HERE TO BE HEARD
Digital feminist engagement with #MeTooinChina

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Abstract

This study analyses Chinese people's engagement in #MeTooinChina against sexual assault and patriarchal norms in Chinese society by asking three main research questions: 1) Why and how do Chinese people engage with #MeTooinChina? 2) What challenges are they faced with in their engagement and how do these challenges influence their continuous engagement with #MeTooinChina? 3) How do they reflect on their engagement and evaluate the outcomes of #MeTooinChina?

Theoretically the thesis draws on research into digital social movements, in particular in relation to feminist movements, as well as theories on the network society and how social media is used for political engagement. The notion of political engagement as based in emotions and affects is discussed in particular.

The analysis shows that the interviewees have a range of motivations as to why they engaged, from affective impulses to discontent with the system. The use of new media technologies has also promoted new modes of engagement and the various practices that they have performed are built on their previous skills and communicative competence like law, IT, sex education, and journalism. The interviewees stories also expose the overwhelming pressure of the world's most sophisticated system for censoring of the media. The black-box logic and unpredictability nature of the censorship creates mental pressure for the participants of #MeTooinChina which results in internalized censoring and disengagement among the interviewees. As a resistance to the harsh censorship, the participants of #MeTooinChina have however also adapted and reinvented media technologies to prevent their voice and engagement from being erased from the Internet, for example, building online archives of #MeTooinChina so that the incidents and articles that emerged in the movement can kept being updated and saved forever online.

Keywords: *feminist engagement in China, civic agency, civic engagement, #MeTooinChina, online political engagement, censorship, digital feminist activism, networked social movement, women's rights movement in China*

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Introduction

"They tried to bury us, but they don't know we are seeds."

On April 27th, 2017, Lin Yihan, a Taiwanese female writer and literary nova star hanged herself in her home, ending her 26-year-old life. Two months earlier, her debut novel *First Love Paradise of Fang Siqi* had been published in Taiwan, quickly becoming a blockbuster in the Chinese literary world ranking number one in the top ten best-selling books of 2017 in Taiwan.[1]

The book tells a story, adapted from Lin Yihan's own experiences, of how an authoritative old school teacher seduces and sexually assaults his female students. Yihan depicts the psychological state of the sexually assaulted victim in painful detail, while also raising sharp questions about how society is complicit in letting this violence to women happen, and most of the time let it go unnoticed.

The book and Lin Yihan's suicide brought attention to the issue of sexual assault also in mainland China, where the book had been spread in large numbers online. From Hongkong to Beijing, women who had been victim of sexual assault identified themselves as "Fang Siqi", and a climate in Chinese society where many young people were angry about sexual assault was formed. In the end of 2017, the international grassroot online feminist movement referred to as #MeToo took off around the world and with the global #MeToo coming to China, the angry "Fang Siqi"'s got their moment to break the silence.

On January 1st, 2018, Luo Xixi a former PhD student from Beihang University who is currently living in the US, used the #MeToo hashtag on Chinese social media microblogging platform *Weibo*, to post a 3000-word open letter detailing how 12 years ago her former supervisor, a renowned professor named Chen Xiaowu had forced himself onto her. Lou's post was widely circulated through both state and social media, and lead to the sacking of Chen Xiaowu. Luo Xixi's post inspired female students from all over Chinese universities,

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[1] http://www.bestseller-to-boxoffice.com/book/23430

including many of the top state universities to break the silence and share their stories of sexual assault under the hashtag *#MeTooinChina*.[2]

When the testimonies of Lin Yihan, Lou Xixi and countless other victims of sexual assault spread and were discussed in Chinese social media, it seemed as though that #MeTooinChina would have similar results as its counterparts in the Western world that hit the patriarchal structures with full force. However, the Chinese media infrastructure and media ecology is very different to that in Western countries, and so is the political, social and cultural context for engaging with feminist issues. China is a socialist one-party state, where public discussions on what is considered as sensitive topics are under tight control. The government can choose to remove or block online discussions at will and create substantial obstacles for this kind of grassroot public engagement. In the case of #MeTooinChina, the government censors responded swiftly, not only removing the hashtag #MeTooinChina but also mass blocking posts including words and phrases such as "anti-sexual harassment", "feminism".[3]

Despite the best efforts of the Chinese government, people's engagement in #MeTooinChina and in protesting sexual assault refused to be silenced. Instead, the hashtag began spreading beyond the university world in the summer of 2018 when many high-profile public figures were targeted as sexual perpetrators, including prominent authors, media personalities, leaders of charity organizations and religious leaders.[4]

Digital feminist engagement like #MeToo have been studied extensively in Western settings (see for example Jackson 2018; Drüeke and Zobl 2016; Thrift 2014; Rodino-Colocino 2014; Mendes 2015). Fewer studies however have addressed the situation in Asian countries (see for example Hasunuma and Shin 2019; Kim 2018) and even fewer the situation in China, the country with the highest number of internet users and the most sophisticated censorship system in the world.

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[2] https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/chinas-me-too-moment

[3] https://advox.globalvoices.org/2019/03/26/censored-on-wechat-metoo-in-china/

[4] https://qz.com/1356556/metoo-in-china-longquan-monk-xuecheng-resigns-from-buddhist-body/

Aim and research questions

This study aims to analyse Chinese people's engagement in #MeTooinChina against sexual assault and patriarchal norms in Chinese society. The study employs feminist in-depth interviews with participants of #MeTooinChina to gain insight into their experiences and perspectives as well as explore their engagement in a holistic way. This includes focusing on the motivations and practices of their engagement, the challenges they have met in their engagement, as well as their own self-reflection on their engagement.

To address the aims of the study, the following research questions are asked:

1. *Why and how do Chinese people engage with #MeTooinChina?*
2. *What challenges are they faced with in their engagement? How do these challenges influence their continuous engagement with #MeTooinChina?*
3. *How do they reflect on their engagement and evaluate the outcomes of #MeTooinChina?*

Directing academic attention to digital engagement against sexual assault in China is motivated in several ways. Firstly, by the sheer number of people concerned - the more than 802 million internet users in China - and the fact that to talk about a global #MeToo movement, one needs to also consider those that often have been overlooked in Western media studies. Secondly, learning about Chinese people's engagement with #MeToo provides for more general knowledge in favour of socially vulnerable groups all over the world where democracy is restricted, and digital activism faces various challenges and threats. The lessons learned from a study of the engagement with digital feminist activism in China can contribute to empirical knowledge that can be shared in solidarity with feminist activists working under repression in other parts of the world. Thirdly, studying #MeTooinChina is motivated theoretically in that it takes place in a vastly different media system with strong implications for the performance of civic agency and civic engagement. Thus, learning about how digital media technologies can or cannot work to create potential for civic cultures under repressive regimes, offers an important contribution to expanding the conceptual understandings of civic engagement and civic cultures (Dahlgren, 2009; 2013).

Contextual background: Digital repression and #MeTooinChina

According to the media freedom organization Reporters Without Borders, China ranks as number 176 out of 180 in the 2018 index of media and press freedom and is considered one of the most restrictive countries in the world. Reporters Without Borders talk about "a social model in China based on control of news and information and online surveillance of its citizens" through massive use of new technology. The nationwide technical filtering, what is often referred to as "The Great Firewall" is one example of this. The Great Firewall blocks internet platforms such as YouTube, Wikipedia, Facebook, and Twitter and many Google services, which is also why #MeTooinChina in many ways have been disconnected from the rest of the world.[5]

The state control over digital media content and use of Chinese messenger apps like WeChat and Weibo has increased during recent years, with China in 2016 being dubbed the "world's worst harasser of internet freedom" following a new cybersecurity law that presented new regulations for internet companies to store data in China and required them to register user data and real names in mainland China.

The control of online speech was intensified during the trending of #MeTooinChina. According to the official report in July 2018 of the state Internet information office of China, more than 720,000 social media accounts had been closed down by internet platforms in the second quarter of the year. However, the digital crackdown failed in keeping people from engaging in the movement. Instead of being silent, more victims came out telling their stories targeting prominent figures.

On 26th July 2018, a 26-year-old screenwriter, Xuan Zi, posted a story on her WeChat, accusing Zhu Jun - one of the most famous faces on Chinese television, a party member and a national news anchor - for sexual assault. Her friend forwarded the story on Weibo, and the account went viral although the Chinese censors were quick to step in and blocking the article and deleting relevant posts. The case rejuvenated the hashtag #MeTooinChina with 773,000 Weibo users searching for the topic within one hour.

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[5] https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/china

Literature review & Theoretical framework

This chapter has two parts. The first part is aimed at giving an overview of relevant previous research on feminist digital grassroots engagement and hashtag activism in general, and the global #MeToo movement and (digital) feminist engagement in China in particular. In this first part of the chapter, the Chinese system of internet censoring and the repression of social movements is also addressed and the challenges that this pose for political engagement in feminist issues are scrutinized.

The second part of the chapter provides an overview of the main theoretical approaches that will be used in the analysis. In particular, this section focuses on the features and functions of networked social movements in the digital age as well as the use of digital communication technologies and the role of social media for online political engagement. For a critical understanding of the case, the analytical framework of civic engagement referred as civic cultures developed by Perter Dahlgren and the notion that political engagement is based in emotions and affects are discussed and elaborated in this section as well.

Feminist digital grassroot engagement

Today, digital media is being used for political engagement in a multitude of ways including everything from disseminating information to organizing spontaneous protests and mobilization around political issues (Lim 2012; Chrona and Bee 2017; Bennett &Segerberg 2012). Knappe and Lang (2014, p. 362) proclaim a "communicative turn in movement repertoires for outreach and mobilization, from offline to online, as well as from mass protests to targeted fundraising and campaign activity" due to the use of digital media technologies.

There is much scholarship focusing on digital grassroot engagement and activism that explores how it can contribute to social justice issues more generally and particularly its affordances when it comes to making marginalized voices heard (Mann 2014, p. 294; Drüeke and Zobl 2016, p. 48). Feminist scholarship on digital engagement and activism has focused on for example how this can create rhetorical spaces for feminist that can counter patriarchal ones (Keller et al. 2018; Mendes 2015; Shaw 2012; Thrift 2014), and how networking and exchange of experiences on microblogs like Twitter can contribute to the formulation of political positions and the formulation of social demands (Fotopoulou 2016).

Among the many feminist hashtags studies, the following can be mentioned: #YesAllWomen that in 2014 was widely posted to raise awareness about violence against women (Rodino-Colocino 2014; Thrift 2014;) and #EverydaySexism that was launched in 2012, to catalog stories of sexism from around the world (Drüeke & Zobl 2016, p. 36). In the German-speaking world, #aufschrei, in 2013 gathered and shared sexist experiences and sexual assaults, opening "a national discursive space for negotiating sexism and feminist protest strategies" (Drüeke & Zobl 2016, p. 38). In Turkey, the attempted rape and murder of a young woman in February 2015 resulted in the hashtag #sendeanlat (meaning "tell your stories") collecting stories of sexual harassment and violence against women (Ikizer, E.G. et al.).

Keller, Mendes and Ringrose (2016, p. 22) document the activist practices and experiences of feminists who use social media to challenge sexism and rape culture. They map the ways in which girls and women are exposing and challenging various forms of misogyny using digital media technologies, drawing on cases such as the online anti-street harassment website Hollaback!, the Twitter hashtag #BeenRapedNeverReported, and teen feminists' use of social media platforms to challenge rape culture in and around schools. Keller, Mendes and Ringrose (2016) specifically points to how girls and women are creating online cultures of support for victims of sexual violence, both by creating awareness about the existence of these problems, and forming spaces where women are able to share experiences of sexual violence and assault. The creation of online cultures of support for victims of sexual violence through testimonial and advice giving have been the focus of much scholarship on feminist hashtag activism (Dixon 2014; Thrift 2014; Keller 2015; Mendes 2015), in particular the capacity to create networks and construct collective responses to patriarchal structures and violence (Armstrong & Mahone, 2016 p. 93) and build identification and solidarity with victims (Salter 2013; Sills et al. 2016 p. 936-937).

