive the extent to which its popularity is increasing among the population at large. Ji Hang who I talked to in Beijing shares the same experience. She works for the Women's Media Watch Network and says she perceives an increase particularly in the number of young, active feminists in China, but that it is difficult to tell how feminism is growing in general from within the movement itself. In studying the feminist movement I find myself experiencing the same thing. Suddenly I'm surrounded by feminist theory and practice, but it is hard to decipher how much is actually reaching the population at large. Nonetheless if one takes a step back, looking at mainstream media and politics in Sweden today it is apparent that feminism here is indeed experiencing a popularisation. Parties on both sides, left and right, are using feminist rhetoric and setting issues such as sexual violence high on their agenda, and cases of sexual violence receive wide media coverage.

China has seen a drastic increase in the number of “mass incidents” during the last two decades. In their study “The Power of Instability” Ching Kwan Lee and Yonghong Zhang cites statistics showing that the number increased from 10,000 in 1993, to 60,000 in 2003 and then to 180,000 in 2010.<sup>21</sup> Poverty, increasing income gaps, exploitation of workers and farmers, and discrimination are some of the reasons behind this rapid increase. I will argue that feminist activism has also increased, and that some current forms of activism, such as public protests in the form of “performance art” of which a few cases will be discussed below, are relatively new in China. As in Sweden, media coverage on cases of violence against women indicate that gender issues are getting more attention. Another indicator is feminist protests, their impact and the media coverage they attract. For instance, in 2012 students started protesting against certain universities requiring a lower score on the entrance examination to get accepted for male student compared to female. A letter was sent to the Ministry of Education, which responded that manipulating the male to female student ratio for certain schools and educations is in the nation's interest. Dissatisfied with the

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<sup>21</sup> Ching Kwan Lee and Yonghong Zhang, “The Power of Instability: Unravelling the Microfoundations of Bargained Authoritarianism in China”, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 118, No. 6 (The University of Chicago Press, May 2013) p. 1476



response, four female students in Guangzhou shaved their heads in public with the message that the department's response equals “zero”, nothing at all, and several students across China followed their example. In 2013 the Ministry of Education announced that it would prohibit manipulation of the male to female enrolment ratio.<sup>22</sup>

### **5.3 Social media and activism**

Today different forms of social media have become important platforms for feminists in both China and Sweden to reach out to a wider audience. The Women's Media Watch Network frequently posts articles on their Weibo account with more than 40,000 followers, a number that is steadily increasing.<sup>23</sup> The network shares a lot of similarities with a news network, but they are also involved in giving seminars and in various campaigns to raise awareness on gender related issues. It employs a small number of full time staff and relies on funding from other organisations, but also on the work of volunteers. Ji Hang told me that they are now focusing a lot on their public WeChat account, which sends daily news messages to those who follow it. WeChat is a relatively new mobile text and voice message application. It was launched in 2013 and is now the world's biggest standalone chat application by monthly active users, and contains a feature similar to that of the news feed on Facebook. The network also prints fliers that are handed out during various activities or seminars that they organise, distributed among other organisations and placed in cafes or other strategic locations.

The Swedish organisation Support Your Local Feminist utilises social media networks such as Facebook to raise awareness on gender issues, and as one of its founders put it, with 3,000 followers on Facebook their updates will appear in the news feed of approximately 100,000 Facebook users. The number of followers of their account has increased to 5,000 over just a few months since then. Another recent effort by Support Your Local Feminist to popularise feminism is a t-shirt campaign, selling their own t-shirts with the organisation name and slogan “Support Your Local Feminist” as well as the logo printed on the chest, using any profit made from selling these t-shirts to further the cause of the network. The network is also an active organiser of public protests such as Reclaim the Night. Reclaim the Night is a form of protest march against different forms of sexual violence, harassment and violence against women in general that first started appearing in

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<sup>22</sup> “Young women around China shave their heads to protest gender discrimination in university enrolment” (Gedi nüqingnian ti guangtou fandui gaozhao xingbie qishi) (<http://lady.163.com/special/sense/nvrenxingdong04.html>); “Institutions of higher education are prohibited from manipulating the male to female enrolment ratio” (Gaoxiao bu dei shan she nannü luqu bili) (<http://www.genderwatch.cn:801/detail.jsp?fid=302820&cnID=90090>)

<sup>23</sup> “Nüquan Zhi Sheng” Weibo profile (<http://www.weibo.com/genderinchina>)

Europe and the US in the 1970's. Support your local feminist has been organising this demonstration in Malmo together with other feminist networks since 2008. The network also participates in various other demonstrations, such as pride or anti-racist rallies, often with some organisational responsibilities.

