

# Performing Feminism

## Motivations of Young Feminist Activists in China

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## *Abstract*

China's women's movement is currently being reignited by diverse groups of young feminist activists. Given China's authoritarian environment, these activists have condemned institutionalized efforts to achieve gender equality and instead adopted a non-institutionalized approach through performance art, such as theatre and singing. This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference and sets the stage for reviving the discussions on women rights in China. Yet, a recent event of arresting and detaining some activists shows the risks involved of highlighting current gender inequalities. The aim of this study is to explore the motivations behind the movement. With data collected from semi-structured interviews with group members and academics, together with various observations, it aims to identify the motivation of these young feminist activists. While personal experiences act as a driver to become engaged, it is found that high levels of solidarity and group dynamics are highly significant in sustaining the movement. Through eclectic and non-institutionalized demonstrations, and thereby putting their own safety at risk, the group of activists has become more vocal in China's society.

## *Acknowledgements*

This thesis is a capstone of my two years at the master program in Asian Studies at Lund University including my fieldwork in Beijing. I would first like to express my sincerest gratitude to Birgit Rausing Language program for believing in my project and awarding me their Chinese scholarship, the Sociology department at Lund University for the Minor Field Studies and NIAS for the valuable comments and response to my ideas for this project.

I would also like to express my greatest appreciation to: my contact person who has been a key person throughout this whole project, the brave feminist group for welcoming me into their space, my mentor in Beijing for giving me her limited time and finally my very patient, supportive and encouraging supervisor Annika for her invaluable advice, discussions and for steering me in the right direction in the completion of this thesis, thank you!

Last but not the least, this thesis would not have been possible without the indispensable support and love from family and friends. Namely my sisters Jeanette and Nathalie for their loving support and encouragement, my Kees who has been with me from the very start and throughout this journey supported and motivated me, and finally, all the amazing friends in Lund.

## *Abbreviations*

ACWF	All-China Women Federation
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
FUNCW	1995 Fourth UN World Conference on Women
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSM	New Social Movement

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## *Prologue: The 6-7 March Crackdown*

On March 7<sup>th</sup> 2015 feminist activist groups across China planned a performance with the intention to raise awareness on sexual harassment. Some of these planned protests were arranged to take place on public transport and others took place in a public park in Beijing with the intention to commemorate the annual International Women's day on March 8. With just days leading up to the protest, police had already harassed some of the feminist activists as a sign of warning. Despite the harassments the decision was to proceed with their performance, but at a different location. On the evening of March 6, around ten feminist activists across China had reported being forcefully arrested by the police (including two of the respondents of this study) with the allegation of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble". Although some were released after a couple of hours of interrogation (on March 7), five women remained in detention and were held for the next 37 days, faced criminal charges and five years in prison. It has been recognized that these five women were purposefully detained because of their roles as initiators, founders, and organisers of feminist groups and protests within the Chinese feminist community.

The arrests triggered a wave of protests and demonstrations from feminist groups in China and beyond. Along with wide international attention, this incident has been noted as the "Feminist awakening in China"<sup>1</sup> by various media. A petition demanding the release of the "five detained" circulated on various social platforms and was signed by over 120.000 people<sup>2</sup>. This wave of protest included posting images for instance where supporters wear masks of the jailed activists faces while being at famous tourist attractions. Statements such as #Freethethefive, #Freebeijing20Five and #CantArrestUsAll were also posted and circulated on various Chinese and foreign social networks including Weibo, Wechat, Facebook, and Twitter. Some in the international feminist community even took the protest in front of Chinese embassies to show their discontent.

Online protesting was coupled with support from the international feminist community and multiple international organisations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the European Union and United Nations, whom all urged the release

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<sup>1</sup> China's Feminist Awakening – By Xiao Meili [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/14/opinion/xiao-meili-chinas-feminist-awakening.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/14/opinion/xiao-meili-chinas-feminist-awakening.html?_r=0) (accessed: July 16, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> All Out Petition: <http://allout.org/en/campaign-highlights/#china> (accessed: July 13, 2015)

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of the activists. Some high-profile politicians such as Hilary Clinton<sup>3</sup>, John Kerry<sup>4</sup>, and Samantha Power<sup>5</sup> also publically condemned this detention. Eventually, the Chinese authorities released the activists on April 13. However, the detained women could still face further charges.

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<sup>3</sup> A current president candidate. Participated in the 1995 United Nations Women's conference where she said the famous statement "women rights are human rights"

<sup>4</sup> The current United States Secretary of State

<sup>5</sup> A diplomat who currently serves as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations



# *1. Introduction*

## **1.1 Research Problem**

On Valentine's Day in 2012, three students dressed up in blood-splattered wedding dresses and marched through the back streets of Tiananmen Square, holding up signs with slogans such as "*Love is not an excuse for violence*" and "*Violence is right beside you. Why are you silent?*" to demonstrate against domestic violence (Fincher 2014:229). Acknowledging the strict and repressive stance the Chinese government has on public protest (for instance demonstrated by the violent suppression of previous student protests) the courage and bravery of these young women had struck me. I wonder what drives these young women to protest in an authoritarian environment, willing to put their own safety and privileges at risk. In the last few years, small acts of defiance staged by feminist activists caught the attention of local, foreign media, and in particular social media. When the issue of women's rights in China is raised through the means of protest it can suggest a number of things. It could be read as a sign that there remains dissatisfaction regarding gender equality in the Chinese society. Yet, there is wide belief and assumption that there is no feminist movement in China. However, with the emergence of feminist activism, it could also imply that a feminist discourse has re-emerged that aims to revive the women's movement in China.

The purpose of this study is to look at contemporary feminist activism in China, and more specifically on the motivations of young feminists and whether their actions have influenced a feminist discourse in China. There exists a rich body of literature on women's right movements that go back to previous periods, including the late Qing-dynasty, Maoist period and the early post-Maoist period (e.g. see Barlow (2004) and Croll (1978)). However, little literature has been devoted to the current feminist movement in China, and especially to groups consisting of young feminist activists. Therefore, much remains unknown about this group and in particular what motivations they have.

## **1.2 Definition of Feminism**

Feminism is a broad term that covers various feminist strands of thoughts and diverse interpretations have been developed by different scholars. Furthermore, when placed within a particular cultural realm, it becomes even more so complex. The reiteration of what a 'women' and 'feminism' implies are originally commonly drawn from the work of Simone

de Beauvoir (1953), which found that women are regarded as the secondary sex, and of Virginia Woolf (1929), who argued that the essential part of feminism is the struggle for one's own space. Taking account of Sherry Ortner's (1996) *Making Gender*, one could also argue for greater rapprochement between feminist, minority postcolonial, and subaltern scholarship. This is partially based on discussions about intersectionality<sup>6</sup>, which have been introduced to feminism by black women who felt left out of the white feminists' considerations. This allows one to explore what role female/subaltern agency plays but also how this kind of agency is constructed in a specific context. Feminism is therefore regarded as a product of 'constructivism' that is informed by cultural categories, historical subjects and forms of subjectivities

Chinese feminism may have lost its relevance because of diverse historical impacts, such as during the Maoist period when 'nüquan zhuyi' and its emphasis on women power was replaced by 'nüxing zhuyi', a less political term with more emphasis on biological differences (Hsiung et al. 2001:283). In addition, the women's movement was institutionalized and dominated by the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), followed by discursive changes in rhetoric and contemporary linguistic messiness, which has arguably acted to conceal a century-long process of Chinese feminism (Ko and Zheng 2007). Nevertheless, Chinese feminism has become increasingly present in China today. As an umbrella movement, Chinese feminism is both diverse and part of the wider and multifaceted feminism that combines both native and foreign (mostly Western) influences (Chen 2011:2). Following the high diversity within the discourse, there exist different kinds of feminist activists groups in China. Examples are 'lala' (拉拉, lesbian), 'tongzhi' (同志, gay), LGBT and migrant women. Although these groups strive for social justice, their meanings can vary as well as their ways and means of achieving this.

Indeed, there are many variations of Chinese feminism. However in accordance with the purpose of this thesis, the term of Chinese feminism (*nüquan zhuyi*)<sup>7</sup> will be adopted in the most basic sense as a movement for women's equal rights. This is drawn from the most

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<sup>6</sup> A term that was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. For further reading see Kimberle Crenshaw's 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color' *Stanford Law Review* Vol. 43, No. 6 (1991)

<sup>7</sup> *Nüquan zhuyi* - is translated as 'women-rights-ism' and can be interpreted as women's power. This particular definition of feminism has been regarded as bourgeois by the CCP, and has since the 1920s appeared in official Chinese discourse but with negative connotations associated with bourgeois values. However, in 1980s a new translation of feminism emerged, *nüxing zhuyi* - which is literally the 'ism' of the female sex. In contrast *nüquan zhuyi* this term has less political but more biological connotations. There is thus a controversy between these two terms. For further reading see Hsiung et al. (2001)

common definition of feminism, which is the “belief in or advocacy of women’s social, political and economic and all other rights equal to those of men”<sup>8</sup>. This will be adopted in both the present and historical context where individual and groups have struggled for more equal women’s rights, although these groups may not have actively used this term to identify themselves with.

### **1.3 Relevance**

Studying the current trend of feminist activism in China today is academically relevant because it suggests that there still exists an unjust and patriarchal system that denies women equality. More specifically, studying feminist activists sheds light on what these activists’ believe and helps to reveal where women’s inequality occurs. The social significance of these activist groups should not be neglected. They can be a strong and vocal group in raising public awareness on gender inequality, advocate for women and LGBT rights, and strive for social change, as we can see elsewhere with Pussy Riot in Russia or Femen in Ukraine.

Moreover, studying feminist activists that have taken a more confrontational approach is particularly relevant because it reflects an independent feminist movement that operates outside the realm of the authorities. This is important because they are finding creative ways to voice their concerns in a largely authoritative environment. The majority of the young feminist activists are born in the 1980s or early 90s and therefore offspring of China’s one-child policy. They are very well educated, highly socially conscious and unlike the previous generation of activists, they are equipped with social media that has provided them with new opportunities to protest. Given that the number of studies on current young feminist activists in China remains small, this study aims to fill in the gap by looking at how they are organized and what drives these individuals to protests in an authoritarian environment. Studying the dynamics of this group and the feminist community is also relevant to understanding the strong bond of solidarity and network between activists, which helps to understand the growth of the movement.