While much scholarship has praised the potential of digital media tools for feminist grassroot activism and engagement, it is also important to not simplistically frame digital media tools as the answer to all kinds of social justice engagement (Dahlgren 2013, p.34). Brandes and Levin (2014 p.338) investigated how Israeli teenage girls construct their social relations on social networks, found that while Facebook made people aware of protests it didn't recruit them for action. Gladwell (2010) argues that this is because of the lack of so

called "strong ties" in digital activism. Morozov (2009) uses the term "slacktivism" to describe some digital activism which he sees as feel-good online activism that has little political or social impact.

For digital feminist activism one challenge is also anti-feminist reactions and sentiments in patriarchal society that make it harder for activism, for example by anti-feminist co-option of feminist platforms and spreading hate. According to Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016, p.187) this new form of "popular misogyny" can be understood as a patriarchal response to the many hashtags about sexual assault that preceded #MeToo.

The rise of the global #MeToo

While as shown in the previous section, there has been several hashtag initiatives during the last five years targeting sexual assault and rape culture, none of these has gotten the media and public attention like #MeToo. Originally the phrase "MeToo" was coined by black feminist activist Tarana Burke and launched to help survivors of sexual harassment (Bhattacharyya 2018; Jackson 2018). It wasn't however until October 15 2017, when Hollywood actress and activist, Alyssa Milano, shared a tweet asking others who had experienced sexual assault or harassment to post "#MeToo" in response that Burke's movement started to gain worldwide attention, getting almost 4,7 million shares and more than 12 million posts and reactions on Facebook within 24 hours. From Hollywood, the movement spread worldwide and reached everything from the music industry to academia and politics (Montenegro 2018, p.1-3).

Jackson (2018) argues that #MeToo differs from previous campaigns to raise awareness about sexual assault not only in sheer numbers of participants, but also in that "me too" is a strategy for giving people a sense of the magnitude of the problem. She uses the concept of epistemic justice to show how #MeToo through the mutual recognition of others who have suffered sexual assault offer the participants an opportunity of overcoming the injustice they have suffered when being victims of sexual assault. (Jackson 2018, p.2-4). The #MeToo movement thus can be seen as a performance of testimony crucial in the recovery of the self, following a traumatic event and a process of mutual recognition which both reclaims a victim's status as an epistemic subject and builds a community of solidarity (Jackson 2018, p. 4-5).

The impact of the #MeToo and other feminist hashtags even reached even the countries of east Asia. Hasunuma and Shin (2019) makes a comparative analysis of the influence of #MeToo in Japan and South Korea. Japan and Korea share many similarities regarding women's political and economic status, and both rank low on global gender equality indices. However, the impact of #MeToo was shown to be very different in each country. In South Korea #MeToo saw hundreds of women of all occupations and ages came forward with accusations of sexual assault, ignited by a woman prosecutor, Suh Ji-Hyeon. On January 29, 2018, she went public with her experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination on a live news program (Hasunuma and Shin 2019, p. 98). This ignited "a vibrant bottom-up grassroots movement" (ibid 2019, p.98) resulting in protest rallies mobilized by women activists. Many powerful men, such as movie directors and actors, teachers in high school and professors in universities were accused of sexual assault. Furthermore, women's groups in South Korea formed a network called "Citizen's Action to Support the MeToo Movement." (ibid 2019, p.101).

The situation in Japan was quite different. Similar to other countries, #MeToo began in Japan because of social media, and the first women to go public used Facebook and Twitter to share their stories. Hachu, a freelance writer and blogger, wrote a Facebook post detailing the sexual harassment she endured while working at Japan's leading advertising agency. However even though at this time, other young women were inspired by the global movement on social media relatively few came forward. Women in Japan many times prefer to remain anonymous due to the risk of victim-blaming and the lack of a support system for victims. There were few organized street protests, although some women professionals demanded strongly for legal reform (Hasunuma and Shin, 2019). In their analysis, Hasunuma and Shin (2019, p.98) argue that the nature of media coverage and the strength of women's engagement in civil society in each case resulted in these different responses in South Korea and Japan.

As opposed to Japan, the precedents of Korean women's movements have paved the way for the arrival of #MeToo in South Korea. In the end of 2016, a series of hashtags started trending on Twitter in Korea. The first was #sexual violence in the otaku culure; similar hashtags then spread to other areas of arts and culture, for example, #yeonghwagye-nae-seongpongnyeok (#sexual violence in the film industry). The survivors' accusations and

testimonies under these hashtags demonstrate that misogynistic rape culture is endemic throughout Korean society (Kim, J. 2018).

Hasunuma and Shin (2019 p.106-107) argues similarly that the South Korean #MeToo movement could build on other movements acting as forerunners, most notably the protests mobilized to impeach the former President Park Geun-Hye, called the Candlelight Revolution. Women in South Korea already had experiences from various political movements within civil society which elevated their civic awareness. This made it possible for #MeToo in South Korea to take off in a way that it could not in Japan (Hasunuma and Shin 2019, Larsen 2018). The Indian #MeToo resembles the situation in both Japan and South-Korea with many women who have come out of the closet to share their gruesome experiences of sexual assault at workplaces by famous and popular celebrities coming from different fields of entertainment, journalism, politics. Similar with South Korea, India has seen street protest following #MeToo, but also faced strong patriarchal pushback (Kumar 2018).

Feminism and feminist engagement in China

It is important also to take into consideration the larger socio-cultural context in which feminist engagement occurs in China, as stressed in the discussion about the differences in the outcomes of #MeToo between South-Korea and Japan earlier in this chapter. Chinese feminism has had a different evolution and is differently embedded within contemporary political and cultural relations than feminism in the West.

Since its start in 1921, the Chinese Communist Party openly supported equality between women and men *(nanniv pingdeng,* which translates as "sexual equality"), mainly through integrating women into the workforce to build a progressive and modern nation (Zheng 2016, p. 480). The official discourse supported gender equality and the liberation of women. However, this version of state-sponsored feminism has been criticized for overemphasizing class struggle while downplaying structural and everyday inequalities faced by women (Tan 2017, p.173). During the Cultural Revolution Maoist philosophy tried to establish women's equality ('Women hold up half the sky') by creating the asexual 'iron-girls' of national development which according to Schaffer and Xianlin (2007, p. 18) "camouflaged a socialist impasse that did not so much emancipate as masculinize women".

In the past twenty years the growth of market economy has dramatically changed China, although the overall standard of living has risen, the market-driven reforms and open-up policy have had more negative effects both materially and symbolically for women. The reforms offered men increased opportunities in education, employment and financial success, while many women have to face the dilemma of choosing between the demands of a career or a family (Lin 2003; Hershatter 2019, p.251-274).

However, during recent decades with the introduction of digital communication technologies, new spaces have also opened up for women where they can impact on the public sphere (Schaffer and Xianlin 2007, p. 19). Tan (2017) dates the history of, digital media aided feminist activism in China back to 1996 when the Media Monitor for Women Network in Beijing was founded to promote women's communication rights and gender equality in the media. In 2009, the network started a weekly digital publication and launched a website commenting on current events related to women's rights and gender equality. Other similar network is The New Media Female Network (NMFN) also known as Women Awakening that organize exhibitions, seminars, lectures, and journalist workshops about feminism.

Digital feminist activism in China also needs to be seen against the backdrop of a new wave and generation of Chinese feminism and women's activism. Zheng (2016) and Tan (2017) both see the previously mentioned feminist five incident as a crucial moment that "Changed the landscape of Chinese feminism" (Zheng 2016, p.476). The news about the detention of the feminist five brought international attention to what was described as an increasingly vocal group of young activists often referred to as a "new generation" of feminists consisting of people born in the 1990's or later (Wang 2018).

Among women of this new generation of feminists, the growing sexism and gender inequality in China today, manifested in for example sexual harassment in public transportation, domestic violence, gender discrimination in education admissions has been targeted (Wang 2018). Tan call these young women "media-savvy feminists" (Tan 2017, p.175) who publicize their actions and messages through social media, especially Sina Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter. Moreover, they resort to individualized and "deinstitutionalized" tactics and loose networks instead of formal organizations (Wei 2015; Yue 2015). Wang and Driscoll (2019) concludes that while social media does not overcome

all the obstacles to feminism in China, these media groups stand out as key voices in Chinese feminist activism today, with implications for how we understand contemporary digital feminism on an international scale.

Internet censorship and repression of social movements

One of the powers of digital media lies in how it can be used as an information and mobilization channel through which messages can be sent out rapidly to what is basically an open circle of participants. However as with any kind of technology, the use of digital media for certain purposes needs to be examined in terms its social, cultural and political context (Drüeke & Zobl 2016, p.37). In this thesis, this means trying to understand how digital political engagement takes place under state censorship and authoritarian regimes, such as China.

Several authors have written about how digital media, such as Twitter, have been used as a channel for participation, a "space of civil society", to mobilize and organize protests against repressive governments for example during the Arab spring or during different kinds of social protests (Fotopoulou 2014, p.3; Hakura, 2014; Halverson et al. 2013). By many the increasing use of social media and communication technologies for political engagement free from government control and corporate interests has also been seen as a "genuine cause for hope" (Boler & Nemorin 2013, p. 411; Castells 2015).

There are also a number of studies looking at how different forms of social media are used in in the Chinese digital landscape and its role in social and political engagement in Chinese society (Cao 2011; Hassid 2012). Digital media in China reflect many contradictions of the Chinese society, it has spread rapidly, but there are also strong digital divides between groups of people, based on both age, education level, and location (Pan et al. 2011). Digital media offers freedom and new opportunities for civic engagement but also means strict political control and surveillance (Chen & Reese 2015, p.1), even though for example Hassid (2012) points to that politics is not a big topic discussed on Chinese social media platforms. Others like Tong and Lei (2012) stress that microblogs like Weibo offers a space where people can express public opinions and voice mistrust to the government. In other words, as Tan (2017 p.172) puts it Weibo loosens up government control over information spread and has the potential to work as a catalyst for social and political transformation.

In a case study of anti-petrochemical protests in China during 2007 to 2014, Liu (2016) shows how protestors are using many different digital media tools including internet forums, Weibo, text messaging, and WeChat, to shar information and protest plans, as well as facilitating collective action mobilization (Liu 2016 p. 610). According to Liu (2016 p. 605) Chinese society has seen an adoption and appropriation of digital media as an indispensable means of political activism because of its "unique affordances of digital media, including availability, accessibility, and affordability" (Liu 2016, p.618).

The situation for digital activism in China however means that information and communication technologies, like in other authoritarian countries also are used to undermine individual influence and to stop collective engagement (Fenton and Barassi, 2011; Terranova 2004). Following the abovementioned study by Liu (2016 p. 620) it is important to note that one of the reasons for the success of these protests is that it is a kind of environmental activism which tends to be tolerated by Chinese authorities because it does not challenge the state.

The Chinese government started developing Internet filtering technologies in 1996 when the Internet entered China and According to King et al. (2013) the size and sophistication of the Chinese government program to selectively censor the expressed views of the Chinese people is unprecedented in recorded world history. Shen and Zhang (2018) argues similarly that China is one of the world's most sophisticated Internet censoring countries.

Internet content in China is censored in a number of ways. To control the domestic network, the government uses a large variety of technical, measures, such as keyword filtering that automatically forbids posts that contain sensitive words or phrases. The domestic network is also screened using human censors, real-life inspectors who screen and delete sensitive posts online (King et al. 2013; Tan 2017 p.176). Much of the responsibility for censorship is on the part of the Internet content providers who may be fined or shut down if they fail to comply with government censorship guidelines. To comply with the government, each individual site privately employs around 1000 censors. Additionally, approximately 20.000-50.000 internet police and internet monitors as well as an estimated 250 000-300 000 party member at all levels of government, participate in the censoring and monitoring of the domestic Chinese Internet (King et al. 2013, p. 326).