Some feminists in Sweden today are actively challenging norms of nudity. In 2007 two female students in Stockholm were forbidden to bathe topless in a public pool, an incident that was widely debated in Swedish media. As a response to this the network Bara Bröst (Meaning bare breasts or just breasts) was founded in Malmo in 2007. Since then women have been bathing topless in public pools on several occasions around Sweden with varying response. As a result a number of public pools have now specified in their regulations that bathing topless is allowed for women as well as men.

In 2012 more than ten feminist volunteers in China, some involved in different feminist networks, posted nude photos of their upper bodies online, some with red body paint or with messages stressing the seriousness of domestic violence written on themselves, in an effort to gather 10,000 signatures for a petition in support of legislating a specific law on domestic violence in China. In another campaign activists in five cities across China took to the streets dressed in wedding dresses stained with fake blood and with fake bruises on their faces. They carried signs with messages such as “Love is no excuse for violence” and “don't wait until she kills her husband in self-defence before you realize that she's been subjected to repeated physical abuse”, the latter referring to the case of Li Yan discussed earlier in this study. This particular approach to raising awareness on domestic violence appeared in Sweden recently as well. In the project “Back in Baby's Arms” Elin Lundgren let approximately one hundred women use make up to fake bruises and injuries and then stand silent in rows on a square in Malmo. This was in 2008, and the project was repeated in the city of Umeå in 2014.<sup>24</sup>

In June 2013 following the lay-off of a pregnant woman by group shopping website Meituan being brought to public attention, over the course of a few days groups of young activists dressed up as pregnant women in various professional outfits and gathered outside offices of the website in the cities of Beijing, Zhengzhou and Wuhan. Holding signs with slogans such as “pregnant women are not for you to sack as you please” and “support pregnant women, oppose Meituan”, the activists

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<sup>24</sup> “Women in China post nude photos online to protest domestic violence” (Zhongguo nüxing wangshang fa luozhao fan jiabao) ([http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-12/05/c\\_124050903.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-12/05/c_124050903.htm)); “Bloody Bride” street performance art against domestic violence” (“Shoushang Xinniāng” jietou shangyan xingwei yishu, xuanchuan fan jiabao) ([http://news.xinhuanet.com/local/2012-12/03/c\\_124039973.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/local/2012-12/03/c_124039973.htm)); “Art breaks the silence concerning domestic violence” (Konst bryter tystnaden kring våld i nära relationer) (<http://www.landetsfria.se/artikel/114620>)

handed out fliers with information on what actions can be taken when pregnant women's rights are ignored or violated. The protests are a reaction to a specific case but also an effort to raise awareness concerning pregnant women's rights and the violation of them in general. When interviewed the volunteers in this protest also commented on the sexist nature of advertisement used by the company, for which it has previously been widely criticised on the internet. One such example is the company's job advertisements with pictures of the legs of different women, some naked with their underwear pulled down below the knees, reading "looking for work = looking for women, you do the one you want to do the most". This quick response in support of the sacked woman's case against the company and the appearance of protest in different cities around China reveal sophisticated organisation and communication among these activists. Different methods to damage the reputation of companies in different ways have long been used by protesters, and is for instance a common approach used by the syndicalist unions in Sweden, one example being a recent campaign by Malmö LS to put pressure on the restaurant Indian Flavour in Malmö.<sup>25</sup>

In one recent incident a twenty year old woman who had been brought along to a business dinner by her manager was found dead in a hotel room. After getting drunk she was brought to a five star hotel by former employees of the company she worked for who were visiting Chongqing, and once in the hotel room she was sexually assaulted resulting in heavy bleeding which ultimately led to her death. Following this incident a few young women posted pictures of themselves online with the message "my vagina is not a workplace gift", with "not a gift" written on their thighs. This was done to protest a workplace culture where employment, termination thereof, promotion or risk of demotion can be used as leverage to make employees do what their superiors tell them, even when it's not directly related to one's work assignments. In the case of female employees, this sometimes translates into women being pressured to have sex, as in this case where it ultimately led to the woman's death.<sup>26</sup> A young woman that I know in China told me that shortly after she started a