### **1.4 Context of the Research**

The question that is being raised in this research is what the motivations behind these young feminist activists are, and more interestingly why is this trend of feminist actions occurring

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<sup>8</sup> For a definition of feminism, see: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>

now? Recent actions such as ‘occupy men’s toilet’ that challenged the lack of female public facilities, the ‘bald sisters’ where activists shaved their heads advocate for equal gender ratio for university entrance, and the most recent attempt to raise awareness about sexual harassment on public transport in March 2015. Looking at the contemporary Chinese women rights movement, it remains largely marginalized within the mainstream Chinese society. While there does exist the Communist Party “movement of women” (*yundong funü*) which is a top-down mobilization of women in service to the nation, and the bottom-up “women’s movement” (*funü yundong*), there is “basically no space for an independent women’s movement” says Feng Yuan from Anti-Domestic Violence Network in Beijing (Fincher 2014: 229).

However, there is an emergence of small and vibrant activist groups that take a more confrontational approach. These are feminist activists who do not belong to any officially registered organization, have instead chosen to work independently in order to raise awareness about women’s rights (ibid:229). Acknowledging the limited space to protest, more organized activists have found creative and provocative ways to protest, for instance using theater, music, poetry, improvised performance, symbolic actions and ultimately their bodies. Some of these are inspired by other movements such as the popular American play ‘vagina monologue’, but also, by locally initiated actions such as the ‘blood-splattered wedding dresses’. With the use of social media, these activist have then skillfully sparked up public debate on women rights and feminism in China. Due to the scope of this thesis, I have chosen to analyze one feminist activist group that is located in Beijing. The group focuses on advocating women’s sexual rights. Through a feminist ethnographical approach, this study aims to shed light on this often ignored and marginalized group in Chinese society.

### **1.5 Motivation of Location**

While feminist activist protests have been initiated across many cities in China, this thesis focuses on a feminist activist group located in Beijing. At the same time, the thesis also takes into account the prevalence of feminist activism in China elsewhere through secondary data. The motivation to use Beijing as a case study is because there is a general trend that feminist activism, and other kinds of activism, are most apparent in China’s capital city. Beijing also acts as China’s political and cultural hub where many non-governmental organizations are located (Chiu 2013:17). Another reason to choose Beijing as a site of research is that the environment for public gatherings and protests, has proven to be more repressive for the feminist activist groups in Beijing than in southern China (Fincher 2014:233). Since the

study intends to find the motivations of the actors involved in feminist activism, Beijing serves as a good location in generating fruitful data on these actors who are operating in a repressive space.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

Corresponding with the overall aim of this thesis, the overarching research question of this thesis is as follows:

*“What are the motivations behind young feminist activists in China to protest through a non-institutionalized and performance art approach?”*

The question above is supported by a set of three sub-questions:

- 1. How do young feminist activists perceive inequality?*
- 2. In what kind of context do young feminist activists operate and what challenges do they experience?*
- 3. What is the motivation to adopt a non-institutionalized and performance art approach?*

## **1.7 Disposition**

The thesis consists of seven chapters and the first chapter introduces the context and relevance of the study while also the research questions are presented. The second chapter introduces the methodology that is employed in this thesis, together with methodological considerations and the adopted research design. At the same time, critical reflections of the author’s position as a researcher and limitations of the research are also discussed. The third chapter discusses the theoretical framework, which mostly rests on the feminist activist performance art theory by Garlough (2008), which is used to explain the motivations behind the feminist activists. In the fourth chapter, the reader is introduced to the contemporary scholarship on Chinese feminism. It reveals some of the prevailing gender inequalities and the efforts that have been taken in order to improve the situation of women in. The fifth chapter presents the empirical data that is derived from the feminist groups and the interviewees and discusses their motivations to engage in feminist activism. It also shows how being a part of the feminist group and protesting through ‘performance art’ is a central characteristic of the current feminist movement, both in creating space and in empowering the activists through the process. The sixth chapter analyzes the findings and identifies feminist activists’ motivations to engage in protests. Finally, chapter 7 will conclude and summarize the findings.

## *2. Methodology*

### **2.1 Methodological Considerations**

This thesis adopts a constructivist ontology which asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors and are therefore constantly in a state of revision (Bryman 2012:33). Since the main methods in this thesis are participatory observation and semi-structured interviews, much of the focus is placed on the participants of this research. The rationale behind these methods is to understand the individual experiences and motivations of young feminist activists, rather than finding an actual or ‘real’ meaning of feminism. The constructivist approach is suitable here as it recognizes that there are multiple and subjective realities (Bryman 2004:16), which allows for different understandings of what feminism means. Closely related, the epistemological stance of this thesis is interpretivism. It rejects the idea that the world can be studied as it really is and instead argues that there remains a certain degree of subjectivity and the researcher’s own bias (Bryman 2012:27). This is particularly true for this thesis, as there is a weak consensus on what feminism actually entails or what is meant with equal women rights, and how this should be achieved. As this study will demonstrate, the actors included in this research are often influenced by their own experiences and values. The aim is therefore not to reveal a definite truth, but rather to present the reality that is perceived by the young feminist activists.

### **2.2 Research Design**

The primary source for data was through participatory observation and semi-structured interviews with young feminist activists over the course of 10 weeks in Beijing. This is complemented by secondary data derived from academic literature. This study adopts a qualitative feminist ethnographic method because it allows one to grasp the significance of understanding women from their perspective, their lives, and activities that have remained largely ignored or subsidiary to men (Bryman 2012:453). This qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for greater opportunity for feminist sensitivity to come forth (Bryman 2012:410). Feminism and qualitative research have been argued to be particularly compatible since a qualitative approach not only allows women voices to be heard, but also because it can critically seek to “alleviate the conditions of oppression” (ibid:454).

Furthermore, by adopting a qualitative research method provides data that is recorded from “the point of view of the participants” (Bryman 2008:393). This in turn enables the researcher to obtain “rich and deep data” which allows for new questions, depending on the input of the participants (ibid: 437).

### 2.2.1 Case Study

This study focuses on one specific feminist activist group based in Beijing and is not a holistic case because it makes only use of one feminist activist group (Yin 2003). A case study design is adopted because of its ability to provide in-depth information, which is a necessary component concerning the aim of this study (Flyvbjerg 2011). Yin (2003) claims that case studies are defined by the following four criteria; number of cases, units of analysis, nature of the case and the theoretical aims (Yin 2003). In terms of the nature of the case, this is an instrumental case study because it provides insights to develop an existing theory (Stake 1995). Although the unit of analysis and site of research each have their unique characteristics, it could also be regarded instrumental because the unit of analysis in this thesis shares similarities with other feminist activists in China elsewhere such as Guangzhou and Shanghai. Finally, concerning the theoretical aims of this study, this study is regarded as a descriptive case study because of its specific focus and its aim to acquire in-depth information (Yin 1993).

### 2.2.2 Participatory Observer

Direct engagement in activities together with observations of the behavior of members, allows one to elicit the meanings they attribute to their environment and behavior (Bryman 2012:316). The strength of participatory observation is to introduce a first-hand understanding of the situation the feminist activists are in, which also helps to understand their motivation to become active in a group. As a participant observer, I participated in three different activities held by the research feminist group that included three different types of meetings (table 1).

*Table 1 Attended sessions of the observed group*

<i>Date</i>	<i>Session</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i># Participants</i>
February 8	Educational session	A public café	9
March 21	Group planning meeting	A public café in a hutong	17
March 22	Photo activity	Lama Temple district	6

The educational session took place in a public café and the main activities consisted of two presentations, various name games, and a clay session. All these activities had the aim to inform and educate about the topic of breasts and the stigma around it, the clay session, for instance, was intended to inform about different breast figures and sizes. The educational session lasted for about five hours and was attended by nine participants, eight women, and one man. The second activity was a group-planning meeting, which also took place in a public café and was located in a hutong. During this more informal meeting, the main discussions revolved around the recent crack down on feminist activists and how to advocate for the release of these women. The meeting lasted about three hours and was attended by 17 participants, consisting of 16 women and one transgender man. The third event was a photo activity where some activists had printed a picture of Li Maizi (one of the five detained women) together with her girlfriend Xiaola. The printed photo was then taken to Lama Temple, a famous tourist attraction in Beijing, where it was photographed and then posted on different social media channels. This particular photo session while aimed to raise attention of the five detained women it was also to show how the detention has separated the two lovers Li Maizi and Xiaola. There were in total six members involved in this activity and it lasted for about three hours.

All the three sessions were held in Mandarin. Although I only speak a very basic level of mandarin, I always felt included and welcomed in the group. My contact person and other participants played a great role in this, by being very inclusive, helpful and when needed helping me with translation. I am aware of the criticism concerning a lack of objectivity and personal bias of the researcher and have therefore adopted strategies to reflect on myself as a researcher. This is with the purpose to challenge the unequal power dimensions that arises between researcher and participants during research. The three power dimensions emphasized by Diane Wolf (1996b in Naples 2003:38) are:

1. Power difference that is stemmed from different positions of the researcher to the researched. Factor such as race, class, nationality, life chances, and urban rural-background.
2. Power of exercised during the research process. Such as the researchers relationship, unequal exchange and exploitation.
3. Power exerted after the fieldwork. Such as writing and representing the participants.



By adopting these reflective strategies, I as a researcher become more aware and try to actively mitigate any potential power imbalances during the research process (Naples 2003: 38).

### 2.2.3 Interviews

In total, nine semi-structured interviews have been conducted, five with members of the feminist group (table 2) and four with influential academic scholars (table 3). With semi-structured interviews the respondents were allowed a great amount of leeway to respond (Bryman 2012:471), while at the same time also provide structure. A list of questions was compiled beforehand, which served as a guideline for the interview (appendix I). Some questions remained unasked when they were not applicable, and sometimes extra questions were spontaneously added, depending on the direction of the conversation and the input of the participants.

*Table 2 Interviews with young feminist activists*

Date	Pseudo Name	Position	Age	Education level
March 14	Xia	Master Student	31	Bachelor
March 14	Kwan	Working	25	Master
March 14	Ling	Student	25	Master
March 27	Wan	Working	30	Master
March 27	Qing	Working	31	Bachelor

*Table 3 Interviews with academics*

Interview Date	Pseudo Name	Position
February 10	Li	Professor
March 9	Ting	University lecturer
March 11	Hong	University lecturer
March 27	Jiao	Professor

All the interviewees from the feminist group had a university background (minimum Bachelor degree) and were between the age of 25 and 31. I interviewed five people, four women, and one transgender man. All the five respondents, even two being relatively new members in the group (less than a year), have all partaken in some kind of performance act. It is also important highlight that two of the respondents were involved in the crackdown on activists that took place in March 6-7, 2015. This suggests that these two participants might have been influenced by this incident and therefore has a slightly different view. With a first

-hand experience of the incident, these two respondents interviews bring a very important perspective in this study, especially in showing Chinese authority's intolerance of protesting.