Comments on social media that are critical of the government without calling for collective action are generally tolerated by the government censors. Those that "represent, reinforce, or spur social mobilization" are however often swiftly responded to by the state, many times within 24 hours (King et al. 2013, p.327; Tan 2017, p.172). As King et al. (2013, p.326) puts it, in China, Internet censorship is "clipping social ties whenever any collective movements are in evidence or expected."

According to Shen (2015), the claimed purposes of Internet censorship in China have always been broad and vague. Laws and regulations prohibit the production and dissemination of information containing content that endangers national security, state secrets, subverts the government, undermines national unification, disturbs social order, or shows pornography and violence. In practice, the blocked Websites are mostly foreign social media platforms, foreign news sites, pro-democracy and human right sites, and pornography and gambling sites (Shen and Zhang 2018. p.107).

Yuen (2015, p.51) points out that the state's control over social activism has tightened since Xi assumed office as the leader of the state and Communist party, with "ad-hoc repression of civil society groups and activists is now moving towards a more systematic restriction". Activism with nationwide networks and interactions with foreign organizations in particular have faced increasing suppression. The crackdown on feminist activists should according to Tan (2017, p.177) be interpreted in this context.

While censorship is harsh on many levels in the digital media landscape in China, there are also many users engaged in escaping censorship and silencing in social media. In the case of the feminist five where five young women who had engaged in activism to protest sexual harassment on public transportation were arrested without accusations studied by Tan (2017, p.172) Chinese activists and social groups managed to express their solidarity with the feminist five on social media after the arrest, urging for their release which happened.

Regarding the more technical aspects of activism and anti-censorship technologies, Shen and Zhang (2018) shows that the most frequently used circumvention tools in China were different kinds of VPN technologies for bypassing the firewall. Proxy servers are used as an intermediary to relay information from the blocked sites to users. Different kinds of

encryption technologies can also be used to keeps keyword filtering devices from identifying "harmful" content. Generally speaking these censorship circumvention technologies have a short lifespan – about four and a half years, but a perhaps more serious limitation is that despite the availability of these technologies, only a smaller group of more tech savvy users know are aware of them and know how to use them (Shen and Zhang 2018, p.107-108).

This is a pattern seen in many authoritarian countries where Internet access is limited and where usually only around 2–3% of Internet users utilize tools to get around restrictions (Shen and Zhang 2018, p.109) As Tan (2017, p.182) points out, the unequal access to media, influenced by class and geographical differences could easily undermine the impact of media-based activism in China. In their study of the impacts of anti-censorship technologies in China (Shen and Zhang 2018, p.107) show that education was one of the most important factors predicting the use of anti-censorship tools, confirming results from previous studies showing that among users of activist and anti-censorship technologies, around 80 % have a university degree.

Theoretical framework

In this second part of literature review, some central theoretical concepts that will be used in the analysis chapter are presented. Firstly, this part focus on theories about the network society, networked social movements and the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in these movements which is considered particularly relevant given that few studies have focused on the case when social media and ICT's are used to restrict freedom of speech and how this influences the pattern of the networked social movements. Secondly, the framework of civic cultures developed by Dahlgren (2009) is elaborated, since the thesis adopts the framework to understand and develop the factors that shapes civic engagement and civic agency among participants of #MeTooinChina. Lastly, the notion of "affective politics" is addressed given that the storytelling infrastructure of digital media spaces has changed the way of engaging politics, which is political statement and engagement could be afforded in the public display of personal stories and emotions.

The network society and networked social movements
Jan van Dijk (2006) has defined the "network society" as a form of society where relationships on all levels are increasingly organized in digital media networks. Digital media

is both complementing, supporting and replacing existing non-digital social networks and relationships. Van Dijk stresses how digital media is influencing all levels of communication and organization in today's society and thus how "the most fundamental values of our society today are at issue when it comes to the development of new information and communication technologies" (Dijk, J.V. 2006, p.3).

Sociologist and Internet theorist Manuel Castells (2004) argues similarly that today's globalised and increasingly connected world represents a new kind of social structure, that shape social settings, social interactions, flows of power, modes of organising, our sense of time and space, as well as collective and self-identities. This social structure is characterised by the fact that the key social processes and organizational forms are organized in networks which are enacted, activated and operated through technologies of communication and digital transmission. The development of digital communication technologies, and in particular mobile media technologies in recent years, has enabled a new kind of mass self-communication, that based on horizontal networks of interactive communication on the Internet (Castells 2015, p.248).

It is within an increasingly digitized, globalized and networked society that the social movements of the 21st century are formed (Castells 2015) and it is through digital social networks that social movements today used for mobilizing, for organizing, for deliberating, for coordinating and for decision making. The Arab Spring that spread across the Middle East (Halverson et al. 2013; Castell 2015; Johnson et al. 2013); The Occupy Wall Street movement against wealth inequality in 2011 (Dahlgren 2013); The Mexican student online protest movement #YoSoy132 in 2012 (Cuninghame 2016); The umbrella movement in HongKong in 2014, which described by Fang (2014, p.243) as "a truly autonomous, networked social movement claiming the right to representative democracy and challenging Beijing's control"; and most recently the various shapes in which #MeToo and other hashtags have been used around the world to challenge sexual abuse and repression are all examples of this.

What these examples all show is one of the defining features of networked social movements to transcend national, cultural, social borders and within minutes spread globally. Another feature of the new networked social movements that Castells (2015, p.2 50-251) describe are how they are typically acting on both global and local at the same time.

They are focusing both on issues of relevance to humanity at large, but are at the same time locally contextualized, rooted in issues of specific relevance for certain groups of people and occuring in vastly different cultures and institutional settings, and under divergent economic and political conditions (Castells 2015, p.222) warranting empirical studies of these movement under different conditions.

Castells (2015, p.223) views digital networked social movements as a reinvention of democracy and the ways in which democracy is practiced. This idea is also seen in Dahlgren's writings (2013, p. 33) where he stresses the fact that digital media technologies permits many forms of political practice that are unquestionably empowering in making available vast amounts of information, fostering decentralization and diversity, facilitating interactivity and individual communication, while providing seemingly limitless communicative space for whoever wants it, at speeds that are instantaneous (Dahlgren 2013, p. 33-35).

There are also however many who have been critical about Castells' argument that networks make possible a historically new form of social power. Van Dijk (2012, p.110) points out that Castells tends to downplay the negative implications of networks, such as the fact that they can also be used by oppressive regimes to quash dissent – something that Morozov (2011) also underscores. This discussion is also something that Dahlgren takes up when discussing how power is exercised and negotiated via the media and growing as "authoritarian regimes make use of digital media to target and threaten those who dissent." (2013, p. 32).

While digital media networks are crucial for social movements in the 21st century, it is important as Dahlgren (2013, p. 42-43) reminds, to not "lose sight of the actors that networks link together, the practices in which they engage, and their societal circumstances". In the next subsection this will be given closer consideration.

Civic engagement and agency in the digital age

In the context of the increasingly mediated civic interaction taking place via the Internet and other forms of interactive digital communication, the political potential of digital communication technologies is centered on the notion of civic engagement in public life - a cornerstone of democracy (Dahlgren 2009; Tierney 2013; Chen & Reese 2015). In relation to the concept "political", the notion of civic is broader, encompassing the terrain of the public

where the political arises. Civic engagement then in Dahlgren's theory is seen as a precondition for the political, and the term "civic agency" is a fundamental notion to conceptually anchor people's enactment of citizenship (2009, p.59). As noted by Dahlgren (ibid., p.80-81), engagement refers to subjective states, that is, a mobilized, focused attention on some object. It is in a sense a prerequisite for participation: To "participate" in politics, presuppose engagement and for engagement to result in participation and give rise to civic agency there must be some connection to do-able activities where citizens can feel empowered. The concept of civic agency is built on people being able to see themselves as participants, that they find engagement meaningful, and that they experience motivation via the interplay of reasons and passion (ibid., p.102).

The framework referred as civic cultures which intended to help analyze what factors that shape civic agency, the conditions that are necessary for - that promote or hinder and thereby impact on citizens' engagement and participation in democracy, and in particular factors within the realm of the media (ibid, p.102-103). This thesis adopts the framework as the analytical guide for coding and measuring civic engagement with #MeTooinChina. The dimensions of civic cultures regarding literacy (knowledge and skills); the valorization of democratic rules in social networking sites; trust formation, in the social capital sense; social media as potentially richer mediated public space; and people's online identification as citizens.

The dimension, *identities*, is perceived as the centerpiece in the framework, with other five dimensions playing a part in shaping the conditions of its existence, as 'identities build on knowledge and values, they can be reinforced by trust and embodied in particular spaces via practices' (ibid., p.119). In order to understanding citizenship and civic agency among the participants of #MeTooinChina, there are two critical components that worth a highlight here: the sense of being an empowered political agent that "one can see oneself as a citizen, as subjectively encompassing the attributes of agency that this social category may involve"(ibid., p. 63); and identities always resonates with emotion and affect rather than being the product of rational thought solely (ibid., p.64).

The networked structure of social media and mobile technologies create an expanded public space for politics, enabling citizens to take part in developing more elaborative ways of political engagement and democracy (Tierney 2013; Dahlgren 2005, 2013; Castells 2015).

Castells (2015, p.9) sees the new spatial of political mobilization as spaces of autonomy, he stresses the importance of these spaces where social movement can act free from the control of power holders over communication power. Adding on to this, Dahlgren (2013) argues that the expanded online space can become alternative channels of expression and manifestations are used to address issues that are not represented adequately in mainstream political institutions. As such, digital media spaces give the participants a collective mandate to challenge the authority of the status quo, just like public gathering in physical communities, sharing and gathering in digital communities creates "a call for agency" (Dahlgren 2013, p.10-11). However, what lacking in these discussions is how does an expanded but not safe communicative space influence the civic engagement when the digital media spaces are under large surveillance and controlled by institutional powers. The thesis takes on the framework of Dahlgren but also contribute a part to develop the concepts of civic engagement and civic cultures in a non-western like democracy.

Affective politics in digital spaces

What many of the new digital social movements have in common, is a sense of shared online and offline solidarity shaped around the "public display of emotions" (Papacharissi 2015, p.19). In the new mediated social spaces, digitally enabled affective structures support meaning-making and construction of marginalized viewpoints (Spigel et al., 2010), which put by Papacharissi (2015, p.6) are "discursively calling into being further publics of support". The role of affect as a communicative practice in of social movements is also noted by Castells (2015, p.247) that enthusiastic networked individuals, having overcome fear, are transformed into a conscious, collective actor. It is when people are connecting with each other, sharing outrage, feeling togetherness, and constructing alternative projects for themselves and for society at large that these social movements thrive.

The digital networked spaces for political protest meant a blurring of the boundaries between the personal and private and the public as previous personal problems and issues with digital communication technologies are turned into political issues for a larger community (Bennett & Segerberg 2012; Askanius & Nils 2010). This blurring boundaries are resulted in the storytelling infrastructure that the online media platforms hold as potential, which manifest in the visibility to voices and affects. The link between political engagement and affect is addressed by Papacharissi (2015, p.16) that "Affect is inherently

political. It provides a way of understanding humans as collective and emotional, as well as individual and rational, by presenting these states as confluent rather than opposite". Drawing on a wide range of theories, Papacharissi (2015, p. 19) suggests that affect is particularly useful in understanding politics within digital cultures, as "it does not conform to the structures we symbolically internalize as political, such as conventional modes of protest activism or governmental politics". Similarly, Dahlgren's analytical framework stresses the affectual foundations of engagement and civic agency. Dahlgren claims that to be engaged, an individual not only must demonstrate cognitive interest, but also have an "affective investment" (2009, p. 83) in relation to the perceived injustices of the protest. Engagement, affect and emotions are very much connected with each other and they all occur in everyday life, as Dahlgren states "political sentiments in the form of dominant and oppositional discourses are embodied by various modes of cultural expression, often comprising strong affective dimensions" (Dahlgren 2013, p.25).