<sup>25</sup> "Young women in Wuhan dress up as pregnant women, and protest Meituan's discrimination of pregnant women" (Wuhan nüqingnian ban yunfu, fandui meituan qishi yunfu) (<http://www.xbpd.org/web/newsx.asp?id=2183>); "Support pregnant women, oppose Meituan! Young women dress up as pregnant women and protest Meituan's lay off of pregnant employee" (Cheng yunfu, fan meituan! nüqingnian ban yunfu kangyi meituan qiangci huaiyun yuangong) (<http://www.genderwatch.cn:801/detail.jsp?fid=302874&cnID=90020>); "Volunteers in Zhengzhou dress up as pregnant women and call on working women to protect their legal rights" (Zhengzhou zhiyuanzhe ban yunfu, huyu "Zhichang nüxing yonggan weiquan") (<http://henan.sina.com.cn/news/s/2013-06-21/0803-76328.html>); "Pregnant woman laid off by the Meituan Network suggests labour arbitration, demands one month's salary in compensation" (Yunfu bei Meituanwang kaichu tiqing laodong zhongcai, yaoqiu gongsi bufa yi ge yue gongzi) ([http://news.xinhuanet.com/info/2013-06/05/c\\_132431808.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/info/2013-06/05/c_132431808.htm)); "Boycott against Indian Flavour in Malmö" (Bojkott av Indian Flavour i Malmö) (<https://www.sac.se/Aktuellt/Nyheter/Bojkott-av-Indian-Flavour-i-Malm%C3%B6>)

<sup>26</sup> "Female employee killed in sexual assault following a company business dinner, female netizens say: Vaginas are no workplace gifts" (Nühai gongwu yingchou zao xingqin zhishi, nü wangyou: Yindao bu shi zhichang zengpin) (<http://www.genderwatch.cn:801/detail.jsp?fid=304623&cnID=90050>)

new job she was relocated to stay in a hotel room, with the explanation that there wasn't enough beds in the company dormitories. The following night her manager came to the hotel room with the intention of having sex with her. She refused, and the manager left, but it was apparent to her that it was an intentional scheme, the outcome of which affected the manager's attitude towards her, and so she quit the job shortly thereafter.

Activism and protest in different forms seem to be an increasingly common approach among young feminists in China today. The PRC harbours a low tolerance to public gatherings and protests compared to Sweden, but feminists in China have found their own ways to protest. Sometimes they find inspiration in other parts of the world, as in the case of the wedding dress protest mentioned earlier, a form of protest that has been used in many different parts of the world to raise awareness on domestic violence. Another example of inspiration from abroad is the play “Yindao Zhi Dao” (literary meaning the way of the vagina), a interpretation of Vagina Monologues that was remade to better fit the Chinese context. It was set up at a few universities and other places in Beijing by a feminist group called BCome in 2013. Meanwhile feminists also develop their own methods of activism and protest in response to discrimination in China.

#### ***5.4 Feminism and socialism***

Feminism in Sweden, especially in its more radical forms, has a tradition of adopting or cooperating with other political ideologies such as socialism. One organisation active today that has chosen socialist feminism as its ideological foundation is the above mentioned Support Your Local Feminist, a network that shares some features with the 1970's Group 8. The network's political platform states that capitalism, liberalism, parliamentarianism and the patriarchy are all interrelated, and therefore they choose socialist feminism as a platform to battle all forms of inequality. Apart from working together with a wide range of other feminist organisations, the network also cooperates with other extra-parliamentary political networks such as the anti-capitalist Allt åt Alla, literally meaning everything for everyone.