In addition to the young feminist activists, I also interviewed three highly influential academics in China who have and are currently working extensively with women rights in China but in different areas. Having followed the development on women's rights since the 1995 Beijing UN Women's conference, these three academics agree that it was an important event in the step towards improving women's rights in China. All the three academics are today currently active working with women's rights within various fields in connection to university and academia.

Acknowledging some important differences between the interviewees and me, I always tried to emphasize my student status and asked them to use my first name. This was necessary to create an informal atmosphere where they could talk openly. The interviews with members from the feminist group usually took place at different cafés located in a hutong. The interviews with the academics took place at either a university or restaurant. The majority of the interviews were conducted in English, but when this was not possible the help of a translator was used. Some of the interviews have been recorded and are only those that were given clear consent by participant, which was always asked before the interview was conducted. Each interview lasted about 1-1.5 hours depending on the answers of the respondent and the direction the interview was going. Furthermore, due to the public holiday of Chinese New Year (celebrated for 2 weeks), March 6-7 crackdown and the following detention, it was difficult to collect data during this period. This can be seen in my data collection process where there is a gap between February 8 (participant observation) and March 14 (interview).

## **2.4 Research Criteria**

According to Bryman (2012), there are three key criteria concerning social research: reliability, replication, and validity. Reliability concerns the measurement and consistency of the research methods. In this study, reliability was aided by the consistency of semi-structured interviews (ibid:715). Replication is the second criterion and closely related to reliability, as it concerns whether the findings can be reproduced. Since this study is conducted through a feminist ethnographic approach there are certain constraints about the researcher's objectivity and therefore on the study's replication. In particular, since the primary data is obtained through observations from the researcher's participation (Hammersly 1992 in Naples 2003:38). However, with critical self-reflection strategies

adopted at all stages of the fieldwork, this method has aimed to improve the replication of this study (Ackerly and True 2010). Lastly, validity is about the integrity of the study's outcomes. Since this study focuses on only one specific group and interviews some of its members and looks at their motivations, this study can simply not claim or attempt to represent all young feminist activists in China. It does however, represents an important group within the current Chinese feminism movement.

## **2.5 Challenges, Limitations, and Critical Approach**

This research has faced some unforeseen challenges, which have led to some amendments of the initial research plan. The greatest challenge was to participate in performance demonstrations and acquiring interviews with the feminist activists, partly due to the Chinese New Year holiday. However, these challenges were increased after the crackdown. The event caused fear for the activists' safety and consequently led some of the participants' temporary leaving Beijing, while others assumed in a low profile. Therefore, the scheduled performances and activities were put on hold, including the annual performance of the recreated version the Vagina Monologue<sup>9</sup> in Beijing. Although the normal activities were postponed, the group and some of its participants turned their attention to raising awareness on the five detained feminist activists. During this period, through my contact person, I was able to conduct some interviews and participate in the few activities organized by the group. Another limitation was the time, in particular with the Chinese New Year (lasting for two weeks) taking place very late this year it also interrupted the data collection process. Moreover, language was another limitation. However, with the help of translators and with a majority of the respondents speaking English this problem was overcome.

Although this research includes only a small sample size, it is designed as a case study and intended to shed light on a very specific feminist group. Therefore, the quality and depth of the interviews are more important than the quantity. Especially the interviews with two participants involved in the March 6-7 crackdown are considered relevant and appropriate with the aim of this study. While the crackdown suddenly interrupted the data collection process, the responses, and new developments in the aftermath of the crackdown proved to be an invaluable opportunity and vantage point in observing the feminist activists. At the same time, other observations could be made not only from domestic feminist groups

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<sup>9</sup> Vagina monologue is a play consisting of a number of monologues aiming to end violence against women. The play is written by Eve Ensler in 1996. For further reading on Vagina Monologue, see: Eve Ensler's "The Vagina Monologues" (*Villard, December 26, 2007*)

but also responses from the international community<sup>10</sup>. This event highlighted the influence and recognition of young feminist activists. I believe that my sample is appropriate for this research as the group reveals an important but often ignored perspective in the current state of Chinese feminism.

## **2.6 Ethical Considerations**

From the beginning I made it clear that I was a student from Lund University and explained the aims and purpose of my research. Before conducting the individual interviews I asked for permission to record the interview. It was also explained that I would be the only person to possess the full answers. All these steps were taken again in order to ensure the safety of my respondents. Finally, no substantial gifts were promised or given. However, ice cream and chocolates were given to the interviewees at the end of the interview, as a token of my gratitude for their participation.

The research and fieldwork have been conducted in accordance with the Swedish Research Council (SRC 2002). In particular, attention is allocated to the four areas where ethical concerns arise; whether harm comes to the participants; informed consent; invasion of privacy; and deception (Bryman 2012:130). These considerations are all related to the safety of the respondents. Since feminism and the nature of activism often perceived as provocative or contesting the legitimacy of the state, especially in China, doing research has been conducted with extreme precaution. Naturally, a high degree discretion and sensibility were maintained throughout the whole study. The interviewees were granted absolute anonymity and confidentiality and their name and location have been changed.

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<sup>10</sup> Besides international feminist groups the incident also raised attention from e.g. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UN and European Union, but also from people such as: Hillary Clinton, John Kerry and Samatha Power.

### *3. Theoretical Framework*

#### **3.1 New Social Movements Theory**

Guiheux and Kuah-Pearce (2009) argue that social movements can be divided into two groups. The first group is conventional social movements that are “based on the Marxist line of class differentiation and economic materialism”; while the second group is a ‘new’ type emerged during the post-industrial and post-modern era (Guiheux and Kuah-Pearce 2009:14-16). It is the second type of group, in the literature crafted as the New Social Movement (NSM) theory, in which this research is situated. The NSM theory draws upon the works from Touraine (1985), Calhoun (1995), Melucci (1985), and others. The theory is particularly helpful in offering a cultural approach to understanding social movements, placing an emphasis on social constructs such as frames, identities, meanings and emotions (Goodwin and Japsen 2004).

NSM are characterized as to working outside formal institutional channels and focus on ethical or identity concerns rather than economic issues (Calhoun 1995:173). Therefore, identities (such as gender, race, and sexual orientation) are the sources of NSM, which accordingly culminate in movements such as the feminist movement, the peace movement, the LGBT movement, and the animal rights movement. Furthermore, Touraine (1985) finds that the groups have a sociocultural orientation and usually position themselves against state structures, sometimes because they find themselves in a marginalized or oppressed position.

Moreover, their method of protesting is also different from conventional social movements. NSM tends to be more individualized, bottom-up and eclectic (Guiheux and Kuah-Pearce 2009:15). Therefore, the New Social Movements are often regarded as a form of collective action that is primarily based on solidarity (Melucci 1985:795). They have in particular taken advantage of new technological opportunities, most notably social media (Obar et al. 2011). In maneuvering beyond state boundaries, they move out of their subordinate positions and seek to actively engage civil society (Polletta 1999:6).

#### **3.2 Garlough’s Feminist Activist and Performance Theory**

Given the wide array of NSM, this thesis specifically focuses on the activities of the young feminist activists. Without a public space to protest and voice their opinions, theatrical feminism has become an important means of protest for feminist activists. In China, Fincher

(2014:13) notes that an increasing number of unregistered grassroots women's rights groups have adopted 'performance art' as a means of protest. This study adopts the feminist activist and performance theory put forward by Christine Lynn Garlough (2008) in her study on grassroots feminist activism in India. Garlough uses concepts from folklore, rhetorical, feminist and performance theories in her work in order to show how street performance call on public conscience and create a feminist audience. While the literature on feminist activism through performance is limited, Garlough has theorized a framework by adopting various concepts derived from feminist, rhetorical and performance theories including the work of Judith Butler (1993) and Malini Bhattacharya (1979). By doing so, Garlough (2008) has constructed a framework capturing feminist activism through the use of street-level performance. This study and its framework are also relevant in the context of feminist movements in China.

The starting point for Garlough's theory is the recognition of 'art' as a potential method for identification of self, other and the problems faced in ones community. Art allows one to make connections "between the self and community, values, and beliefs" (Garlough 2008:172), and also raises ideas about "the collective consciousness" (ibid:172). Moreover, the power of art also serves as a means of providing the audience the opportunity to learn about themselves, others, and the social problems occurring in their communities (Bhattacharya 1986). Contrast to formal speeches, street performance has more 'sway' on the audience and are "flexible, collective, participatory, familiar and entertaining", but more importantly have great potential for social change and reasserting progressive values (Garlough 2008:188). Through various kinds of performances and narratives, activists also disseminate new ideas that are usually opposed by more conservative fractions in a community or society. In this way, it allows marginalized perspectives to come forward that are otherwise difficult to articulate because they are not widely accepted or openly discussed (Kumar 1993). Taken from this perspective, street performance is an important and powerful tool marginalized groups such as feminist groups could equip themselves with. This is particularly relevant in a repressive environment with limited space to protest.

Garlough (2008:167) also argues that performance can have both profound and long-term effects on a wide range of audiences. Street performances are a popular medium for reaching out because it allows for dynamic improvisation (Srampickal 1990:102). Furthermore, performances that take place on public spaces are not restricted by "predefined structures such as a theatre building" (Mason 1992:3), which allows for direct interaction with the audience (Garlough 2008:173). Moreover, since the nature of street performance is

‘mobile’, actors can physically target their audience and reach out to those marginalized or without economic means as well (ibid:174).

With different forms of performances – such as dialogue, songs and dance – “offers the opportunity for shared understanding about community problems” (Garlough 2008:173), and also encourages individuals to work on and solve these issues together. In this way, performances are useful for raising consciousness about issues, providing social critique, and inspiring people at the grassroots level to spur change (ibid). Besides their inherent entertainment value, performances also “work subtly upon the cultural habits of the people involved in it” (Bhattacharya 1979:19) and envision change or challenge existing political discourses. To raise awareness of ethical, cultural and social issues, the scripts of the plays and performances are often based on real-life cases or inspired by issues currently at play in society. The scripts are also commonly drawn from popular literature or media and where the language used is usually “colloquial, militant, and provocative in nature” (Garlough 2008:174).