To avoid conceptual confusion, Papacharissi (2015, p.21-22) makes a distinction in her book about affect and emotion. Affect is a "non-conscious experience of intensity," which permits feeling to be "felt" and subsequently transcribed into emotion. Without affect, feelings essentially do not "feel," for it is affect that provides the intensity with which we experience emotions like pain, joy, and love, and more important, the urgency to act upon those feelings. Emotion is subsumed within affect, and perhaps the most intense part of affect.

Methodology and methods: A feminist approach

The thesis adopts *feminist standpoint theory* (Harding, 1991) to ask questions about the lives of Chinese people who are trying to voice the many negative consequences of the endorsed rape culture in the contemporary Chinese society. In line with standpoint theory, this thesis gives epistemological priority to "the lives of those who forced to live in the shadows of such specters" (Harding 2008, p.225), in this case the people who are revealing scars and tears caused by the dominant androcentric culture and calling for change, while being suppressed by the compelling institutional power.

A feminist standpoint epistemology acknowledges that all human beliefs, including scientific ones, are socially situated which means that no unbiased research can ever be possible. (Harding 1991, p.142) This, however, doesn't mean, that all knowledge claims are equal. Feminist standpoint epistemology also stress the requirement of critical evaluation of knowledge, "to determine which social situations tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims" (Harding 19991, p. 142) use the notion of "strong objectivity" to conceptualize the value of putting the subject or agent of knowledge in the same critical, causal plane as the object of her or his inquiry.

Selecting the case and method

Feminist in-depth interview sits firmly in qualitative interviewing tradition to explore individuals' lived experiences and perspectives (Hesse-Biber 2016). For the purpose of grounding the research in the lives of #MeTooinChina participants, feminist in-depth interview will be used to capture the interviewees' experiences and reflections of engaging with the *#MeTooinChina* from their perspectives and using their own words. As Letherby (2003, p.83) notes, feminist in-depth interviews build on ideals of the research process as interactive. This means not only that the researcher needs to be responsive to the interviewee, but the researchers needs also to give of herself, not just be in the interview situation to harvest data. Adopting feminist in-depth interview as a method allows the research to produce non-hierarchical and non-manipulative relationships between the researcher and interviewees (Slee 2004, p.44). This kind of trying to build rapport and reciprocity between the research and the researcher can be seen as crucial for interviewing about and approaching a case like #MeTooinChina, which is highly sensitive, both in terms of the private experiences of the interviewees but also in terms of the risk of political repression.

One of the things that Flyvbjerg (2001, p. 85) stress about the case study approach is that it implies "exploring phenomena firsthand instead of reading maps of them". Stake (2005, p.444) similarly notes that a case study concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and "close attention to the influence of its social, political, and other contexts". Applying case study approach as a supplementary method allows the research to build on the real-life context of Chinese people's engagement with #MeTooinChina, which "avoids context-free analyses that have historically been harmful to disempowered groups" (Hesse-Biber 2016, p. 529). As Flyvbjerg (2001, p66) argues a detailed single example can generalized into a broader class and has the potential to contribute to scientific knowledge. As such, taking on #MeTooinChina as a concrete case, can further mirror the manifestations of civic engagement with digital activism in China.

Reflecting on social positioning and feminist ethics

There is a common recognition that feminist research accounts should be "grounded in the personal and be accountable to readers" (Letherby 2003, p.9). In producing a qualitative feminist work, there is a need to acknowledge that researchers are people with their own "responses, values, beliefs and prejudice" (Morley 1996, p.139). Thus, the personal biographies of researcher are relevant to the research in terms of choice of topic and method, relationship with respondents and analysis and presentation of the findings (Letherby 2003). In order to give reader insight into the choices made in the research process and how they are influenced by me as a researcher, I see it necessary to enclose a brief description of myself, thus acknowledging myself as an interpretive subject as well as an analytical tool that have influence over the research process in all its stages.

To situate myself, I am a 24-year-old Chinese woman who came to higher education in Sweden as a master student. I identify myself a member of the post-90s generation in China - the first generation to be born after the Tiananmen Square Protests and the second generation of Chinese people to grow up as only child. We are alleged to have a knack for information technology, capitalism and more of a sense of individuality compared to older generation. I have never experienced sexual assault myself, but I am very familiar with the feeling of being slut-shamed and sexually offended. I consider myself as a feminist in the sense that I believe all human are created equal and refuse any kind of oppression that compromise women's right

and well-being. But I don't consider myself a feminist activist. I see myself as a close audience of #MeTooinChina as I have constantly followed the movement but participated little until I decided to write this thesis in contribution to the movement.

This personal research account shows that there is some extent of closeness between me and most of the interviewees, for example nationality, language, I am a woman and a feminist myself. This closeness created natural trust as a base of doing interview. For example, some of the interviewees, especially victims of sexual assault may feel that their experiences and feelings can only be understood by another woman or someone who has had the same kind of fears. However, I was also worried that our shared Chinese identity would create pressure for the interviewees to be fully open about their viewpoints of the negative consequences they experienced caused by the government. To avoid this situation, I decided to be as open as I could myself first and share my own thoughts and feelings on the topic which I was interviewing them about. By writing this thesis I am in this struggle with them, not only here as a master student getting her degree. This kind of alignment of experiences between interviewer and interviewee has been seen as crucial for understanding the research subjects in feminist research (Reinharz 1992).

My positions of being an outsider of the movement and a social science student who were studying overseas while #MeTooinChina was prevailing in China, created some "distance" to the research. While witnessing how this international movement found its way to China where social movements of any kinds seem impossible – led to a strong desire in me to further explore this as a case. This distance has kept me curious and passionate as an investigator holding an open attitude in embracing any possible findings.

The distance also manifests in the presumption that I hold for the interview as a student in the West, such as the assumption that the interviewees have heard about #MeToo in the world before #MeTooinChna. As many interviewees detailed in the interviews: They had never heard of #MeToo in the world before #MeTooinChina because Chinese media normally don't report this kind of Western social movements and Chinese people have a vastly different social media ecosystem to that in which #MeToo in the world took place. This kind of bias is inescapable due to my social position as someone studying in the West. Acknowledging this distance and the influence it may have is a way here to try to be transparent.

As the interviewer in this study, I was fully aware that the power balance is inevitably in favour of me in terms of who controls the direction of the interview, the results and ultimately who benefits (Seidman, 2006, p.99) As an attempt to negotiate this hierarchies and shifting power to the interviewees, I have treated myself as 'subject' in research as well as placed my own experiences within the social context. This extent of self-disclosure and social positioning of myself, noted by Letherby (2013, p.9) is the antidote of feeling superior in research relationships and writings.

However, undertaking a research that is related to highly sensitive accounts in regard both to the personal experiences of the interviewees and the political attitude toward the movement they participated in, I have given more consideration of moral and ethical issues concerning power in all stages of the research and writing process. As Letherby (2003, p.110) notes, issues regarding emotional involvement, management and work, are one aspect of feminist research ethics. Being the first time that I have taken on such a big research by myself, I have felt rather vulnerable and sensitive myself in relation to the research process and the topic. Letherby (2003, p.11) describes how one common emotion among interview researchers is that of distress by the experience of the interviewees. In one interview with a male participant of #MeTooinChina, I asked him how he became a feminist. His answer was out of expectation when he told me he has a congenital disorder called *kallmann syndrome*, and because of it he had been forced and sexually humiliated by many guys. which made him feel for all women who experienced sexual assault. It was a really personal and emotionally upsetting story to hear for an instance. I was shocked and had a total blank moment of thinking how I should act and continue the conversation without both of us feeling distracted and stressed.

Drawing on the work of Kleinman and Copp (1993, p.33), one suggested way of dealing with discomforting emotion in the research process is to ignore or 'repress it'. I gave an objective response which repressed my feelings by saying "I understand, all oppressions in patriarchy society are similar no matter to which group." This part of conversation didn't really influence the ongoing of the interview, but after the interview I had an even stronger emotional reaction in worrying that I didn't do good enough in that situation and wondering if this interview caused him any uncomfortable or not.

There was also one interviewee who were too nervous to talk about her engagement in the beginning of the interview. Considering that #MeTooinChina is quite political sensitive in China, she felt unsafe to talk about it. Therefore, I stopped the interview for a while, had a friend talk with her until she felt safe to talk to me. The interview lasted for 2 hours in the end and we became friends afterwards. This correspond to what sociologist Oakley (1981, p.28) has identified as a contradiction between "scientific" interviewing requiring objectivity, feminist research requiring openness, engagement, and the development of a potential long-lasting relationship.

I was sincerely happy to see that some of my interviewees posted their experiences of the interview on their social media accounts, saying that they felt being understood and what they have done was valued. For me, it was a token of feminist ethics that my interviewees felt being listened, respected and understood as individuals rather than data providers nor scientific samples. In-Depth interviews of the kind that are used in this thesis are often seen as a collaborative process of knowledge creation that requires a unique relationship between the researcher and interviewee based on mutual interest, respect, and compassion. Hesse-Biber (2016, p.331) sees it as a process than when most effective "is rewarding for both the researcher and researched, and both widen their perspective through the experience."

Method practices: piloting, sampling, and the interview process

The pilot interview was conducted on 2 March with a male website builder of MeTooChina*Me. The interview was done via Skype, as an alternative to face-to-face interview due to geographical restriction that the interviewee was currently living in America. The interview quickly identified problems of my earlier research design and contributed to finalizing my interview guide.

Initially, I designed two separate interview guides (See Appendix I) for victims and activists considering that they are the two kinds of participants of #MeTooinChina I mainly wanted to recruit, and they need to be approached in different ways due to their distinct engagement. However, after the pilot interview I realised thatiIt was unrealistic to presuppose that there is a clear division of interviewees' identities as victims or activists - interviewees who are victims can also be activists who participated in organizing offline activities, building online campaigns. After I realised that the identities of interviewees are multiple and fluid, I gave

up the plan of using two separate interview guides and only developed one (See Appendix II) that can apply to all the interviewees as participants of #MeTooinChina.

Furthermore, piloting has helped me to finalise my interview guide by revising questions that wouldn't work and covering themes that are central to the study. I added a theme "Disengagement with #MeTooinChina" into the interview guide as a result of realizing that it is also important to see what hinder their continuous engagement and what limit the developing of this movement.

While simultaneously conceptualising the theoretical framework in accordance to the finalised interview guide, the recruitment began. Within the research's time constraints, the study has recruited a number of 14 participants of #MeTooinChina as interviewees. The recruitment started from me contacting 38 people whom I have observed as actively engaging with #MeTooinChina through personal messaging them on social media platforms, such as Weibo and Douban. The message contains a fully explanation of the research aims as well as interest in confidentiality and anonymity. Only 5 people replied me and 3 of them became interviewees in the study. I was a bit disappointed in the beginning but not surprised about the result, taking into account that they are people first, people who may have had difficulties and distressing experiences.

The employ of snowball sampling technique that initial contact with one participant generates further contacts (Jensen 2012, p.239) has opened up situation for me. My first interviewee who is a feminist blogger has recommended me to more participants of #MeTooinChina, and many of my interviewees has recommended me to someone they know who has also participated in #MeTooinChina. Apart from that, I have posted the detail information of my recruitment on content-generated blockchain website using the hashtag of #MeTooinChina attempting to recruit more participants volunteer to be part of the study. In the end, 13 interviews have done between 13ᵗʰ March and 8ᵗʰ April. Including the pilot interview, 14 interviewees locating in mainland China, Hongkong, Thailand, Finland and America, with the age ranging from 23 to 40 years old, have participated in this study. (See Appendix III)

Due to the geographical restrictions that my interviewees are locating in different parts of China and the world. All interviews have conducted in the form of online video chatting, via Skype, Facetime, WeChat, depending on the preference of interviewees. As interviewee-

guided interviews, which means focusing less on getting one's questions answered and more on understanding the interviewees (O'Keeffe, S. 2016). One result is often that there is a quite large variation in the duration of interviews within a project (Reinharz 1992:25). The duration of each interview was estimated to be maximum 1 hour, however there are some cases that the interviews are over 1 hour, lasting 1. 5 hours or even 2 hours.