Feminists in China seem more reluctant to add other political ideologies or epithets to their movements. There are a number of possible reasons for this, ranging from individual political views and agendas to the political atmosphere and the government's sensitivity to political ideologies that would challenge its authority. The explanation is probably a combination of many different factors. Looking at the feminist individuals and organisations that I have encountered in China, many of them do not hesitate to criticise the authorities and their actions, or to use controversial means in

their struggle. Their efforts are however aimed at changing the current system, not at suggesting an alternative one. Ji Hang told me that although not believing that the free market will solve problems of inequality, she and some of her fellow workers in the organisation believe that giving too much power to the state will also harm their movement, a very sober opinion considering the political history of the PRC. As mentioned in the history chapter, after the reforms started feminists worked hard to separate their movement from state ideology. In the light of this there is another factor concerning the status of socialism and communism in particular that deserves our attention. These are both official ideologies of the CPC, a party that has been implementing socialism and working towards communism since its foundation, at least officially. This official status of socialism and communism as ideologies of the government is one probable reason why they are not commonly found among extra-parliamentary political organisations. Comparison can be made between the status of socialism in China to that of democracy in Sweden. Many critics of our current political system do not consider it a real democracy. Consequently it would be perfectly possible for a radical political movement to adopt democracy as its ideology while still propagating a comprehensive transformation of the current system. However, Sweden is already a democracy, at least formally, and on top of that a large part of the population also considers Sweden a democracy, rendering it a complicated ideology to propagate as an alternative political system.

The fact that feminists that I have encountered in China do not add other political ideologies to their cause is of course not to say that feminists in China do not involve themselves in other political movements at all. Recently Ji Hang has been working on a project concerning the rights of domestic workers. Domestic workers in China are more often than not female migrant workers from rural areas or poor areas in general, and although this issue does fit well into the feminist cause it is undoubtedly also a workers' issue. The purpose of this project is to push for China to sign the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers, and to raise general awareness on domestic workers' rights, or the lack thereof, in general. The project has its own Weibo account which is used as a platform to publish news and raise awareness, and Ji Hang acts as editor of the account. A petition with 92 signatures gathered online and offline was sent to the relevant government department for the third year anniversary of the ILO convention.<sup>27</sup> The Women's Media Watch Network also functions as a platform of publicity for social movements directly or indirectly related to feminism around China. Staff working for the organisation carry out their own journalist work, but they also republish material from other networks and organisations. In another recent example of involvement in the

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<sup>27</sup> "Domestic workers and employers sign petition calling for signing of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers" (Jiazhenggong yu guzhu lianshu huyu qianding 《Jiazhenggong Timian Laodong Gongyue》) (<http://www.genderwatch.cn:801/detail.jsp?fid=304382&cnID=90020>; "Jiazhenggong Naxie Shi" Weibo Profile ([http://www.weibo.com/p/1005052819571371/weibo?from=page\\_100505&wvr=5&mod=headweibo](http://www.weibo.com/p/1005052819571371/weibo?from=page_100505&wvr=5&mod=headweibo)))

workers' movement the network published an extensive article on a strike in Guangzhou where at the time of writing around eighty sanitary workers, the majority of them women, are protesting deteriorating working conditions.<sup>28</sup>

### **5.5 Confrontations with the law**

The feminist movement in China, despite seeing an increase in young participants, is still small, and at least the more organised activism appears to be largely confined to the major cities. The movement does however seem vibrant and well organised. The different groups and networks within the movement keep track of each other and often work together. Organisations such as the Women's Legal Aid Network work from within the system, and when I talked to Lü Xiaoquan it was clear that he would certainly not define himself as a feminist activist. Nevertheless, when important women's rights issues surface, different groups and individuals all rise to the call, each using their own methods.

While in Beijing I discussed the nature of organisation and activism in China with a feminist who has herself participated in public protests. During our conversations she told me that protests often are organised by feminists from different networks and organisations working together. Furthermore she said that the protests usually are well planned, with prior briefing or agreements on what to say to police in the case of being “invited for tea”, a euphemism for interrogation. Plans are kept secret prior to execution, and duration is kept short, usually less than half an hour, in order to minimise the risk of being caught.

Some organisations in China, such as the one of Li Maizi (李麦子) who was interviewed by Leta Hong Fincher in her study on leftover women, seem to focus almost explicitly on activism. They often refer to what they do as “performance art” in order not to make the action itself sound too provocative while still conveying their message effectively, and for many of the protests this appears to be a rather fitting description. Li Maizi has herself been detained and brought to the police station “to drink tea”. The first time was when trying to occupy men's toilets in Beijing to protest against an imbalance in the number of cubicles in women's public toilets relative to men's. Soon after that she was taken in again when preparing to protest in front of the Civil Servants' Personnel Office against female applicants to civil service jobs being required to undergo a