Eclectic activism has proven especially useful for women rights groups that are operating in environments that are sceptical of feminist messages. In this context, Garlough (2008) argues that street performance helps to convey a feminist perspective, offers another lens to interpret the history of women, and also provides foundation for political engagement (ibid:177). In a setting where there is already a more politicized and concerned audience receptive to feminism, performance serves as a tool to create space for debate between different perspectives.

While protesting against prevailing gender inequality, performances and direct interaction with the audience disseminate certain critiques, such as the ‘male gaze’, the ‘pornographic gaze’ or ‘panoptic discipline’ of the female body (Garlough 2008:178). Therefore, by engaging in these feminist performances Garlough (2008) claims that it “enacts a political role in the public space” (ibid: 178). These performances illustrate realities that many women have actually lived and felt, and thereby create a testimonial of women’s personal experiences of gender inequality. Furthermore, by becoming involved in the demonstrations the activists generate feelings of power, personal fulfillment and a sense of belonging (ibid: 178).

### **3.3 Applying the Framework**

The NSM theory, together with the theory put forward by Garlough (2008), helps to frame the social movement that is being staged by the young feminist activists. Deploying these

theories helps to answer the research questions, and assists in identifying why feminist activists engage in their protests. These theories help one explore how people in these movements perceive gender inequality and activists' personal motivations for participating in acts of protest. With Garlough's (2008) performance theory identifying the context in which these activists are operating, NSM theory contributes to understanding why the form of performance art has been adopted.



## *4. Literature Review*

This chapter discusses the English language literature on the women rights movements in China, together with the development of feminist activism in China. While there is a wide body of literature on feminism and Chinese women movements, the literature on demonstration art as staged by the group of feminist activists studied remains limited. This chapter starts with an overview of gender inequality in the Chinese context and examines where gender inequality is most prevalent and the specific issues that are taken up by the activists.

### **4.1 A Half-Liberated and Unfinished Protest**

With an embedded patriarchal and hierarchical Confucian structure in society favoring men, Chinese women have traditionally been largely subordinate and limited to accessing power through their position in their family (Edwards 2000). However, in the early twentieth century, when China was experiencing political turmoil from military defeat during the Boxer war, a turn could be observed. Women were encouraged to participate in the national cause to help restore the ‘Chinese Greatness’. The movement to overthrow the Qing monarchy and replace it with a parliamentary system was welcomed by many, especially women, since the establishment of a parliamentary system was a prerequisite for women to gain any political power (Edwards and Roces 2004:60). Like many women in other countries in the beginning of the nineteenth century, Chinese women struggling to gain political power started with acquiring the right to vote. The suffrage<sup>11</sup> movement was mainly driven by well-educated women that acquired overseas training, mostly from Japan and the United States (ibid: 63).

However, as these women acquired more power and started to challenge male privileges, they came into conflict with the anti-Qing plan that accordingly resulted in hostility against feminism to the point where the suffragettes were violently suppressed by the Nationalists (Croll 1978). Croll’s analysis suggests that, while both the Nationalist and the Communist Party attempted to gain women’s support, neither were willing to place feminism above nationalism or support it as an independent cause (ibid). Recent analyzes by Edwards (2000; 2004; 2010) on the Chinese suffrage movement have placed more emphasis on the agency of the suffragettes and on their successes in their struggle for women’s rights. Edwards (2000) challenges the notions of Chinese suffragettes lacked agency and instead

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<sup>11</sup> Women’s suffrage is the right of women to vote and to engage in elections

emphasizes their decades-long efforts to achieve gender equality in politics, such as a minimum quota for women in parliament (Edwards 2000:617). Despite their success, the Chinese suffrage activists also faced opposition and setbacks such as the violent banning and crackdown of the feminist movement in 1913 by Yuan Shikai (Edwards 2004:63). However, Chinese suffragettes skillfully adapted to different socio-political context by changing their tactics, shifting speaking positions and invoking different ideological weapons to suit the time (Edwards 2000:618).

When the CCP seized power in 1949, a strong emancipatory rhetoric echoing women's liberation and gender equality followed. Women's equality was incorporated in the new constitution, and a marriage law was installed that formally legalized free-choice marriage and equalized wives' rights (Xie 2014:497). Meanwhile, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) was formed by the government to implement a Maoist policy concerning women rights (Chen, 2011:42). The state's efforts to liberate women showed to be pervasive, reflected by Mao's famous words: "women hold up half the sky" (Mao 1950). This dismissal of the patriarchal heritage of Confucianism proved to be a very effective way to mobilize women and gain their support (Croll 1978). However, many intellectuals questioned the state's efforts in liberating women. The Chinese writer Ding Ling (1982) complained that, although liberated in their professional sphere, women were still expected to do their duties in the domestic sphere and thus created a double burden (Croll 1978). The state's efforts became particularly questioned when the term '*nüquan zhuyi*' was replaced with '*nüxing zhuyi*', where the latter was a much less powerful term. Meanwhile, previous liberation efforts were reversed and the state imposed restrictions on women's spontaneous activism, which suggested that neither '*nüquan zhuyi*' nor activism were part of the party's discourse on women liberation (Ko and Zheng 2007:6; Edwards and Roces 2000:75).

The transition in 1978 reversed many of the Maoist policies, including the efforts taken on gender equality and also with the economic reforms further exaggerated gender inequalities. While the ACWF continued to exist, it distanced itself from the word feminism '*nüxing zhuyi*' by not including it in their newspapers and campaigns. The feminist movement was being marginalized in Chinese politics (Croll 1978). With femininity encouraged in media, there was a sudden surge of separation between men and women in dress, social roles and behavior (Wang 1997:136-139). Previous symbols of heroic female

figures in the Maoist era, such as the ‘Iron girl’<sup>12</sup>, became devalued and ridiculed (Croll, 1978).

## 4.2 Persisting issues in Gender Equality

*”Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in all aspects of political, economic, cultural, social and family life.” (Article 2, 1992)<sup>13</sup>*

Despite previous efforts, women presently remain largely disadvantaged in areas such as education, employment, income, access to positions of authority, and the private sphere. These issues are reflected in the activities of the young feminist activists, who have earlier focused on not only inequality in education and employment but also repression in the domestic sphere and sexual harassment in public spaces. Each will be briefly discussed below.

One of the prerequisites for women to have the same opportunity to play an equal role as men and to be able to secure a job in the future is education, and in particular higher education (Hooper 1984). Acknowledging that education is a key factor for women’s empowerment and liberation, it has been noted that young women in China find it harder to access higher education due to discriminatory practices. Sons are regarded as permanent members of the family and are therefore encouraged and supported in their studies, while girls are regarded as ‘temporary’ liabilities. Although the gap between girls and boys education has significantly decreased in the last decade, the trend is visible. Young women are being discouraged and hindered from pursuing opportunities to access higher education, which are perpetuated by institutions including the Ministry of Education and ACWF. The latter, for instance, has previously campaigned to pressure young educated women to stop being too ambitious. In March 2011, just after the International Women’s day, ACWF wrote on their web-page that:

”Pretty girls don’t need a lot of education to marry into a rich and powerful family, but girls with an average or ugly appearance will find it difficult. These kinds of girls hope to further their education in order to increase their competitiveness. The tragedy is, they don’t realize that as women age, they are (...) like yellowed pearls.” (Xinhua column, 2011; see in Fincher, 2014:15)

Fincher (2014) argues that this statement, insulting and discouraging women from pursuing higher education, is part of the broader resurgence of gender inequality and rollback of

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<sup>12</sup> Iron girl played an influential function as role model for women during the Maoist era. For further reading and pictures on iron girl, see: <http://chineseposters.net/themes/women-working.php>

<sup>13</sup> Article 2 in Law on the protection of Women’s rights and interests, April 3, 1992

women's rights in a post-socialist China. Fincher (2014) notes that almost all women who are subjected to the term 'leftover'<sup>14</sup> are also 'higher educated'.

Hooper (1984) finds that employment is another prerequisite for women's empowerment and independence. While employment has undergone a major transformation over the last twenty years, it has been a transformation less favorable for women, as unemployment rates for women in China are among the highest in the world (Attané 2011:7). The market reforms initiated under Deng Xiaoping included the decentralization of and privatization of the state-owned sectors. The labor restructuring reforms ended lifetime employment and egalitarian labor compensation. Women, in particular, were affected by this restructuring since many of the labor policies were gender insensitive, and institutional mechanisms that used to protect women's reproductive role were dismantled (Xiao-yuan 2014:488). The declining socialist ideology coincided with a re-emergence of traditional patriarchal values, which has led to an increasing pressure on women to return home to care for the household responsibilities. With widespread gender discrimination in the labor market, women were left with limited options and instead entered the informal labor sector where there are no stable incomes, safety nets and formal contracts (Chen 2011:42).

Attané (2011) also points to inequality and discrimination occurring within women's private life and has raised concerns regarding women's health. Related to this is the issue of domestic violence, argued to be the most common form of violence perpetrated against women (UNPFA 2005:66). Domestic violence remains largely considered a family or private issue and therefore rarely reported (Kaufman 2012:599). It is estimated that domestic violence occurs in 30% of Chinese families with 85% of victims being women (ACWF 2000). While gendered roles are evident in the household, state institutions have also shown to maintain and emphasize these roles (Fincher 2014). Sexual harassment is another alarming issue impeding on women's health that has more recently received attention due the work of NGO's. With sexual harassment occurring widely in the workplaces, women are often faced with a dilemma between unemployment or submitting to sexual harassment (Fu 2009). This has shown to be one of the largest barriers to gender equity (Bannister and Beja 2015:44). Today sexual harassment in workplaces, university campuses, and public transport remains a major issue with many undocumented cases.

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<sup>14</sup> The term "leftover" women (*shengnü*) refers to a single women older than 27 following the definition by the ACWF in 2007 (Fincher 2014)

### 4.3 Institutionalized Efforts

Although the economic reforms reversed many of the efforts toward gender equality, it provided new opportunities for private initiatives at the same time. Li Xiaojiang has been widely considered a pioneer for her efforts on gender inequality and was responsible for initiating China's first Women's Research Center in 1985 which acted as an alternative to the ACWF (Xu 2009:199). Together with other activists and NGO's, Li Xiaojiang raised attention on women's issues in preparation for the Beijing Women's Conference (Kaufman 2012: 594). Li Xiaojiang was an outspoken critic of the ACWF and has openly questioned ACWF's existence (Wang 1997:133). In terms of influence and size the ACWF is the largest women organization in China (Hsiung et al. 2001:131); however, during the 1995 women conference in China, the federation saw its position challenged. To secure its position, the federation claimed NGO status, and automatically become the largest NGO in China focusing on women's rights questions and thus the largest receiver of international funds, which became a topic of hot debate (Hsiung et al. 2001:10).