Prior to conducting the interviews, research ethics promising the interviewees' confidentiality and anonymity have been stressed. Every interviewee was made sure to receive an electronic copy of the consent form (See Appendix IV), addressing one's right to withdraw his or her own responses at any point during or after the interview; guaranteeing the respondent's confidentiality, as well as asking for one's approval to have the interviews recorded before the interview. All interviewees were informed of the exact terms verbally and agreed to the conditions of their participation in the beginning of the interviews. I also acknowledge my moral responsibility to protect respondents from potential harm (Brennen, 2013). As a result, each respondent in this study received a pseudonym.

Treating the data

Following the data collection process, all 14 interviews were fully transcribed and analysed through interpretative text analysis and thematic open coding.

When I finished the transcription and began to analyse the data on 16th of April, I was overwhelmed by the time pressure and 94 pages of interview transcripts (See Appendix VI, for example transcript) which were considered as complex and substantial text for me. As I started to read through the raw text and carried out the steps of open coding, memo writing was associated to keep tracking of my thoughts and ideas for organizing the data analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003, p. 46) around my research concerns and theoretical framework in the most relevant way (Bazeley 2013; Auerbach & Silverstein 2003). Writing memos down took some extra time but it "contributed significantly to the eventual writing up of the project" (Bazeley 2013, p. 131) in the sense that it gave a lead on how the open codes were conceptually generated into different categories in the next step.

After the first phrase of coding, 480 open codes were extracted from the 14 transcripts (See Appendix V). These codes were interpreted on basis of the main concepts of the theoretical

framework and grouped into different sub/categories by repeating patterns that respectively emerged. Ultimately, 7 categories were formed corresponding to the overarching theme: (dis)engagement. The categories include practice, motivation, trust, identity, space, challenges and changes. This step builds a bridge between the researchers' concerns and the participants' subjective experience by which a theoretical narrative was created to retelling the participants' personal stories in terms of coherent theoretical constructs (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003).

Understanding digital feminist engagement in #MeTooinChina

In this chapter, the empirical material from the interviews with participants in #MeTooinChina is analysed. The first part takes a look at the motivations and practices of their engagement, in particularly highlighting how their reasons to engage are driven by strong emotions and affects. The second part of the chapter turns to analyse the challenges of different kinds that participants in #MeTooinChina are faced with as well as how they respond to these challenges. Lastly, the interviewees' self-reflection on their engagement in #MeTooinChina is discussed

The motivations and practices of #MeTooinChina

Digital media spread stories about who we are and about the world we live in. As Papacharissi (2015, p.32) notes, when these stories connect people in ways that make them feel like their views matter, an affective investment develop with the potential to drive social movements forward. In this first part of the analysis, the decisions for the interviewees to engage in #MeTooinChina are analysed and how their engagement is manifested in real life practices.

An affective engagement

Several authors have stressed the complexity of confronting issues involved in sexual harassment, many of which can be related to feelings of shame, for having put up with it, or even for having been targeted in the first place (Keller, Mendes and Ringrose 2016; Jackson, 2018). The very real fear of not being believed is another one that many women reporting on sexual abuse have had to endure (Monroe 2019, p. 134). The interviewees describe how there are strong forces holding them back from engaging. Tracy engaged in #MeTooinChina by helping making updates to the #MeTooinChina initiated website and organizing chat groups for victims, also, as a victim of sexual assault herself, she speaks of how she found it hard to engage:

> I tried to tell my stories, but it was really difficult. I am doubting about myself,
> denying myself all the time. I have a degree in gender studies and I have been
> engaging with feminist activism, but when things happened to me, I still feel
> powerless. I still don't understand why it influenced me so much, I don't know

where I can go for help. Living in a society like this, I feel uncertain and unsafe all the time. (Tracy)

Tracy details how she at first refrained from sharing her story of sexual assault, she felt powerless, uncertain and unsafe. But Tracy's choice to actually engage also shows how emotions and affect provides opportunities for voice that networked platforms invite (Couldry, 2010). When the interviewees were asked why they chose to engage in #MeToo and what made them want to engage, many mentioned that it was deep felt emotions and feelings that drove them to engage. Blair talks about how she felt connected with other victims' stories and that the emotional connection created a "desire" for her to say me too. She describes it as an "impulsive decision":

At the beginning I didn't have so many considerations, it was quite an impulsive decision. After reading other girls' experiences on Weibo, I totally broke down, I cried the whole night, because their stories sound so similar to mine. I felt like what happened 10 years ago all came back to me. I had this strong desire to tell my experiences, to say me too. (Blair)

The "strong desire" that Blair describes shows how affect provides the intensity with which emotions like breaking down and crying are experienced. More importantly, it also shows how the intensity that affect provides feeds an urgency to act upon those feelings. (Papacharassi 2015, p.22). In a movement like #MeTooinChina which founded on the sharing of emotional stories and experiences, these personal and affective expressions function as a way of discursively calling into being further publics of support (Papacharassi 2015, p. 6). One example of this can be seen in Robin's decision to engage in #MeToo by helping his friend file an accusation against an organization leader who had raped her. In Robins case, the emotional reaction he felt was connected to his personal experiences of not fitting norms of masculinity and being sexually humiliated because of it:

I am very empathetic to her story. I have been growing up bullied by other guys because of my *Kallmann Syndrome*. One time 10 guys came into my room trying to take off my pants and see how I am different from them. Recalling that moment, I know that must be how she felt as well. Rape culture is not only

oppressing women, but also anyone who's different from the masculine way of being. (Robin)

As Dahlgren argues (2009, p.75), we need to understand participation through the reflections on lived personal occurrences and circumstances. Robin's explanation of how he relates to the feelings of the victim also shows how digital networked movements like #MeTooinChina can affect people to take actions based on the emotional reactions created through unveiling personal experiences that connects to one's own personal experience.

The me too moment: From private to political

As described in the previous section, the recollection of one's own experiences of sexual assault is a strong motivating factor to engage in #MeTooinChina, but for those who are without relatable experiences, their engagement is also motivated by affect. Affect here link little with personal experiences but more with personal beliefs of democratic values. As Hall (2005, p. 215-216) notes, in order to become politically involved, people must care about an issue, and this care is a crucial motivating factor for people's commitment to take action. In particular it seems that hearing other people's stories about how society has ignored them and/or acted in what is perceived as an unjust and intolerant manner when they have shared their experiences creates anger and a will to do something. Sylvia explains:

> I was so angry about how these women were slut-shamed afterwards and how the government silent them. It made me doubt the system. The anger has led me to engage by sending letters to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference to request the establishing of nationwide anti-sexual harassment mechanism and doing my academic research on this. (Sylvia)

The anger that Sylvia felt has led her to quickly act upon on relevant practices with moral consideration and care for others and a pursuit for a more democratic and fair society (Dahlgren 2009, p.75). As Dahlgren notes, the emotional and private engagement should not be seen as something that necessarily stand in opposition to more rational political engagement, but rather to be seen as performing citizenship resonates emotionality and affect (Dahlgren 2009, p. 64). The way that Sylvia sees herself as participant and find her engagement meaningful is the waking of her civic agency, in which she experienced her

motivation of engaging with #MeTooinChina via interplay of reasons and passion (ibid, p.102).

Tracy's description of how she and the other participants in #MeTooinChina is using their "scars and tears to question the system", shows how affective intensity and affective investment on parts of the participants is crucial for understanding political movements in the digital age (Papacharissi 2015; Dahlgren 2009, p. 83):

> We are using our scars and tears to question the system, why there are so many girls getting hurt in this way, why women are being oppressed, why you didn't protect us, why you didn't support us when we need you. You always tell us to be obedient, but why you never tell perpetrator not to harm others. There are many things that we are questioning here are political. (Tracy)

What Tracy's story also reveal is how "public displays of affect" (Papacharissi 2015, p.7) can be understood as political statements and how the boundaries of private and public is collapsing in digital media. At the heart of many digital communication technologies lies the feature that they give people a platform and a communicative space where they can express their personal views and ideas, the act of making a private though public bears the potential of a political act (Dahlgren 2009; Papacharissi 2014). This confirmed by the interviewees describing their motivations to engage not only as motivated by personal emotions and affect, but also as a desire to engage in politics. Blair express how her engagement in #MeTooinChina is an engagement based in her personal experiences, emotions and affects, that subsequently creates political engagement, illustrating what Papacharissi writes about affective statements in digital media being a mix of fact with opinion, and with emotion, in a manner that simulates the way that we politically react in our everyday lives (2015, p.27).

> As a woman and a feminist, my personal experiences, personal statements, and my engagement is my response to a social structure in which women are systematically dominated, exploited, and oppressed. And I do have a political appealing. (Blair)

As Blair says her personal experiences and engagement have a political appealing, and her example again shows the connections between one's own experiences and political

participation (Dahlgren 2013, p.52). When the interviewees are sharing their stories what they seem to be experiencing is what Jackson (2018, p.12-13) calls a "me too moment", allowing them to discover that their suffering is not a "personal problem," but is instead a result of a larger system of oppression. In this way, saying "me too" launches the realization that the personal is political (Jackson 2018, p.12-13). For women as a marginalized group, affective statements are part of performing identities that otherwise risk becoming further repressed (Papacharissi 2015, p.119).

The practices of #MeTooinChina

The sharing of affects, emotions and experiences that takes place as people are engaging in #MeTooinChina forms the foundation for larger civic identities which built on knowledge and values, reinforced by trust, and embodied in particular spaces via practices - pursuing issues by the use of civic skills - than in turn serve to reinforce identities (Dahlgren 2009, p. 86, 119). Audrey talks about how her engagement in #MeTooinChina is built on connecting to strangers in loose networks of shared values like the ones Dahlgren (2009, p.116) sees as important for civic cultures.

> I have been participating in women's rights activities for a few years, so I have many contacts in this regard. I posted that I am a participant of #MeTooinChina and I can help victims with legal support and psychological assistance if they need it. My friends helped me to circulate my post and many victims have contacted me to get consultation before they posted their stories online, including the litigant of the ZhuJun case. (Audrey)

What Audrey describes can be seen as practices build on the "thin" trust in which people interact with others that they don't know personally (Dahlgren 2009, p.112-113). This thin trust linking people together in networks of shared interests and values, which provided possibilities for collective actions and developing a sense of "we-ness" around specific issues (Dahlgren 2009, p.114). Kat, who is a feminist blogger, gives an example of this when speaking about how she is helping others to speak out and go public with their experiences:

> Ever since July, I have been continuously posting and exposing cases of sexual assault on my Weibo account. When I became a little bit more famous, some

victims started message me, hoping that I can speak for them. So basically, my daily job is to post, repost, trying to let more people to be heard. (Kat)

The networked practice of Kat reveals that, in digital media spaces, one's voice and engagement can have ever-ending influence and reaching greater audience in distance. In a media landscape like the Chinese, where mass media is controlled by governments and media corporations, social media, digital social networks and the communicative autonomous spaces that can be created here offers possibilities to reach geographically dispersed audiences with posts and images that would previously have been impossible and address issues that are not represented adequately in mainstream political institutions (Couldry 2010; Dahlgren 2013; Castells 2015, p.9). Tammy who volunteered in building an online website of #MeTooinChina also speaks about the collaborative and internationally networked nature of their engagement, as well as how her practices are built on civic knowledge and skills:

There were a group of people who were following and contributing the building of the website. Volunteers who locate outside the great firewall helped to collect and updated the information and articles, a bunch of IT people made them into an encrypted data package and upload it to the Google drive, and there are also volunteers who donate money to the website. (Tammy)

Another example of how the participation in #MeTooinChina is built on specific knowledges that the participants have is interviewee Steven who is an IT professional using his skills to build an online archive of #MeTooinChina:

Many people have made voices in #MeTooinChina, but their posts were deleted or forgotten through the time, then no one knows or cares about the movement anymore. Therefore, I build this website to leave an online chronicle of #MeTooinChina. Because the website is built through overseas server, so I don't need to worry too much about being censored. (Steven)

The practices shown above were performed by various social actors, including feminist activist, feminist blogger, International volunteers, IT people. Therefore, the practices of engaging in #MeTooinChina can be understood as a collective action, a web of collaboration that bridged through thin trust, through storytelling, sharing, and solidarity across many

different social actors that eventually results in practices of engagement of different kinds (Castells 2015).