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<sup>28</sup> “Look! Strong women take a stand: An account of the Guangzhou Higher Education Mega Center sanitary workers' strike” (Kan! Youli nüren zai kangzheng: guangzhou daxuecheng huanweigong weiquan bagong jishi) (<http://www.genderwatch.cn:801/detail.jsp?fid=304653&cnID=90020>)

gynaecological examination, screening for STDs and malignant tumours. The occupy men's toilets protest had been carried out a few days earlier in Guangzhou without attracting much attention from the authorities, and Li Maizi attributes this contrast to the more sensitive political environment in the capital. She also explains that her phone was monitored and the keywords "occupy men's toilets" were blocked on Sina Weibo for a number of days following the incident.<sup>29</sup>

During my conversations with activists in Sweden it appeared that when planning protests for which arrests seem possible they frequently use strategies similar to those employed by feminists in China. Public gatherings and protests are legal in Sweden, a right that was itself obtained through protests, demonstrations and strikes in the past. This right is however not unconditional. Factors that make arrests possible during demonstrations according to relevant legislation include trying to take a different route than the officially announced one, refusing to move or disperse when instructed by the police to do so, lighting flares or wearing masks. Just as in the case of the occupation of men's toilets campaign in China, regulations in Sweden are also subject to interpretation. One example is that flares are sometimes used in protests without any consequences, such as during the Pride Festival or the Reclaim the Night demonstrations in Malmö, while at other occasions they can be the sole reason for police to intervene and make arrests, as in the case of the 2014 International Workers' Day demonstration organised by extra-parliamentary left wing groups in Lund.<sup>30</sup> In Sweden one is also required by law to apply for permission to perform a public protest or gathering. The police can only deny permission to public protests under specific circumstances, the most common being security implications. The police is however only allowed to stop a demonstration for which no permission has been applied if the demonstration violates relevant regulations.<sup>31</sup>

In organising the Reclaim the Night demonstrations in Malmö, the Support Your Local Feminist network consistently chooses not to apply for permission with the police. Permission for this particular demonstration has always been granted despite not being applied for, but refusal to apply is in itself a way of protesting the requirement to do so. Members of Support Your Local Feminist that I talked to during my research have since they started the network not had any problems with the police in campaigns or protests related explicitly to feminism. Judging from this it would seem that feminists in Sweden deal with a significantly higher tolerance to their protests.

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<sup>29</sup> Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women, The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (Zed Books Ltd, 2014), pp. 167-168

<sup>30</sup> "Several injured following police intervention at demonstration" (Flera skadade efter polisinsats vid demonstration) (<http://www.sydsvenskan.se/lund/polisen-stormade-demonstrationstag/>)

<sup>31</sup> "The Swedish law on public order" (Sveriges Ordningslag) ([http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/Dokument-Lagar/Lagar/Svenskforfattningssamling/Ordningslag-19931617\\_sfs-1993-1617/](http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/Dokument-Lagar/Lagar/Svenskforfattningssamling/Ordningslag-19931617_sfs-1993-1617/))



There are however plenty of other contexts in which protests are not always tolerated.

In a recent protest aimed at disturbing a election campaign speech by a racist political party in Malmo, Support Your Local Feminist members that participated experienced an unusually violent reaction from the police. Several protesters where injured during the demonstration, some trampled by mounted police. The official strategy employed by the protesters was one of confrontational non-violence, and testimonials of journalists and other witnesses on the scene as well as various videos later confirmed that protesters almost exclusively used non-violent methods. Johan Pries, historian at Lund University, provides one analysis of the Limhamn incident in his article “Why did limhamn take place?”<sup>32</sup>. The prosecution of christian protesters attempting to stop a demonstration by Svenskarnas Parti on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 provide another indicator of the degree of tolerance to public protest in Sweden. The six protesters that have been prosecuted, one of which already sentenced with fines as penalty, were part of a sit-in aimed at preventing the demonstration of Svenskarnas Parti from proceeding. They were charged with refusal to cooperate with the police when instructed to stop chanting and disperse.<sup>33</sup>