Among scholars, there is a general consensus that the 1995 Fourth UN World Conference on Women (FUNCW) in Beijing marked an important step towards improving women's rights in China (Kaufman 2012; Edwards and Roces 2010; Xu 2009). Providing not only the opportunity for feminism to evolve through an interplay between Chinese and global feminism, it also acted as a catalyst for China's civil society and NGOs (Xu 2009:201). The conference underscored the widespread issue of domestic violence and led to the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* that publicized goals for achieving gender equality (Wang 2009:107). Although the event brought about many positive developments towards gender equality, many issues remained. Hsiung et al. (2001:163) have noted that all NGOs are required to register with the government, and are then automatically confined to operating only within the boundaries set by the state. NGOs and their activities were suddenly no longer distinct from the government, but rather controlled and to an extent restricted.

After the 1995 Beijing conference, more women's organizations and NGOs formed and took a more active and influential role in improving the situation of women (Croll 2001: 25-41; Milwertz 2002; Wang 2004). In order to maintain operations and at the same time improve women's rights, Bohong (2001) finds that most NGOs have taken a non-confrontational approach. Indeed, Chinese NGOs work within the political framework and thereby cooperate closely with governmental bodies including the ACWF (Hsiung et al.

2001:148). Similarly, Women Research Centers have also been pressured to adopt non-confrontational strategies in order to maintain their operations and, as Du Fangqin (2001) argues, they have to avoid slogans and appeals that are considered too radical.

#### **4.4 Non-Institutionalized Activism and Protest**

Besides the institutionalized efforts discussed above, Kaufman (2012) notes that without a true voice and input from women, women's rights will always remain limited. Therefore, some activists have decided to work outside the institutional framework. Along with rapid economic growth, the state also placed emphasis on social stability, which included measures to either crush or preempt nascent conflicts (Perry and Selden 2010:2). Selden and Perry (2010) emphasize that although social conflicts remain deeply rooted in contemporary Chinese society, there is a lack of legitimate channels to demand rights. Therefore conflicts have become extensive and at times confrontational and violent (ibid 2). Despite extensive and same time repressive measures taken by the state to maintain stability, it has never fully eradicated groups or preventing adherents from engaging in acts of resistance and protests. This is coupled with new ways, forms, and opportunities of protest, which have been created by activists themselves (O'Brien 2008:26).

The current active feminist activists, who do not belong to any registered organization, are activists that have chosen to work outside the system and adopted various creative methods to raise awareness of women's rights in Chinese society. In the chapter "*Fighting back*" of Leta Hong Fincher's book "Leftover Women", she writes about the current feminist activist resistance and highlights some of the protests that they have organized aiming to raise awareness of various gender inequalities in society. Fincher (2014) notes that while these methods of raising awareness are perceived to be highly political, the content of the protests are not too particularly sensitive or extreme. By picking more mainstream topics or current issues, they increase the chances of public cooperation and make it more likely the protests will be covered by traditional media, thus spreading awareness on the issues they raise. As another way to distance themselves from being too politically sensitive, Fincher (2014) notes feminist activists much prefer to speak about "actions" than using the word "protest" (ibid 2014:131).

One action that caught attention was the "Blood –Splattered wedding dresses" in 2012, which took place in Beijing. In this action, the activist's purpose was to highlight the widespread issue of domestic violence in China. Three young women dressed up in white wedding gowns splattered with red paint and walked the streets of downtown Beijing while

holding placards with statements such as "Love is not an excuse for violence". Along with this action, a campaign was launched to collect 10,000 signatures in order to push for legislation on domestic violence<sup>15</sup>. To spread awareness for this campaign on domestic violence postcards with volunteers' naked torsos, some splattered with red paint were also distributed (Fincher 2014: 131).

Another action that received media attention is the "Bald Sister" campaign in 2012 that began in Guangzhou, but spread to several other cities after the action received popular attention and support. This action protested against the gender-based quotas favoring men in university admission. To protest this gender discrimination many feminist activists shaved their heads in a show of support for a female who was rejected from the International Relations program when scoring a 614 on the university exam, which was below the required score for female applicants of 628. However if she was a man, she would have been admitted since the required score for male applicants was only 609.

"Occupy Men's Toilet", was another campaign that first took place in 2012 in Guangzhou but due to its popularity also spread to other cities. This action aimed to call on local governments to provide more public toilets for women. In this action, several female volunteers occupied men's toilets and invited women to use the vacated men's stalls in order to shorten women's typically long wait. Not only did this action receive widespread media attention, it also pushed the Guangzhou officials into responding with a pledge to increase the ratio of women's toilet to men's. Along with this action, volunteers held up placards saying, "More convenience for women, more gender equality" (ibid: 131-132).

Apart from these effective physical actions taking place in public areas, feminist activists also write their own news reports on their "actions" along with photos and statements that are spread around on various social networks as another way to further raise awareness. Since most of the feminist activist groups receive very little funding (one of the consequences of being unregistered) posting their protests online has proven to be a creative and effective way in getting their message out (ibid: 131). The importance of this new information and communication technology (ICT) has undeniably played an important role for feminist activist and many other groups in society in raising their issues in an environment where freedom of association is severely restricted.

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<sup>15</sup> "China Drafts its First Domestic Violence law, but Rights advocates says it falls short" ([http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/28/china-drafts-its-first-domestic-violence-law-but-rights-advocates-say-it-falls-short/?\\_r=0](http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/28/china-drafts-its-first-domestic-violence-law-but-rights-advocates-say-it-falls-short/?_r=0), accessed: July 17, 2015)

## 4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown the marginalisation of feminism in recent history and identified where gender inequality is most persistent. Feminism in China is constrained by prohibitions on public protest, and the dominance of the ACWF on handling the discourse on women issues. While women's rights NGOs and feminist organisations have been allowed to develop since the FUNCW (mainly due to adopting non-confrontational strategies) this development has occurred in a controlled space coupled with heavy restrictions on protest. Yet, current feminist activist groups are increasingly marking their presence by working outside the state realm. By remaining unregistered, using creative methods of protesting and information communications technology, feminist activists equip themselves with platforms for activism and protest. When distinguishing between institutionalized (most notably the ACWF) and non-institutionalized groups (most notably independent feminist groups) a distinctive difference here is their definition of feminism: while formal institutions adopt the term '*nüxing zhuyi*', independent groups favor the term '*nüquan zhuyi*'.



## 5. *Empirical Discussion*

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the data obtained from participant observations and interviews. This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section the feminist group, the feminist interviewees, and the academic interviewees are introduced. The second section discusses how interviewees understand feminism and their motivation to participate in groups and protests. The third section is, based on other interviews and observations and a reflection is presented on the feminist activists are perceived in the Chinese society.

### 5.2 The Feminist Group

#### 5.2.1 *General Characteristics*

Formed in 2012 in Beijing, this feminist group<sup>16</sup> was formed by about ten women, young activists who were friends. It has since, over the course of three years, grown in terms of member's activities, and performance acts. Apart from organizing different activities, the group also has weekly meetings, which are more frequent when the group is planning or staging a performance act. Being based in Beijing, it also has close connections to other similar feminist groups located in Beijing but also to other groups located in cities such as Guangzhou and Shanghai.

#### 5.2.2 *Group Members*

Currently, the number of members fluctuates between 30-40 people. About 20 members live in Beijing, although most members were originally born in cities elsewhere in China. Although the group has grown rapidly in size, it still appears to be a very tight-knit group, where many of the members are friends and keep close contact even outside the group activities. The majority of the members are women while men and transgender men and women form a fraction of the group. The age of the members is generally young and ranges between 20 to 34 years. Most of the young feminist activists have a higher education background, all the group members who participated in this research hold at least a bachelor degree. To connect and communicate with each other, members use the popular social media

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<sup>16</sup> The feminist group and its members were all conducted under strict anonymity. The feminist group will therefore referred to as 'the performance group' and for the interviewees; both the young feminist activists and the academics are given pseudonyms.

application WeChat as their primary line of communication, but after the March 6-7 crackdown they switched platforms due to monitoring.

### *5.2.3 Activities*

The performance group aims to raise awareness of women's sexual rights and their body's autonomous rights. The group has created the play "Our Vaginas, Ourselves", inspired by Eve Ensler's famous play entitled the 'Vagina Monologue', and is also known as the 'Chinese Monologue group' in China. This play is a central project and captures the group's aim of raising awareness on issues concerning sexuality and women's right of their body against gender-based violence. The play has developed into a stage where a large part of the content is original and based on real life experiences collected from story workshops that are organized inside the group. Apart from the play, the feminist group have also actively initiated and participated in performance arts taking place in public areas such as streets, parks, and public transports to raise awareness about women and LGBT rights. The feminist group stages about four to five actions yearly, with some actions drawing more attention than others (for a complete list see Appendix II).

In addition to the performance acts, the active group members meet up weekly to engage in different activities such as educational sessions and workshops; these activities are open to non-members as well. Activities are aimed at raising awareness and the understanding of topics related to sexuality and women's bodies. The topics that are being dealt with are generally those that are stigmatized or ignored in mainstream society and China's educational system, including menstruation and acquaintance rape. In these sessions, participants have the opportunity to share their individual stories on the relevant topic in a safe place. Finally, the activities are also arranged to act as an introduction for new individuals to familiarise themselves with the feminist group and to give them the chance to join the group.

### *5.2.5 Organisation*

The group is organised in such a way that most of the decisions regarding activities, topics, performances and protests are made collectively within the group. It usually begins when member send out request (any member within the group) then other members have the opportunity to comment and vote on the idea within a set time. Although there is no appointed or elected leader within the group, the group has one activity organizer who

coordinates the meetings. The current activity organizer has been coordinating the group since September 2013.