Dancing with shackles on

To take part in #MeTooinChina means confronting censorship and repression. In this subsection, the challenges encountered by the participants of #MeTooinChina are put under scrutiny and their struggle to surpass censorship is further analysed. The challenges that the participants are faced with are of different kinds from societal resistance to digital repression and require different responses on their part. Finally, in this section, the risk of censorship and repressions leading to disengagement among participants is discussed.

An unsupportive environment for feminist engagement

The challenges that Chinese women face are in many ways similar to those described by Hasanuma and Shin (2019, p.99) in their discussion about why the Japanese #MeToo movement was much more constrained than the South-Korean equivalent. In the Chinese social and cultural environment, it is not easy for woman to speak against their perpetrators since having been sexually abused is a strong stigma in Chinese society, as Audrey explains:

> Sex is dirty. Being sexually assault is dirtier. You are ruined with sexual assault.
> This kind of thoughts are mental violence which exercise second injure to victims.
> (Audrey)

Slut-shaming to victims is a common response similarly to what (Hasunuma and Shin 2019, p. 106-107) describe about how "group harmony creates powerful cultural and social pressures for sexual assault to remain a private matter." there are social pressures of different kind in China but like in Japan, they make it hard for women to go public and sexual harassment is still considered as private matter. If a woman chooses to speak out about her experiences to the public, then she is highly likely to be judged by people for her sexual behavior, a common reaction in a patriarchal society:

> There are many people who think that a good girl will not encounter such a thing.
> They expect a perfect victim, have you done A? Have you done B? Oh no, well,

the you deserve it. This way of thinking is very unfriendly to victims, both male and female. (Tammy)

Old patriarchal structures that keeps victims of sexual assault silent have not changed much in contemporary Chinese society. Strong gender norms and the patriarchal culture make women internalize sexual harassment the vulnerability of women in lower and more precarious positions of employment makes it hard for victims to speak out. The unsupportive environment also affects those coming out as a feminist who stands up for other women:

My parents don't support me engaging with #MeToo, actually they don't want me to participate in politics at all. They prohibit me from publicizing that I am a feminist, saying that it will become a stain on my resume. They think being a feminist will stand in the way for my future promotion. (Tracy)

Here Tracy talks about a circumstance in Chinese society that is different from Japan or South-Korea as described by Hasunuma & Shin (2019). In China, being feminist is connected with the concepts of revolution, anti-national and a subverting foreign influence, which as Madison describes makes it "very difficult to have a conversation":

The pushback of the movement is built in an ideological conflict. If you go look it up, feminism, environmentalism and left wings, these words are linked with the tendency that they are going to subvert China. If you believe in any of these things, then the society wouldn't welcome you. I think that in this environment, it is very difficult to have a conversation. (Madison)

The black box of censorship

Digital media in China provide new opportunities for civic engagement but with pervasive surveillance. Since the introduction of digital communication technologies, Chinese government officials have closely monitored how these technologies are used to build networked social movements, in particular bottom-up ones reaffirming what Dahlgren (2013, p.56) writes about how "Perhaps never before has the distinction between empowerment and vulnerability, between recognition and control, been thinner."

In the Chinese context, a networked social movement like #MeToo, first and foremost face massive challenges in the form of internet censorship and the monitoring of oppositional voices. Having their posts deleted is the most common experience of censorship among the interviewees. Since the first occurrence of #MeToo in China, the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission has listed feminism and anti-sexual harassment as sensitive words, that if they are found in a post, almost certainly it will be deleted, in particular if the poster has some level of social influence and readership in social media. Collective actions and statements are often "shattered" while they are only "in infancy":

> Here one post got deleted within one hour, there some accounts were erased because they reposted the post. In this way, many collective actions, collective statements were shattered while they were in infancy. So, when I was observing the incidents and cases of #MeTooinChina, I felt that the information I got was very fragmented. Many cases we lost track of the cause and effect, because they were suddenly disappeared. (Sylvia)

Molly, a feminist activist, describes how being deleted is normalized in their daily engagement, and how as a participant of #MeTooinChina, always need to find new ways in order to keep the communicative spaces open and keep messages spreading and reaching more people.

> I got used to it. We often count how many hours our articles will be deleted after we post. It maybe takes a few days for us to write and pondering the wording to write an article, but the article usually takes less than 24 hours to be deleted. So, we have to keep copying it and changing different platforms to post. (Molly)

The conditions for messages shared on social media platforms to mobilize people for a cause like #MeToo are vastly different in China compared to Western liberal democracies. For political engagement to be successful in creating possibilities and spaces for change, first of all citizens must be able to encounter and talk to each other. They need access to each other to develop collective political efforts, and contexts and spaces in which they can act together. This is what Dahlgren (2009, p.115) defines as "communicative spaces" in which "experiential proximity to citizens" is considered particularly important. For a thriving civic culture, citizens need to feel that these spaces are available for them to use to communicate

(Dahlgren 2009, p.115). In China however, this is hindered by the lack of safe and free communicative space as a result of the sophisticated system of censorship monitoring and controlling online speech and activities.

The censorship on Internet in China also manifest in more hidden ways than the blocking and deletion of posts. For example, one way of the government censors to control the spread ability of digital media activism, is to forcibly set their accounts settings to private, so as to make it impossible for a larger audience to read it. Blair details how this happened to her after she posted her story about sexual assault:

> After I posted my open letter on Weibo, censors change the setting of my post into private, so no one can see it except me. It became invisible to the public. I also tried to post images and screenshots, but even so I was unable to successfully send it. (Blair)

Feminist blogger Kat who has also experienced this kind of censorship, inhibiting her posts of reaching a larger audience in a more hidden form of censorship, resembling what Chen and Reese (2015, p.4) talks about as "The iron hand of the state has become increasingly covered in a velvet glove as it develops more sophisticated tactics to take advantage of digital media technologies." where censors prefer misdirection over blocking, trying to make users perceive outright censorship as network error.

> Instead of deleting every single post of mine, they "flow limit" me. Normally, the amount of reading for one post of mine is between 30,000 to 50,000. If the post is forwarded more than 100 times, then the reading amount should be more than 100,000. However, the censors can "flow limit" me, so my posts will only have one-twentieth or even one-hundredth percent of reading, maybe only three hundred people can see my post. (Kat)

On the other end of the spectrum of censorship is the full erasure of social media accounts that are spreading posts on sensitive topics. This is referred to as being "bombed" by the interviewees. Tracy explains:

I have experienced twice that my Weibo account being bombed. The first time was after the International Women's Day in 2018, I re-posted something supporting women's rights, then when I tried to log in to my account it says the account doesn't exist anymore. My new account is bombed again a few days ago in March. (Tracy)

Censorship in China covers all platforms in mainland China, and uses different methods, both automatic and human censors to delete and limit the spread of what is considered sensitive information. It varies in time, and during certain times can be particularly harsh, for example the International women's day. It also varies according to how influential the poster is and considered to be. For the participants in #MeTooinChina, all of this together creates a situation of unpredictability when it comes to how the censorship works, an unpredictability that makes political engagement like #MeToo particularly delicate. Tammy explains:

"Not only #MeToo and feminist activism considered sensitive, so many things are considered sensitive in China. You never know where the red line is, what you do will touch it. the logic of government is like a black box, even if we tried to avoid the censorship, but no one knows how the rules have been written." (Tammy)

As Tammy phrase it, censorship in China is like a black box, something they lack insight into. The participants don't know which words and themes are monitored and how the rules for this monitoring are written. They are living in the dark about their online engagement and it's virtually impossible to know when and how censorship will affect them, making censorship particularly hard to anticipate and avoid.

Twelve who is a victim but also a former media practitioner describes in a similar way of living "under the shade of censorship", showing how the combined workings of the censorship system on a very fundamental level limits the collective networked social movements like #MeTooinChina:

I was a media practitioner for a long time. My entire career was under the shade of censorship. To be honest, there is not much room of freedom of speech for us. If people can't engage in public discussion, then their thinkings lose discursive

power, which kills the possibilities of the developing of #MeTooinChina. (Twelve)

In the case of #MeTooinChina, access to spaces of free speech and networking are severely limited by censoring technologies. Internet censorship is clipping the social ties of collective engagement when people tries to spontaneous unite around a call to action like that of #MeToo. While digital engagement is often described as decentralized (Chen and Reese 2015, p.40) in China, decentralized engagement and fragmented voices is an inevitable result of surviving under censorship in China:

> After they closed down the most influential feminist social media accounts. For example, the Voice of Feminist, the biggest feminist online platform which has the most followers. The Chinese feminist movement can be said to be in a state of decentralization, that is, there is no central voice speaks out and lead others what to do. Everyone has to act alone now, deciding by themselves what to do or not, which decentralized our engagement. (Audrey)

In situations where the elites in power are hostile to the engagement in a social movement, and where the lack of spaces for creating civic cultures are evident, resignation and disengagement among participants may follow (Dahlgren 2009, p.82). The next section will specifically address how disengagement can follow from strict censorship, and particularly how the state sanctioned censoring of posts and social media accounts might lead to an even deeper level of censorship, self-censoring.

Disengagement and self-censorship in #MeTooinChina

For engagement to become embodied in participation and thereby give rise to civic agency there must be some connection to practical, do-able activities, where citizens can feel empowered (Dahlgren 2009, p.80-81). However, when participants feel powerless, not do-able, they might choose to disengage, as Tracy describes:

> The first time my account was erased I was extremely angry, I have been having my account for nine years since middle school, they took away my memories and my social identities. The second time when they erased my account, I felt more

powerless. When I applied for a new account, they blocked me, I can't comment on others. They muted me, even if I have a mouth but I felt like I am disabled who can't speak. After that, I stopped posting. (Tracy)

Discussing disengagement in social movements, Dahlgren (2009, p.82) makes an important point: lack of engagement may not just be the manifestation of an absence of something but can also be interpreted as a political act. One may well have actively, as a political step, chosen to disengage. The choice of disengagement here stemming from an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness. Like Dahlgren puts it (2009, p.82) "Resignation deflects engagement in circumstances where power elites seem unresponsive and one's sense of powerless is overwhelming". As disclosed by Tracy when talking about what she had to pay for posting about #MeToo, and how the consequences in the end made her to stop posting, the choose to disengage can also come from a feeling that "the effort required for engagement is simply too great". (ibid., p.82). Tracy is not a single case here, the threat of permanent or temporary shutdown has encouraged widespread self-censorship among the interviewees:

It's terrible. It's too easy to kill someone in this kind of network environment. It's too easy to completely erase a person and his speech online. I don't know how much I can make a voice on the Internet in the future while keeping my account safe. The mental panic it caused me led me to step up my own self-censorship. (Tammy)

The disengagement described by Tammy here can be understood as an expression of distrust, which signals a critical distancing based a negative evaluation of the political system (Dahlgren 2009, p.82). It shows how disengagement is an active choice with an affective drive based in panic, fear, and powerless. Adding up together, it leads to self-censorship of the participants of #MeTooinChina. Self-censorship comes out many times as the only alternative in a situation where no spaces can be trusted, where the risk of being surveilled is ever present. Molly uses a metaphor, a snake on the roof, to describe how she feels when she has to adjust her speech and behaviours under the pressure of being surveilled:

The censorship system in China is like a snake lurking on the ceiling, it does not necessarily make a sound nor exert its power, but knowing that there is a snake

above you watching you move, you will automatically adjust your behaviors to
not irritate the snake. (Molly)

Molly further disclose how self-censorship manifest in practices. It is as powerful as the resistance comes from outside world, it consumes more energy and emotions of activists:

> We have to consider carefully about every step in our actions, can we take the risk
> of exposing it online, how open the open letter should be wouldn't irritate our
> school, what words we chose to use wouldn't cause our letter to be deleted so
> quick, etc. We clearly know that it limits our actions, but we don't really have a
> choice, we can only keep trying to find the balance between being censored and
> self-censor in the process. (Molly)

While the picture painted here might seem like a dark one, and not very promising for the proliferation of social networked movements in China, it is important to also note that while many of the interviewees tell about how they have stopped engaging openly online out of fear of repression, it doesn't mean that they cease to be critically engaged in questions such as women's rights, neither that their disengagement is a total one. As Dahlgren (2009, p.83) reminds, despite the difficult situations in which people might find themselves, this shouldn't be understood as if they are abandoning the values and motivations that lie behind their choice to engage in the first place. Becoming a critical citizen that are questioning a political system that fails to protect women is a path that the interviewees, despite the government's efforts to suppress and silence them are not diverging from. When some spaces are closed or considered unsafe to use to speak out about sexual harassment, other ways are tried out, and new ways of engaging safely are created. It is to these practices that the next part of this chapter turns.