The Chinese legislation on public gatherings and demonstrations is similar in that it requires organisers of such events to apply for permission. Authorities are only allowed to deny permission under certain circumstances, of which most have to do with security. Compared to its Swedish counterpart however, the legislation in China is stricter in certain ways. Public gatherings or demonstrations for which no permission has been applied are not allowed, and in such an event authorities have the unconditional right to intervene. Citizen do not have the right to protest in other cities than the one they reside in. Judging by cases discussed in this study as well as my own talks with feminists and activists in Beijing, the way in which authorities react to and confront protests vary depending on location and current policies. This study focuses on feminist protests, few of which seem to take the form of mass demonstrations, but this could be interpreted as at least partly a reaction to the relevant legislation and the enforcement of it. Further research on the frequency of strikers and protesters applying for permission and how reactions from authorities are affected by this could be revealing.<sup>34</sup>

The activist that I talked to in Beijing said that she and other feminists around her have experienced even less tolerance to different forms of public protests starting around the time that Xi

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<sup>32</sup> Johan Pries, ”Varför hände Limhamn?” (<http://altid.se/varfor-hande-limhamn/>)

<sup>33</sup> “Trial against psalm singers begins tomorrow” (Rättegång mot psalmsångare inleds imorgon) (<http://www.dagensarena.se/innehall/rattegang-mot-psalmsangare-inleds-i-morgon/>)

<sup>34</sup> “The Protest and Demonstration Law of The People's Republic of China” (Zhongguo Renmin Gongheguo Jihui Youxing Shiwei Fa) ([http://www.gjxfj.gov.cn/2005-01/13/content\\_3560962.htm](http://www.gjxfj.gov.cn/2005-01/13/content_3560962.htm))



Jinping assumed office. Still all feminists that I have talked to in China seem to agree that the government's tolerance towards feminism as an ideology is generous. This suggests that the low tolerance to their activism is more likely to be a symptom of a general sensitivity to public protest. It appears that in Sweden feminism as an ideology is not perceived as a threat to security by authorities either. The general notion of public demonstrations does seem to be perceived as less of a threat to security in Sweden compared to China, which for instance manifests itself in the response to feminist protests and activism. Yet in Sweden, depending on the context, a completely peaceful protest can be perceived as a threat to security if participants exercise any form of civil disobedience, i.e. do not comply with police instructions. The difference between the two countries then seems to be mostly in the definition of unacceptable civil disobedience, a definition that will inevitably be subject to interpretation in both countries.

## **5.6 Conformity or defiance**

In a study on feminist networks in China Wang Zheng expressed concern that excessive interaction and cooperation with state and the ACWF might transform feminist NGO's more than they transform society, depending on the staunchness of the NGOs in their struggle to stay independent.<sup>35</sup> This is no doubt a legitimate concern, but looking at the feminist movement of today we can see that part of it has definitely been moving away from the influence of the state and the ACWF. While some organisations and individuals do seem to work almost entirely within the legal and political framework laid down by local and national government, others are refusing to be confined to that same framework, using more controversial tactics to raise awareness and put pressure on authorities. Just as in Sweden there are those within the Chinese feminist movement, some working within established NGO's, others forming new groups and organisations, that take a more radical approach to their struggle. The feminist movement of today is a versatile cluster of old and new organisations, and especially among the more radical organisations there are many young members, indicating that there is a new generation of feminists growing within and alongside the old one. Feminist organisations and individuals are inevitably going to be affected by mainstream political currents, consciously or not, some to a greater extent than others. Even Jessica Haskel, despite being far to the left of Swedish parliamentary politics in both ideology and practice, told me

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<sup>35</sup> Wang Zheng, "Feminist Networks", *Reclaiming Chinese Society, The new social activism*, edited by You-tien Hsing and Ching Kwan Lee, (Routledge, 2010)

that there are times when she or other members of Support Your Local Feminist adjust their own language or message in order not to sound too controversial or provocative. The bottom line is that there can be no doubt today that there are many feminists who are actively trying to confront rather than conform in both China and Sweden.