### **5.3 Motivations and Personal Considerations**

#### *5.3.1 Discussing the Meaning of Feminism*

For several reasons it is important to examine how the word ‘feminism’ is used and perceived by the young feminist activists, partly because the conceptual construct remains heavily drawn from the Western discourse. Although all young activist respondents identify themselves as feminists (all adopted the Chinese term ‘*nüquan zhuyi*’ – collectively), their own interpretation and meaning varies. Understanding the specific meaning of feminism can reveal some of the individual motivations behind their involvement in the feminist group. When asked, Ling explains what feminism means to her:

*“For me it is very simple, gender equality. Feminism is gender equality for me. I know that some people has expanded to many fields but for me and the area that I am interested in, I tend to focus on gender inequality and that is what make the most sense for me. I define feminism as gender equality.”* (Ling, 25 years)

Here Ling defines feminism as gender equality, which is not limited or exclusive in advocating just for women’s rights, but also extends her view to men’s rights. Ling is not the only one to define feminism in the broader sense of gender equality, Kwan also acknowledges oppressions against men as she expresses what feminism means to her:

*“I do care about many oppressions even those against males. Like the need for them to afford many things, to be strong, and to be the one that protect others. I do not agree with that. Because I can do that. I am the protector all the time. I think it is important for people to be able to choose whomever they want to be, and not be determined by their sex.”* (Kwan, 25 years)

This view of oppression that includes men suggest of a patriarchal structure that affects both men and women, in the sense of certain expected characteristics attached to men (*the strong protector*) and women (*the protected*), which both genders have to follow. However, by taking on the role of being the ‘protector’ in a relationship that is presupposed to be a manly characteristic, Kwan opposes heteronormativity and living according to the gender roles. This is further emphasised when Kwan says everyone should have the choice to choose whomever one wants to be, regardless of ones gender. While most respondents have given

similar answers defining feminism as gender equality, one respondent instead described feminism as a rather fluid and changing concept:

*It is a process and there is no perfect feminism. But feminism is a process of reviewing, changing and moving (Qing, 31 years)*

It should be noted here that Qing is transgender and wanted to be referred to as a man. His description of what feminism means to him stood out from the rest and is therefore important to highlight. While feminism highlights oppression in the heteronormative society, it can also be seen as excluding and limiting, as some feminist strands adopt a binary definition of gender. Qing's definition of feminism as a process including self-reflection and criticism is therefore important not only, in the struggle for equality and social justice but also for those who are advocating it. While feminism is often described as gender equality, Qing's answer also shows that within the feminist group there are multiple and at times conflicting ideas on feminism.

### *5.3.2 Becoming Involved*

China's political environment is a fragmented authoritarian with limited freedom to protest. It is therefore important to look at the motivation individuals have to become active in a feminist activist group. When Kwan was asked why she became involved in the feminist group, she explained her interest formed after attending a thought-provoking gender education course at her university:

*“Why should it be like this? Work like this? What you as a girl should and shouldn't be like? For instance you shouldn't be putting your legs in this way...” (Kwan, 25 years)*

Kwan feels uncomfortable with the gender roles seen by agitatedly questioning why girls should act a certain way. The example of “shouldn't be putting your legs” refers to how girls have to close their legs is illustrative of how invasive and pressuring Kwan feels gender roles are. All of the respondents argue that their involvement in the feminist group was motivated by their concerns regarding gender inequality, and many have experienced this inequality in private relationships, family, and academia. Xia (31), for instance, mentioned domestic violence, where she witnessed her father beating her mother. Besides shared reflections on gender inequality as a reason to become involved, some respondents also argued that the sense of belonging to a group was important. Qing for instance explained that a sense of understanding and support in the group was the main motivation:

*“The group members share similar opinions and have very open minds. However in the mainstream society, it is not the same.” (Qing, 31 years).*

The search for a sense of belonging and understanding is also reflected in Ling’s answer:

*“[In China] it is very lonely to be a feminist....it is amazing that there is a group, a group of people, a group of very active feminists in China” (Ling, 25 years)*

These answers make it clear that the group dynamics act as a means of support, in which the group evolves as a safe place where individuals feel accepted regardless of gender, sexual orientation or their feminist views. This desire for recognition and the support that is provided within this group is important to stress. It forms a basis for strong bonds of kinship not only within the group but also with the wider Chinese feminist community. This was especially true in the aftermath of the March 6-7 crackdown where group members demonstrated their support for the detained activists. Some members paid visits to the detention centre, sometimes together with the families of detained to show their solidarity. The group also launched several protests against the detention, such as photo session and a social media campaign where the group circulated statements and words such as ‘FreeTheFive’, ‘FreeChineseFeminist’ and ‘CantArrestUsAll’. Solidarity within the group was also witnessed by other activities. In the breast educational session for example, participants shared their own stories on the topic (which could be perceived as embarrassing or sensitive in mainstream society). One participant shared that her boyfriend broke up with her because of her small breasts, yet all the members in the group showed great respect and support.

To understand why certain areas are being targeted and further explain the motivation behind protests, it is necessary to find out where the respondents find gender inequality the most prevalent in China’s society. While all respondents agree that gender inequality exists everywhere, some emphasize it being particularly evident in politics. This can be seen in Xia’s answer describing China’s political elite:

*“I think China is a patriarchal society, a heavily patriarchal society and you know for the most powerful people in this country....seven members in the standing committee in the CCP. They are the most powerful, politically powerful people in this country, but there is no women in the committee” (Xia, 31 years).*

### 5.3.3 Aims for Change

Acknowledging that young feminist activists become involved partial out of a desire for a sense of belonging and social acceptance, it is now important to look at the specific aims that these activists have. Respondents suggest that their ultimate desire is to influence and improve the situation of gender equality, and especially concerning women's sexual rights. This is captured in Xia's answer:

*"I think the main purpose is to raise awareness. To raise public consciousness about women's autonomous rights, to their body and their sexuality." (Xia, 31 years)*

Xia believes this is important because although there is a certain level of awareness concerning women sexual rights, she believes this is yet inadequate. The phrases 'awareness' and 'public consciousness' suggests a demand for a societal resurgence of the awareness of such rights. This lacking awareness of women's rights together with persisting traditional gender norms has shown to harm and stigmatize women. Xia illustrates with an example drawn from the 'Ourselves, our Vagina' performance of why she feels raising awareness is an important aim:

*"There is a unit [scene] called 'rape', a sad raping story that happened between friends, a girl and a boy. We call it 'acquaintance rape'. [audience] they thought that the victims [girls] are one to be responsible for the hurt.... to be blamed"*

The audience's response to 'acquaintance rape' to Xia, suggests the existence of certain preconceived notions attached to the gender types favouring men whilst working against women. She pointed out that rather than emphasizing the perpetrator (the boy) wrongdoing, the behaviour of the victim (the girl) is scrutinized and put at blame for the incident.

The group's aim to raise consciousness is not only directed towards the public but also to empower the individuals who identify themselves with the portrayed situations. Besides the aim to create more awareness, some respondents have also mentioned personal development as their aim to become involved in the group. Ling for example explains:

*"I am aiming for this kind of company and building my identity through the whole process (...) this process is a very precious experience for me" (Ling, 25 years)*

Here Ling explains that personal development is an important personal goal. Her statement reveals that becoming part of an activist group is not only about making social change, but also about individual gains.

#### 5.3.4 Provoking Change

The political climate in China is repressive, which leaves little room to critically voice an opinion. The planned protest for sexual harassment in public transport and in a public park this year, a small and seemingly innocent protest, showed that provoking and protesting in China is dangerous and can result in detention. The feminist group has adopted performance art as a means to creatively protest in the restrictive Chinese environment. Most of the respondents claim that their means of protest are a very effective way of drawing attention, for instance, explained by Xia:

*“We can say that the performances are part of the movement. You know, it is art, and sometimes we do some behavior art on the street, it is like demonstration, but still use some forms of art, like singing or a flash mob to advocate what we want the public to be the aware of”* (Xia, 31 years)

Performance art is imperative in this feminist movement, as it provides an outlet and opportunity to convey messages to the public through demonstration, which is something prohibited in China. Yet, through the form of art, demonstrations are made possible, which allows the activists not only to raise public awareness but also to operate tactfully within a repressive environment. Moreover, the performances tend to be small in scale and take place sporadically and unexpectedly, which has significantly contributed to the group’s effectiveness in taking a confrontational approach. In addition, most demonstrations have a specific timing or topic that is related to a certain event or day and this is carefully picked in order to generate more public awareness. The blood-splattered wedding dresses, for instance, aimed to raise awareness concerning domestic violence and was connected to a famous domestic violence case at the time.

The group’s effectiveness is also reflected by the cooperation and inspiration between different feminist groups, where some performances are duplicated in other cities, such as the ‘occupy men’s toilet’ campaign that occurred first in Guangzhou and only some days later in Beijing. Since demonstrations attract attention from authorities there are certain risks involved. So, in order to continue to spread awareness and raise consciousness about women’s rights, demonstrations and protests continue to take place online through various platforms where the content of the protests, statements and pictures are shared. Thus, despite the small scale of these protests and demonstrations, the attention and awareness that is generated online has been significant.

## 5.4 Responses

Feminist activists' performances have shown to be effective in drawing public attention to various social issues and advocating for change. However, because of this method they have also received harsh criticism and some concerns regarding the risks that come with such methods. This was observed when interviewing some influential academics. For instance, Hong explains how she perceives the current trend of feminist activists:

*“In China, the feminist activist groups are marginalized and extreme “极端的”, while Fulian [All-China-Women's- Federation] is in the centre. These groups are radical” (Hong)*

Hong is critical of the current trend of feminist activists. By using words as “marginalised and extreme” to describe these groups in contrast to the Fulian (ACWF) being the “centre” it demonstrates the power dichotomy between the two. Where the feminist activists are on one hand portrayed as insignificant and powerless, the Fulian on the other is portrayed as powerful. Moreover, by continuing to denote the feminist activist groups as “radical” Hong further refers them as being extreme and illegitimate which additionally works to denying them recognition. However, it is important to note that this interview was conducted in the week after the March 6-7 crackdown of the feminist activists and while China's Parliamentary Session was still running. While the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1995 Beijing UN women conference was being held, the BeijingPlus20 meeting was also taking place in New York. These two events and International Women's day on March 8 events coming together, it has created unfortunate timing for the feminist activists. Ting, another academic also says that the feminist activists are marginalised when telling how she perceives them:

*“The feminist movement is marginalized. In fact, there barely even exist a feminist movement in China” (Ting)*

This statement clearly demonstrates conformity with the official understanding that ignores and diminishes these feminist activists groups. By describing them as “barely” existing, she further displays the diminishing rhetoric that continues to perpetuate non-recognition of these feminist activists.