Contesting efforts against censorship

Digital spaces have expanded the possibilities and meant a renewal of social movements all across the world (Castells 2015). However, as shown in previous sections, in China, digital spaces are under tight control. Regardless of these restrictions the engagement of participants in #MetooinChina also shows that creativity and the affordances of digital media still can provide the means for creating bottom up engagement that can outwit the power of the world's

most sophisticated system of internet control. While state censors and algorithms are responsible for the mass deleting and blocking of content, a series of activist strategies are also employed by the #MeTooinChina participants to avoid censorship. Sylvia talks about how #MeTooinChina evolved in relation to the censorship techniques where images and emojis are used to convey political messages since they are harder to be censored:

> At the beginning the hashtag came as #MeToo in English, but the hashtag was taken down around 15 days, so we began to transform the hashtag into other words to continue the movement. For example, #I will be your voice; #woyeshi, which means me too in Chinese, the most famous one is #RiceBunny, it is a homophone to me too in Chinese. Then we started using the emoji with a cute bunny and a bowl of rice, it later became the symbol of the movement. (Sylvia)

Sylvia's story shows how activists, by adopting more concealed and euphemistic methods are trying to keep digital spaces for engagement open and safe for victims to speak out. While censoring algorithms can be avoided to some extent, as shown in the example above, human censors are not so easily circumvented by the use of homophones or posting of images upside down. However, the human censoring of sensitive posting has one disadvantage to that of the automatic censoring algorithms, they are not instantaneous and even though human censors often identify and delete posts within hours, this still leaves enough time for people to read and re-post the postings that they know will be deleted. Molly explains this with her experiences:

> In July, a reporter wrote an article "She thought she could escape the professor's hand" about our case. This article was deleted in less than a day, but then so everyone forwarded it in different ways. And in the process of non-stop posting and reposting, the information is still spread out. (Molly)

The number of users of communication platforms such as Weibo and WeChat and their mother companies Sina and Tencent has grown at a pace that have made it hard for the state to keep censorship working in the same way. The power of digital networked movements, where the infrastructure for dissemination information means that a message is not disseminated one to one, but one to thousands in seconds. The speed with which the voices of women sharing their stories of sexual harassment are being disseminated, outpace the

working of the thousands of censors and algorithms trying to delete it (Chen and Reese 2015, p.5)

What is more, when one route to communication is closed, other alternatives can be tried out. Molly talks about this:

> The main platforms we use are still WeChat and Weibo, usually it will be sent to the WeChat public account at the beginning. If the article is deleted there, we replace with some webpages, the webpage may not be able to read soon. Then we use Zine, SimpleBook, these less popular online document platform. If they were deleted it later, then we use content-generated blockchain based platform Matters, but domestic readers need to use VPN to access Matters, so there could be some difficulties for them to read. (Molly)

Authors like Neumayer (2013) and Bennett and Segerberg (2012) demonstrate how different platforms offer divergent affordances, and how this may shape the patterns of use and if they are used for discussing ideas and debating, developing collective identities, mobilising members or striving to reach out to new members. Moreover, the various platforms can be and are used in convergent ways, with relays, feeds, and sharing across the platforms. The participants of #MeTooinChina avoid state censorship with the application of various of information and communication technologies, such as blockchain technology which Steven talks about:

> I didn't use blockchain technology to build my website because I am using overseas server. But I know many online interventions of #MeTooinChina is built on blockchain technology to avoid censorship, which is a cryptology resist to any modification the original data, so once it has been written into the Internet, it will never ever be able to be deleted. (Steven)

What Steven tells about underscores how the participants of #MeTooinChina adapt, reinvent, reorganize, or build media technologies as needed to suit their various purposes or interests. As they innovate, users combine new and old techniques, or adapt combinations of familiar technologies in new ways that can become established as resources that future participation can draw upon (Dahlgren 2013, p. 39).

The #MeTooinChina campaign can be described as a game of patience and endurance, a game where a move from the participants is followed by a countermove on part of the activists which is then followed by a countermove from the system. To control decentralized networks of digital information exchange, censorship needs to be decentralized itself, and reliant on human censoring activities, and these kinds of system will always have cracks.

Here to be heard

In this the final part of the analysis, the discussion is turned to look at how the interviewees themselves reflect on their engagement in #MeTooinChina. In particular, this part is focused on the empowerment that #MeTooinChina has created regardless of the Chinese censoring systems best efforts to suppress it. #MeTooinChina has created a climate where women feel that they can speak out, but also shifting their perspective on the situation of women at large in Chinese society.

Walking together in the dark

When victims of sexual harassment and assault disclose their experiences, some are believed, but many are not. To be met with confirmation and having their experiences recognized and trusted is what matters the most for victims to speak out in this kind of online call-out culture (Keller at el. 2018). In this regard, seeing others speak out about their experiences is equally important for victims to self-recognize their experiences. Cora tells about the first time she encountered #MeToo and the importance of knowing that she was not the only one experiencing sexual assault:

> For me, it happened two years ago. I was angry, sad, scared and of course I have thought about speaking it out. But I haven't graduated yet, I was worried that school wouldn't acknowledge my experience because it was hard to find evidence and I may not be able to graduate because of this. But in #MeTooinChina, I saw so many girls in campus have spoken up about their experiences and it is a huge encouragement for me to tell my stories. (Cora)

Cora's story confirms how the power of #MeToo lies in overcoming the injustices suffered by victims of sexual assualt through a process of mutual recognition and experiences in solidarity

with others who are similarly situated (Jackson 2018, p. 2). The connection and sense of "we"-ness that springs from reading the stories of other women and imagining what they must have gone through forms the foundation for both an individual and a collective healing that Blair tells about:

> I never thought this kind of movement like #MeToo could happen in China, where women can publicly share their experiences of being sexual assaulted on their own initiatives. For me, speaking it out under the trending hashtag is like a self-healing and a collective healing. (Blair)

As Castells (2015, p. 247) notes, through connecting and sharing emotions, affects and experiences, individuals participating in social movement networks are helped overcoming negative feelings of powerlessness and fear, and can even engage in a "collective healing". The interviewees describe how they are being empowered by the collectives formed around the #MeTooinChina movement. They describe how their identities evolve through the experiences of mutual support and others reaffirming their experiences of sexual assault which is also making their efforts meaningful as a contribution in a political struggle. While engagement ultimately resides in the individual, the stories shared by the interviewees and the digital communities of sharing highlights what Dahlgren (2009, p.81) claims; that "the political realm requires collectivities; the engagement and participation of the citizen are predicted on him/her being connected to others, by civic bonds".

From victim to revenger: Breaking the silence

An important aspect of what the engagement in #MeTooinChina has meant for the participants in terms of empowerment is how they feel that it makes their identities shift, for example from that of a passive bystander witnessing the discrimination and abuse of women on all levels in Chinese society to that of someone actually doing efforts to contest the situation. Twelve describes how her identity evolve from audience to participant of #MeTooinChina, and how that made her feel:

> I was very excited watching the development of the incidents as a bystander at the beginning. When the movement escalated into media industry, my ex-colleagues were exposed as sexual perpetrators and their reactions like slut shaming the

victims was very disgusting. It was a shocking moment for me to start reflecting

on how common sexual harassment is in our society and how rape culture protects

the interest of men instead of women. Not long later, I decided to join the

movement by voicing out my own stories. (Twelve)

Similarly, Blair describes how through her engagement in #MeTooinChina her identity has evolved from being a victim to becoming a full-time feminist blogger, speaking up and taking action for others:

After I joined #MeTooinChina last summer, I started to learn about feminism

through reading books, Weibo discussion. Gradually I became a feminist myself. I

know there are lots of misunderstanding about feminism in China, I was loath to

admit it in the beginning, but now I want to be an open feminist, there's nothing to

be ashamed. (Blair)

Blair's identities shifting from victim to feminist was developed and evolved through experiences, and experiences is emotionally based (Dahlgren 2009, p.119). When Blair reveals the power of #MeToo, her feelings of being relieved and comforted can be seen as an empowerment for her to letting the past go. She also felt a desire to revenge her perpetrator: evolving her identity from victims to revenger:

what comforts me is speaking this out is a big relief for myself. I feel so relieved

now. Maybe it didn't cause more broad attention, but at least everyone in my

university, his family, his friends, everyone knows what kind of a person he really

is, his reputation is destroyed. At least what I reveal took off his disguise. In this

level, I felt like I revenged him. (Blair)

As can be seen in Blairs response, the evolving identity from victim to revenger is an empowering thing as is the very feeling of speaking out publicly about experiences which have been buried inside and shamed about. For every victim who has the same desire to speak out, #MeToo created wind for them, a wind that amplifies their voices:

MeToo is an encouragement for girls. One butterfly fly, ten thousand butterflies resonate with her. They created wind in this process, in this wind, their voice is heard. (Kat)

What #MeToo has done in terms of empowerment, according to Joy, is to raise awareness about sexual harassment in society and afford visibility to voices frequently marginalized by the societal mainstream platforms (Spigel at el. 2010):

#MeToo created an atmosphere for the whole society to give attention to sexual harassment. This atmosphere gave social actors like school and company a certain pressure to take things seriously. If there is no such a big atmosphere, maybe we have done a hundred percent of the effort, the effect is zero. But under the pressure of this great atmosphere, the effect can be changed from zero to ten or even twenty. (Joy)

To be able to give an account of oneself and of the circumstances in which one acts and to have others reaffirm that account is crucial for the development of political engagement and agency (Dahlgren 2013, p. 54). Not only for victims of sexual assault, their engagement is reaffirmed by others in #MeTooinChina, feminist activists as participants of #MeTooinChina have also felt empowered in their engagement:

I have been participating feminism activism for years, working against sexual assault has always been one emphasis of my work, but it has been hard to get attention. When #metoo came in like a forest fire, I knew that there was finally an opportunity to break the silence and push the discussion outside of feminist circle." (Audrey)

Thus, one of the main aspects of the empowerment of #MeToo is it exposes the problem of sexual harassment as one manifestation of the socially endorsed rape culture by constructing, relating, acknowledging and sharing personal stories in the public sphere. Joy's self-reflection of their engagement in #MeTooinChina is the contribution to "expose the problem":

The most important success of #MeTooChina is to expose sexual-harassment as a hidden social issue. #MeToo broke the silence, the ugly realities can't hold back

anymore. More people have realized that we don't have enough discussion about power relations in gender, we have no relevant sex education, and no related mechanisms to prevent sexual assault. (Joy)