A recent study on societal support and funding of grass-roots NGOs in China found that an increasing number of organisations are not registered properly as NGOs. Of the organisations included in the study as many as 70 percent were not properly registered, some being entirely unregistered, others registered in Hong Kong or under another organisation, or registered as businesses. The study included organisations in Beijing, Guangdong and Yunnan, and although the rate of organisations not “properly” registered was similar, there were significant variations in how they registered more specifically in the different areas. A much bigger share of the organisations in Beijing were registered as businesses, while the organisations in Guangdong and Yunnan were more likely to be entirely unregistered, registered under another organisation or “properly” registered as membership-based social organisations (*shehui tuanti*). The authors suggest that this is likely due to a stricter, more sensitive political atmosphere in Beijing, much in line with the experience of Li Maizi discussed earlier. The feminist organisations that I have been in contact with in Beijing were all registered as businesses. While all of them stated that the reason why they didn't register as “proper” NGOs was the difficult procedures and high requirements rather than fear of government insight or influence, the high rates of “improperly” registered NGOs might still suggest an increasing independence from the state.<sup>36</sup>

During my conversation with Feng Yuan she clarified that the Stop Domestic Violence Network cooperates quite closely with government departments to further their cause, and thus avoid excessively confrontational strategies. This likewise seems to be the case with the Women's Legal Aid Centre, judging from the status of the organisation as a legal firm and from my conversation with Lü Xiaoquan. This type of strategy inevitably limits the ways in which these organisations can express themselves and protest. They are for example unlikely to be participating in public activism. At the same time this approach gives them the ability to openly lobby the government for changes in legislation and policy, and to cooperate with government employees to make sure that their petitions are at least addressed by the National People's Congress. Judging from my conversations with Feng and Lü there appears to be little or no direct pressure from the government on their organisations with regards to their political agendas or work. The nature of

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<sup>36</sup> Anthony J. Spires, Lin Tao and Kin-man Chan, “Societal Support for China's Grass-Roots NGOs: Evidence from Yunnan, Guangdong and Beijing”, *The China Journal*, No. 71 (The Australian National University, 2014)

influence then, at least on non-activist forms of feminist activity, seems to be mostly indirect. These organisations are not being controlled or told what to do by the government, but cooperation is essential in carrying out work such as building support networks for battered women and pushing for reform in legislation. Laws and regulations as well as the incentive to stay on good terms with the state confine these organisations. Their agendas are not perceived as political threats, and they know how to carry out their work in ways that don't upset the authorities.

As in China, organisations and individuals that do not want any legal problems are confined by the laws and regulations in their own context. Apart from this, Sweden might harbour a more tolerant political atmosphere, but that does not mean that political movements in Sweden are immune to influence from mainstream media or politics. In order to demonstrate a tendency of Swedish feminists conforming to mainstream politics I will briefly discuss the Nordiskt Forum. Nordiskt Forum, a sequel to the forum by the same name held in 1994, was a feminist conference held in June 2014 in Malmö, inviting feminist organisations and individuals to discuss possible ways to promote women's rights and create a final document of action based on the Beijing Platform from 1995. In the preface to the forum criticism regarding the over-representation of white women, failure to address racism and too expensive participation fees making it difficult for some feminist groups to participate was raised. Interfem, a feminist organisation for women who also risk being subjected to racist discrimination, publicly announced their decision not to participate as they felt that the organisers did not respond constructively enough to criticism, partly raised by interfem itself.<sup>37</sup> A complementary feminist festival was arranged in Malmo running parallel to the Nordiskt Forum, not charging for participation in any activities. Further criticism of Nordiskt Forum was raised as it was revealed that Solveig Horne, Norway's minister of gender equality from the Norwegian party Fremskrittspartiet, roughly the equivalent of Sverigedemokraterna in Sweden and the UK Independence Party, was invited to receive the final document of the forum on stage at the closing ceremony. Organisers of the forum defended the invitation saying that it had been decided at an early stage that they should present the document to each of the Nordic ministers of gender equality, but regretted not letting the Norwegian minister answer to more criticism while receiving the document. Some feminists however dismissed this response as empty, arguing that even inviting the minister, not to mention not criticising her politics thoroughly once she was already there, is just another step in normalising the politics of the party she represents and other similar parties.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "Open letter to Nordic Forum" (Öppet brev till Nordiskt Forum) (<http://www.interfem.se/brev-till-nf2014.aspx>)

<sup>38</sup> "Nordic forum defends Frp-invitation" (Nordiskt forum försvarar Frp-inbjudan) (<http://www.etc.se/inrikes/nordiskt-forum-forsvarar-frp-inbjudan>); "Response to criticism" (Svar på kritik) (<http://nf2014.org/2014/06/17/svar-pa-kritik/>)

Many feminist groups and individuals perceived a tendency within Nordiskt Forum to adapt to mainstream politics, and also to show excessive acceptance to political currents in the Nordic countries, even when some of those currents conflicted directly with feminist ideology. This phenomenon might in essence not be that different from what happens with Chinese feminist organisations as they start working closer together with the state that they are trying to lobby.