It is clear that a hierarchal structure exists in advocating women's rights in China with the dominating ACWF on top and these young feminist activists groups in the bottom, who are perceived as outsiders and inferior when they challenge this order. This is opposite to NGOs who take a more cooperative approach. Given that these feminist activists adopt an



unconventional method of protest in an environment where protest is prohibited it is unsurprising that they are criticised. Apart from criticisms, I have also encountered more optimistic responses. An example is Jiao, who explains how she perceives the current feminist activists' ways of protesting:

*"There are different ways... If you want to be strategic - maybe not the best way. But what they have been doing is very dangerous, but worth doing. Maybe they will bring some change."* (Jiao)

It must be noted that this interview was conducted about three weeks after the March 6-7 crackdown whilst the five feminist activists were still in detention and when the two sessions had already ended. In Jiao's statement she finds performance art as a method questionable as she knows the risk that these young feminist activists are facing by protesting. Despite these concerns Jiao recognises the importance and courage of these young feminist activists and the potential of their work. This somewhat mixed response of concern, admiration and optimism suggests a change in perception of these feminist activists.

One interview conducted in early February stood out from the rest. Contrary to other influential academics, Li was confident and very supportive of the young feminist activists, and the feminist community and what they were doing. For instance, when asked if there were any real risks of adopting a confrontational approach, Li assuredly explains that feminist activists were not at risk:

*"Since these students are not doing anything illegal, there is no reason. They are not endangering themselves"* (Li).

The assertion in Li's answer shows how much she supports these young feminist activists and their work. This is somewhat surprising as the climate for open and confrontational protests in China has been seen to come with very high risks, as mentioned in the literature (Wright 2008). However, this assertion of no risk was also encountered when I participated in the educational session (before the crackdown) speaking to one of the members. The members, like Li, believed that there is very little risk in what they were doing, or at least very mild risk compared to activists with other agendas. Although members have occasionally been invited to the police for "tea" – a euphemism for interrogation – she still emphasised that the government's tolerance towards feminism is much more generous in comparison to other ideologies. This is despite experiencing a harsher climate against activism and protests

since Xi Jinping assumed office in 2012. However, it should be noted that this was encountered before the incident of the March 6-7 crackdown and detention.

## 5.5 Challenges

Looking to the future, most of the respondents were optimistic and confident that they would in some way continue to be involved in advocating women's rights, but perhaps in a different form. An example is Xia how she envisions her future:

*I think it is my lifetime mission, I am not sure if I am willing to work as a full-time NGO worker, or CSO worker. I am not sure. Because it is too challenging for me. I think that would be too close to the movement for me. I think I need a little space (Xia, 31 years)*

Like many of the respondents, Xia expressed that her commitment to the women's movement is a personal and long-time one. Although the hope is to continue to advocate for women' and LGBT rights, the life of an activist has proven to be tough in many ways. As seen here with Xia explaining what she found to be the greatest challenges being an activist:

*Before the horrible night [March 6] I thought it was the challenges and the conflict between my personal life and the movement, because time is limited, energy is limited.... Now the greatest challenge is the safety. (Xia, 31 years)*

## 5.6 Conclusion

Although Chinese feminism is diverse and sometimes conflicting, as observed within this performance group, the collectively adopted term 'nüquan zhuyi' has helped to create a strong sense of community among actors. A community that is built on solidarity and understanding. Furthermore, while literature, official discourses, state institutions and sometimes even influential academics (as observed in this study's findings) retain that this feminist movement in China is a marginalized one, the findings based on conducted interviews, participant observation, and development after the crackdown suggest that Chinese feminism is a rapid growing and influential movement. It is a movement driven by highly socially conscious and determined young feminist activists who are motivated by recognition and self-empowerment in the light of aggravating and persisting gender inequalities in Chinese society. This will be further elaborated upon in the next chapter.

## 6. *Analysis*

This chapter analyses the findings presented in the previous chapter. The aim is to answer the research question, which is to identify and outline the motivations of the young feminist activists. Following the literature overview and theoretical framework, the motivations behind the protest can be guided by three characteristics. The first part looks at the personal motivation of individuals in the feminist group, the second part looks at the non-institutionalized character of protest while the last part elaborates on the main method of protest, which is electiveness.

### 6.1 **Personal Motivations**

How social movements start to exist are dependent on the motivations and characteristics of its initiators. According to Calhoun (1995), one of the characteristics of new social movements is their focus on ethical or identity issues such as gender, race, and sexual orientation. It is here that identities have provoked and informed the feminist movement in China. Regarding performance art, Garlough (2008) notes that actors are motivated by their personal experiences and as Calhoun (1995) puts it, NSMs are self-fulfilling.

This study has found that a feminist identity, informed by individual experiences of gender inequality and social injustices situated and controlled by main sociocultural patterns, acts as a main driver for the activists. It should be noted that individuals hold varying definitions of what feminism means to them. Personal motivations can be distinguished in three factors. First, a personal discomfort and feeling of misplacement in the mainstream heteronormative society based on individual's sexuality, gender and alternative views that are socially not accepted in the wider mainstream heteronorm society. In line with Tourine's (1985) notion of NSM being a counterculture where individuals search for an alternative form of social and cultural life, the individuals in this study have similarly searched for belonging and understanding in an alternative community. The sense of belonging and pursuit of a different way of life from the mainstream society is a compelling explanation for why individuals become involved in the feminist group.

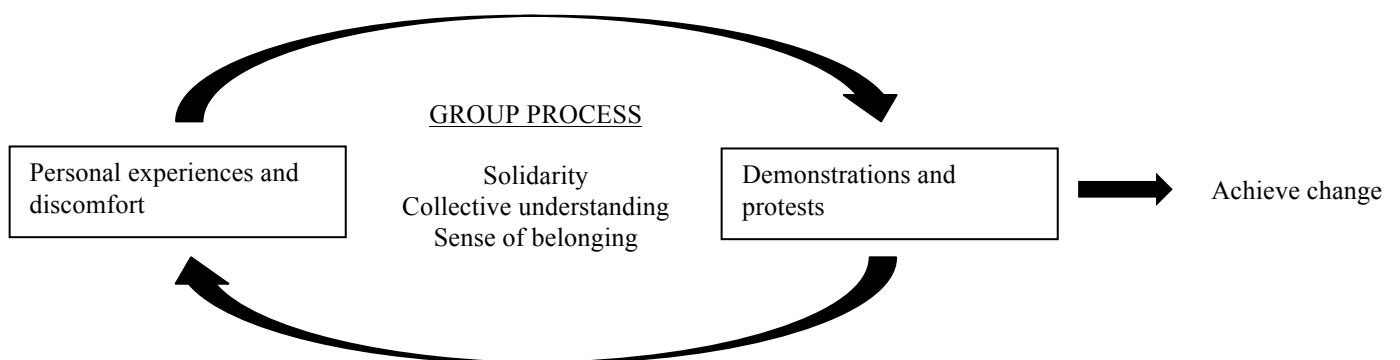
A second personal motivation this study found is that protesting is a way to exert power and an attempt to detach from the dominant sociocultural norms and hierarchies. Through the process of reflecting and deconstructing experiences through education sessions and workshops held within the performance group, individuals come together and educate themselves on how gender inequalities are produced and reproduced. Collective

understanding of their experiences has accelerated the motivation to protest with the aim to empower oneself by disseminating realities and lived stories.

A third personal motivation explaining why individuals become engaged is solidarity that is found within and beyond the feminist group. While Guiheux and Kuah-Pearce (2009) explain that NSM tends to be more individualised than conventional movements, individualisation in Chinese society has also provided the opportunity for individuals to mobilise and collectivise. In this way, it allows individuals to defend their specific spheres of lives, rights, and individual autonomy. In this study, solidarity has been profoundly observed within the group that is translated in the form of support, understanding and strong kinship between members. Solidarity is also strongly evident within the wider feminist community. The events of March 6-7 crackdown and the detention of the five is a clear demonstration of how individuals come together to support the detained activists. While actors within the movement protested, this event also witnessed domestic and foreign individuals standing in solidarity with the detained activists. Proving that solidarity is an important factor in the feminist community is in line with Melucci’s (1985) notion of NSM being a collective action based on solidarity.

In sum, these personal experiences and views are the main motivations to become involved in the group. Through participation, the individuals gain a sense of belonging, a collective understanding and mutual solidarity throughout the entire group process. The group dynamics is an essential cornerstone, as without individuals might not have capabilities of demonstrating. In turn, through demonstration art and protest, individuals learn to cope with their personal experiences and can find support while aiming for change at the same time. This process is illustrated in figure 1.

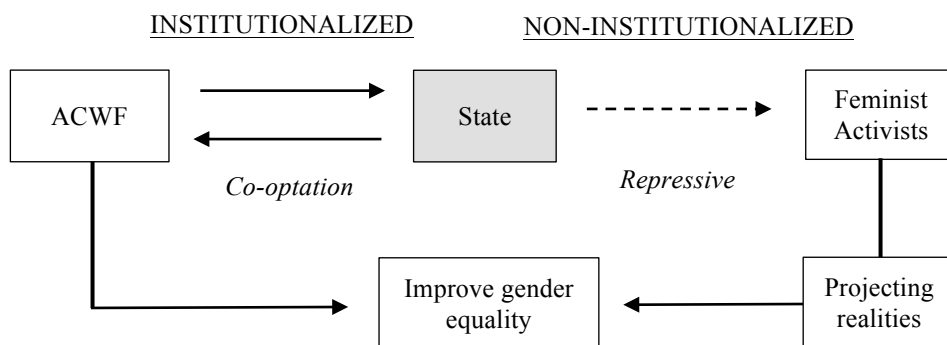
*Figure 1 Personal motivations for individual activists*



## 6.2 Crafting a Non-Institutionalized Space for Protest and Empowerment

While new social movements are often initiated outside the realm of the state because individuals see themselves in a marginalized or oppressed position (Touraine, 1985), performances are based on real life stories that shed light on these oppressive realities faced by the activists (Garlough, 2008). These life stories transcend individual experiences and construct a testimonial based on shared experiences. Given the Chinese authoritative environment, it is important to understand why the activists adopt a non-institutionalized method of protest, and why they choose projecting realities as their way to protest. A contextualization including state relationships is presented in figure 2.

Figure 2 Institutionalized and non-institutionalized efforts in improving gender equality



In China public gatherings and protests are strictly prohibited. For the feminist movement to emerge and exist, it is crucial that actors have space not only to operate for protests but also to empower themselves in order to have the ability and strength to drive, encourage and raise public consciousness about various social issues. By purposely not registering as an organization, the group deliberately aims to remain outside state control. The activists feel that institutionalized efforts, most notably the ACWF, do not represent all women and mostly serve to help the authorities maintain stability. Dissatisfied with these efforts, activists have staged their own initiatives despite the high risk involved. Projecting their critique and achieving change is done through performance art. Demonstration allows for a more subtle and disguised form of protest; while it disseminates messages, it can be received as a dance or singing performance by the public.