In China, the ACWF provides a good example of conformity. The federation is supposedly the state body responsible for promoting gender equality, but its close ties with the government renders it largely unable to carry out any significant work that does not accord with current state policy. Other organisations such as the Stop Domestic Violence Network or the Women's Legal Aid Centre will in their efforts to cooperate with the government inevitably also end up compromising their own political agendas, albeit to a lesser extent due to their independent nature. Just as in Sweden there are feminists in China who promote gender equality through means that let them keep more of a distance to the state. When I asked Ji Hang about the role of the ACWF within Chinese feminism today, she simply responded that she doesn't really know. She said that the Women's Media Watch Network hardly works together with the Federation at all, except perhaps when responding to a major gender-related case that is easy for everyone to rally behind, such as that of Li Yan. Current forms of feminist activism in which young feminists risk being arrested provide further evidence of the existence of a healthy independent feminist movement.

## 6. Conclusions

Much suggests that both Sweden and China are experiencing period of politicalisation and radicalism today, and feminism is an important part of this. The frequency of women's issues entering public debate, new organisations appearing and the increasing number of people following feminist organisations online are some of the indicators of a growing feminist movement, in Sweden and China alike. Just as women in early 20<sup>th</sup> century China and Sweden struggled to push the boundaries within which women were expected to exist back then, today women in the two countries are struggling to push the current boundaries, those restricting women specifically as well as those restricting social movements in general. While the core of feminist ideology and of gender inequalities is similar in both countries, there are some noteworthy differences in how inequalities manifest themselves and how feminists rise to meet them. In both countries feminists challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, and try to influence public opinion on gender discrimination. The debate on gender discrimination seems strikingly similar, perhaps not all that surprising as feminist movements across the world were influencing each other even a hundred years ago. Nevertheless there are differences in what immediate changes in policy or legislation that are fought for. One example is how feminists in China have long been pushing for specific legislation on domestic violence, while some feminists in Sweden are currently pushing for a change in legislation on sexual abuse and rape.

Feminists in Sweden today are following a pattern similar to that their predecessors, using public demonstrations, printed material, meetings and seminars as tools to further their cause. Some are trying to stay politically independent, focusing only on improving the situation of women within the current political system, some combine their feminism with other political ideologies working to change the system as a whole, arguing that one type of oppression leads to another. As opposed to in Sweden where the political system has remained relatively unchanged for a long time, feminism in China has experienced a new start as an independent movement after the reforms started in 1978. They seem less inclined to include other political ideologies in their own, but there are still those who criticise the current political system and work to change it. Their activism for instance is challenging not only gender roles, but also the government's sensitivity to public protests. Nonetheless feminist organisations in China seem to focus on changing the current system, and organisations with agendas similar to for instance Support Your Local Feminist are hard to find, if they exist.

Internet and social media provide new platforms for communication as well as advocacy that

are frequently utilised by organisations and networks in both countries. Social media networks such as Facebook in Sweden and Weibo in China have become important tools in reaching a wider audience. Some differences can be found in the ways that feminists in the two countries convey their message in public. Performance art in combination with a clear political message, often in written form, is one common approach in China, a form of protest not as frequently utilised by organised feminists in Sweden today. Broadly speaking feminists in China seem more inclined to use the element of visual provocation in public protest, and to drawing attention to specific cases of discrimination. Their counterparts in Sweden more often organise and participate in mass demonstrations. It seems plausible that this approach is partly a result of the low tolerance in China towards public protests, and to mass demonstrations in particular. Protests in the form of performance art can be executed by a small number of people in a short period of time, but are still likely to attract media attention, especially in a context where public protest in and of itself is a sensitive topic.

While the subject of this study was narrowed down as it developed, further specialisation could have been beneficial in several ways. If the focus of the study had been narrowed down further to work on more specific aspects of feminism in the two countries, more in-depth research could have been carried out. Further studies on and comparison of social movements, feminist or otherwise, in the two countries could reveal additional similarities and differences, and other possible reasons behind them. My hope is that this study will at least provide some general insight into the dynamics of feminist movements in the two countries and their differences.

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