Moreover, space for empowerment is created within the group of fellow feminist activists and the feminist community is imperative for individual empowerment. By performing life stories brings a sense of empowering where actors exert their own power

over the incident. The recreated play of Vagina Monologues is such a performance where individual experiences drawn from activists are performed and discussed with the audience in order to raise their collective consciousness, and also to challenge certain current sociocultural norms in issues such as sexual harassment and rape.

### **6.3 Eclectic Forms of Demonstration**

In an environment without freedom to protest and voice one's opinion, eclectic performance art is an important means of protest in bringing forward marginalised perspectives. This is complemented with different theatrical elements and new opportunities offered by social media, which are found evident in this study. In the annual performance of the play "Our Vaginas, Ourselves", actors have adopted singing, theatre and using their bodies in their narrative to convey marginalized life stories. The plays have become increasingly popular and have generated a higher audience. Through interaction with the audience, actors can also confront and reassert progressive values while simultaneously engaging viewers to participate in the discussion and challenge their perspectives. Much in line with Garlough's (2008) notion of art working to connect individuals and community and inform about social issues, these feminist activists cleverly utilised art in their performances to inform and engage their audience. Thereby, space and platform for debate between different perspectives are created.

Re-acted real life stories have brought a sense of familiarity and connection to the audience, in turn providing a more profound impact. With the wide diversity of theatrical elements, actors can be creative with their performance. It also helps to draw attention to the feminist activists and their cause apart from providing entertainment value. Through small scale and sporadic protests taking place unexpectedly at public spaces such as a flash mob in public transport or parks, feminist activists are able to effectively target their audience and disseminate their ideas.

With these protests aimed at raising awareness of gender inequalities, the question of what impact they have is relevant to why activist would adopt such an eclectic form of protest. In this feminist performance group the aim has been to raise public consciousness by providing a social critique, but through its actions, it has also inspired and engaged people to join their cause. For instance, with the protests aimed to set the detained activists free, they crafted a model that was followed and copied not only by people within the feminist community in China but also by the international feminist community. By engaging in these feminist performances, the feminist activists as put by Garlough (2008) "enact a public role

in the public space” (ibid: 178). Along with the performances engaging the public, having both profound and long-term effects by subtly working on cultural habits, the performances have also, with the help of social media, pushed for feminist activists recognition in a discourse that denies their existence.

## *7. Conclusion*

The aim of this thesis has been to determine the motivations behind feminist activists who to engage in a performance form of protest. By doing so, it has explored the personal motivations, the persisting gender inequalities, the climate of protest and the strategies they employ in their protest. My analysis shows that, in the Chinese context of a patriarchal heteronormative society coupled with restriction on protest, individuals are still highly motivated to engage in protest. Personal motivation deriving from individual identities, personal experiences of gender inequality, and solidarity found in the feminist community, formed the base for individuals becoming involved in a feminist performance group. With the support and belonging this group provides along with space for development, individuals empower themselves and through protest exert their power over the sociocultural structure that oppresses them.

These feminist activists find gender inequality encompassing and entrenched in Chinese society, but they lack opportunities to make an effective change. In addition to disappointing institutionalized efforts such as the ACWF, there is a restriction on protest, strong state control and dominance over women's right issues. The feminist performance group in this study has therefore adopted a confrontational approach. With performance art in their demonstrations and skillful use of social media, the feminist activists have been able to outmaneuver state restriction. The 6-7 March Crackdown, however, can be considered as a turning point in the attitude of the state towards the protestors.

The 6-7 March crackdown and the following detention marked a change with authorities taking a much harsher stance towards the activists. Perhaps ironic, the attempt to silence the activists brought instead the feminist movement into the spotlight where some commenters even coining it being the "Chinese feminist awakening". Since the situation of the five detained feminists was quickly spread with the use of performance art and social media, it engaged not only people within China but also the international community to push for the release of the activists.

In terms of the future and what it may bring, a feminist activist in this study have expressed that advocating for women's rights is for them a lifelong mission. Although feminist activist now might have to adjust their tactics in the near future, the motivation continues to fight for women's rights will unquestionably remain. As the development of the 6-7 March crackdown and detention of the five inspired some, the strong motivation and



commitment of the feminist activists have influenced and engaged people across borders to stand in solidarity and achieve change.

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## 9. Appendix

### Appendix I: Interview questions

#### Section 1: General information

1. Name?
2. Age?
3. Background (hometown)?
4. When did you get involved? (Year of involvement?)
5. Education:

#### Section 2: Questions related to the framework

1. Why did you get involved (the driver)?
2. What are you aiming for? Goal?
3. How do you protest?
  - a. What kind of protests?
  - b. Why this type of protest
4. Where is inequality the most striking? (Most obvious?)
  - a. Political
  - b. Employment
  - c. Education
  - d. Social
5. What is the source of this inequality?
  - a. Societal bias
  - b. Family?
  - c. The state?
6. How are you organized?
  - a. How often do you meet?
  - b. Who makes the decision? Commonly or individually?
7. Besides striving for the common purpose, are there any other reasons for you to joining the group?
8. Did you know anyone before in the group?

9. Are you satisfied with the efforts in the organisation?
10. Are you active in other organisation?
11. Are you fighting for other rights?
12. What are the greatest challenges in your actions?
13. What do you think about the All-China Women Federation (Fulian)?

Section 3: Anything interesting in section 1 and 2, follow up

1. (For students) In the future, do you plan on continuing doing this? (Ex within 5 years)
2. What change do you think you in (the feminist group) will be able to achieve?
3. What do you think the gender inequality will be in the future?

Extra questions

1. What is feminism? to you?
2. Would you identify yourself as feminist?

## Appendix II: The list of protests organized by the young feminist activists

The Event	The Action	The Aim	The Date	Categories
“Blood splattered wedding dresses” or “Injured brides”	Three women dresses in Western style wedding dresses splattered with blood stains held up signs marched the Qianmen (前门) pedestrian street in Beijing holding up signs.	The aim was to raise awareness on <b>Domestic Violence (DV)</b> and was especially in relation to a famous DV case (Li Yang <sup>17</sup> ) at the time.	February 14 <sup>th</sup> (Valentines day), 2012	Dressing, clothes, ‘performance’, theatre (with the blood over dress: Violating own body  As a result, it generated a landmark bill on domestic violence that is being considered by the national legislature.
“Our Vagina, Ourselves” is a play inspired by the play “Vagina Monologues” written by Eve Ensler.  Although the play is inspired, the most of the content is today independent. The play consists of 11 scenes, but eight of them are produced by women in the group.	The play is performed yearly by some members in the organisation and was first performed in the L.G.B.T Centre in Beijing.  The performances have only been taken place in unofficial venues: each time attracting large audience number up to 150.	Aim to raise awareness and public consciousness about women’s <b>autonomous rights, their body their and sexuality</b> . But also about the violence against women’s bodies and bring theatrical feminism into China.	The play was first performed in January 2013 and has since then been preformed 18 times in cities such as Beijing, Tianjin, and Xiamen.	Theatre, performance
“Occupy men’s toilet”	Several women, led by <i>Li Ting Ting</i> occupied men’s public toilet in Beijing. Following the protest taken place a week earlier in Guangzhou	Called for a more balanced male-female <b>toilet</b> ratio.	February, 2012	Taking over male space  As a result of the attention, National Peoples Congress (NPC) delegates raised the issue during legislative sessions in March 2012. In that year alone, several cities made plans to improve public restroom gender ratios.
“Bald sisters”	Three girls in Beijing shaved their heads, following the protest that has been taken place days earlier in Guangzhou.	Protested against <b>gender discriminatory admissions</b> rates.	September, 2012	Violating own body

<sup>17</sup> The high-profiled domestic violence case concern a 43 year old woman who 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 failing to address the degree of abuse she had suffered, ordering a higher court to retry the case.



<p>“Homophobia kills Lesbians”</p>	<p>Six girls pretending to be couples kissing in a public park in Beijing. With another member (man) pretending to be shocked and shouting “Lesbians and gays”.</p> <p>The girls then falls down to the ground and are being covered with slogans “Homophobia kills Lesbians”</p>	<p>Aim to raise awareness about <b>Lesbian rights</b>. As the current discourse on LGBT and queer rights have mainly focused on gays right and marginalize lesbians rights</p>	<p>May, 2013</p>	<p>Performance, ‘theatre’</p>
<p>“Women’s Rights March”</p>	<p>Starting from Beijing marchers (<i>Xiao Meili</i> and her fellow marcher) walked along the National Highway 107, passing through Hebei, Henan, Hubei, and Hunan to Guangzhou. Along the way they have been collecting signatures, staging performances and handing out information to local governments.</p>	<p>The marchers promoted <b>gender equality</b> and advocated for reform for the handling of <b>sexual assault</b> cases.</p>	<p>Starting September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013 (continued for 6 months)</p>	<p>Traditional kind of protest march</p>
<p>Flash-mob activity</p>	<p>A group of volunteers rode line 13 of the Beijing subway signing, “Do you hear the women singing?”</p> <p>Inspired by the song “Do you hear the people sing “from the play <i>Les Miserable</i>”</p>	<p>The activity aimed to commemorate the International Day for the <b>Elimination of Violence Against Women</b> on November 25th</p>	<p>November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>	<p>Performance, ‘theatre’</p>
<p>“My Short Skirt” from their play <i>My Vagina Says</i>”</p>	<p>On the subway line 13, which was temporarily established as an open public space. Several participations performed ”My Short Skirt” from their play <i>My Vagina Says</i>”</p>	<p>The aim was to raise awareness on women’s autonomous sexual rights.</p>	<p>November 25<sup>th</sup> to December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>	<p>Performance, ‘theatre’</p>
<p>Protest and performance acts calling the release of the five detained girls.</p>	<p>Member from the groups – wearing mask (faces of the five detained girls) located in different places in Beijing. This was then put on different social platforms.</p>	<p>The aim was to call on the <b>release of the five detained girls</b>:</p> <p>Li Tingting (李婷婷), Zheng Churan (郑楚然), Wei Tingting (韦婷婷), Wang Man (王曼), Wu Rongrong (武嵘嵘)</p> <p>Who were all taken on the 6-7 March and detained for 37 days.</p>	<p>March, 2015 – 13, April, 2015</p>	