Leading the way for others

The interviewees' stories reflect the collective nature of #MeToo and how networks of support are formed around sharing of emotions, affects and experiences. One important aspect of how this plays out in the Chinese context is that some of the interviewees view themselves as taking a "democratic responsibility" (Dahlgren 2009, p.81) in their engagement, not only following in the path of others and sharing their stories, but in leading the way for others who are struggling for help, opening windows of possibilities for others, for those who these possibilities might not be so easy to understand. As Kat explains it, speaking for others is speaking for oneself:

> speaking for others is speaking for myself, I wanted to change the law, the judicial system in China is protecting man, not women. (Kat)

The idea that it falls on them to not only engage in #MeToo by sharing their own stories, but also in speaking out for others, and helping them speak out in different ways, is something other interviewees also put forward. Taking the initiative and action to speak for others is a manifestation of democratic responsibility that they have as citizens, to become engaged and to participate (Dahlgren 2009, p.81). For Fabio, this responsibility follows from the privileges that he enjoys as compared to many women in Chinese society:

> I often think I should engage more, firstly I am from a freer place since I'm studying abroad. If I say something online, the worst could happen is they delete my posts, no one will come to me to "have a talk with me". But for anyone living in the system of China, they have boss, families, companies, schools fettering their engagement; Also, I have some followers on my Weibo account, I could use my influence to amplify their voices. (Fabio)

Molly similarly stresses the importance that a pioneer group, which she refers to as belonging to an "elite group" pushing the discussions raised by #MeToo into the forefront:

People in China who have the access to the concept of sexual harassment is a quite elite group. When it happens in factories and rural parts, people feel uncomfortable about it, but there is no words nor concepts for them to describe and express it. This movement name the concept of sexual harassment and bring it to public discussion. In fact, activists are very aware of these restrictions, but this is a very long process, and this process needs the elite group to push forward first. (Molly)

What Molly claims is that without these forerunners taking responsibility and helping others to become engaged, the very definition of "sexual harassment" as a societal problem, risks getting lost. What revealed in her claim shows that the differences between the western #MeToo and Chinese #MeToo also lies in the audience group and the engaging group of the movement in China restricted in a certain group who has the economic and educational resources to follow and contribute the women's rights movement. Fabio identifies educational level as an important factor in creating opportunities for engaging against sexual harassment in Chinese society, seeing it as an obvious responsibility for those who have the access to the educational resources that others don't:

There must be a group of people to start this movement, in #MeTooinChina, the first involvement groups are university students, public intellectuals. It is true that people with higher education levels are more easily involved. There is often a process for the popularization of consciousness, and It is normal for this kind of awareness to be popularized from the elite group and the high-education group. (Fabio)

Joy, a university student who wrote an open letter to her home university requesting to establish anti-sexual harassment mechanism, explains taking the responsibility to not only speaking for oneself but also for the larger vulnerable group is a natural thing for her to do:

In China, many victims have restrictions to speak out. For example, factory women workers, if they stand out then they may lose their jobs. We can't expect them to speak up first. If I stand in a position where I have the ability and the social resources to speak out, of course I should do it first. Even if there is only a

small portion of population to promote the movement, that is what you need to do,
because you have a louder voice. (Joy)

In Joy's story, the idea that a group of achieved citizens needs to lead the way for others is
framed as a practice crucial to the success of a movement like #MeTooinChina.
An idea that is also supported by (Hasunuma and Shin 2019, p. 98) stressing how the
engagement of high-profile women in high profile positions was important for the bigger
impact it had in South-Korea. The interviewees here resemble what Dahlgren (2013, p. 103)
calls web intellectuals "people with developed political identities, and with diverse origins."
The roles that they assume parallel those of traditional public intellectuals: they can act as
opinion leaders, and do this via journalism, debate, cultural production, and political activism.
They become particularly visible during protest activities and are able to combine their
political engagement with communicative skills and creativity (Dahlgren 2013, p.103). In
Dahlgren's view, these web intellectuals signal the continued importance of intellectual
activity for democracy in regard to opinion formation. It is for these "pioneer" groups taking
the risks and responsibilities of building a civil society, the voices appeared in
#MeTooinChina resisted to be silent and eventually being heard regardless of the many
obstacles in the way.

Conclusion

In this final chapter, the aim and research questions of the study will be addressed again, and the main findings in the analysis of the empirical material are presented. Following this, some concluding reflections on the future of #MetooInChina are presented and discussed.

Why and how do people engage with #MeTooinChina?

The interviewees offer a range of motivations as to why they engaged, from affective impulses to discontent with the system. Their motivations are not only varied but can also seem paradoxical. They are built on affect and strong emotions of empathy and sympathy with victims, inspiring spontaneous actions, but they are also the result of cognitive held beliefs, resulting in rational and planned actions. Their motivations can be based in personal experiences of sexual assault, but also arise out of hearing about injustices suffered by others and in those without any personal experiences of sexual assault. Thus, the motivations are both based in emotional and rational processes, but what stands out is the importance of affect and emotions for examining how digital media is used for political engagement also noted by authors as Papacharissi (2015).

The interviewees' stories about how they came to engage with #MeTooinChina also shows how digital networked spaces for political protest means a blurring of the boundaries between private and public, as what was previously personal problems and issues with digital communication technologies are turned into political issues for a larger community with far-reaching and long-lasting effects.

New media technologies have promoted new modes of engagement, allowing people to build solidarity through the collaboration between different social actors, such as victims, feminist activists and bloggers, journalists, people in academia and even reaching out to broader audience in society. The various practices they perform are built on their previous skills and communicative competence like law, IT, sex education, and journalism. Subsequently their engagement also generates and disseminate "information" that can be translated into civic knowledge. Their shared values on issues such as women's rights, intolerance to social injustice, empathy to vulnerable groups, creates a thin trust bonding participant together and can further lead to the development of a sense of "we-ness" in their engagement.

The digital repression of #MeTooinChina

While the Chinese MeToo movement shows the power of networks and networked social movements in turning the personal and private into political and public, the interviewees stories also expose the overwhelming pressure of the world's most sophisticated system for censoring of the media.

The Chinese participants in #MeToo, unlike in the West, are fighting two struggles, one against the patriarchal norms of millennia old traditions of men being entitled to women's bodies, but also against being silenced by the state. The crackdown on #MeTooinChina and feminist engagement is of different kinds and different levels. It is done by both keywords blocking through algorithm and manual efforts by human censors. It can be extreme and harsh as in the permanent shut-down and thorough erasure of social accounts, but it can also be hidden and delicate like secretly change setting into private and restrict the reading. The black-box logic and unpredictability nature of the censorship creates mental pressure for the participants of #MeTooinChina which results in internalized censoring among the interviewees. This self-censoring can be understood as a choice to disengage when trust to power representatives and safe communicative spaces are lacking in authoritarian regime. The Chinese states censoring and suppression of networked social movements such as #MeTooinChina also shows the fragilities of grassroot engagement and bottom up mobilisation and how it can be readily exploited by the holders of communication power.

Another aspect influencing the engagement in #MeTooinChina is that unlike in most countries in the rest of the world, including neighbouring countries like South-Korea (Hasunuma & Shin 2019), the digital networked movement that is #MeTooinChina cannot transcend the digital space into the physical space through various forms of collective action. One of the strengths of the #MeToo movement lies in its blend of grassroots organizing to interrupt sexual assault and digital community building to connect survivors to resources. However, this kind of offering community organizing resources is blocked in the Chinese context.

Everything has a crack, that's how the light comes in

By targeting social media use and spaces through censorship, the state tries to crush the movement by cutting their connectivity and making them into fragmented pieces, disassociated and out of network with others. This means that the participants of #MeTooinChina has to be resilient to continue their engagement.

As a resistance to the harsh censorship, the participants of #MeTooinChina have adapted and reinvented media technologies to prevent their voice and engagement from being erased from Internet. For example, voluntary activists have adopted blockchain technology to build online archives of #MeTooinChina, so that the incidents and articles that emerged in the movement can kept being updated and saved forever online.

The movement demonstrates the endurance of citizen power through social media story-sharing, anti-censorship strategies, and collaboration between victims, media, lawyers and civil society. Reflecting on their own engagement, the interviewees give clues to what they see as important for their engagement. One is the notion of responsibility that falls on them as privileged middle class and educated, a democratic responsibility not unlike that of the web public intellectuals with developed political identities that Dahlgren (2013, p. 103) describe and that can act as opinion leaders in social justice issues.

The empowerment that the interviews report on are of different kinds. They are empowered in sharing stories, creating solidarity and having their own and other's experiences recognized. Many of the interviewees tell of the paralyzing emotions of having to come to terms with their own personal trauma and speak about it, but also how empowering it is to have spaces to speak out and get support. Despite the dangers the interviewees self-evaluation of what their engagement means to them shows that #MeToo has great promise as a political movement that offers the opportunity for victims' testimonies to be heard by empathetic listeners.

#MeToo in the West and in China

One of the main empirical contributions of this thesis is to show through situated and detailed accounts by feminist activists in China how the much-celebrated digital feminist networked movements in hashtags and other digital spaces fare in non-western and non-democratic contexts. It shows how digital freedoms can turn into digital oppression and how engagement can shift to disengagement and how the promises of #MeToo are no universal claims, but contingent on social, cultural and political context.

In both academia and the media, #MeToo is often presented as a white, western and celebrity initiative (Jackson 2018, p. 16). This thesis has aimed to complement to that picture by pointing to the special situation for digital feminist engagement in China and for Chinese women and feminists, who have often been marginalized in the international feminist and gender studies community. The situation for Chinese women is also something that deserves far more academic attention, for example by looking into the inequalities among Chinese women in relation to their engagement in #MeTooinChina in terms of education, rural-urban areas, socio-economic status etc. For example it is known from previous research that in authoritarian countries where Internet access is limited and where usually only around 2–3% of Internet users utilize tools to get around restrictions (Shen and Zhang 2018, p.109) As Tan (2017, p. 182) points out, the unequal access to media, influenced by class and geographical differences could easily undermine the impact of media-based activism in China.

These empirical findings further feeds into the conceptual contribution on the conditions for civic agency and engagement in non-democratic countries to happen, therefore, to expand the understanding of civic engagement in different contexts and contributed a part on developing civic cultures as analytical framework.

That MeToo has - at least temporarily - changed the discussions around sexual assault is clear. In China, for example a new legislation listed sexual harassment into a justice cause to file a civil lawsuit was introduced on the January 2019. This can also be seen in other countries such as South-Korea where protests brought about changes and by the end of 2018 seven new laws on sexual violence had been passed (Hasunuma and Shin 2019, p. 101). At the same time, the intensity of the #MeToo debate has to some extent waned, both in the West and in China which raises questions about how to ensure that a movement like

#MeTooinChina can become more permanent and how the progresses that have been made can be protected in the future? One example of how the progress of #MeToo is protected is how around the world today digital archives are created of the women's witnesses and stories. One example is https://metoomvmt.org/ that provides a space for different kinds of resources for survivors of sexual violence. Another example is the Columbia University Asian Studies institute, to which this research project has also contributed with material. These digital archives can help transform information on sexual violence into knowledge that can be shared with and inspire others to take action themselves.

One of the big questions regarding the future of #MeTooinChina is whether the ban on collective offline organising in China will mean for the movements further success and spread. It is reasonable to believe that the ability to spread into other physical spaces is an important one for a movement that tries to become more permanent and long lasting and promoting further change on concrete issues. In Sweden, The US and many other countries, also in Asia such as India and South-Korea the initial #MeToo uprisings was followed by collective street protests to end sexual discrimination and sexual violence. As Hasunuma & Shin (2019) shows, the main difference between the outcomes in South Korea and Japan of #MeToo is founded in broader political movements of a kind that is not possible in China where collective organizing is limited.

The #MeToo movement has done a great service in opening up an area too long taboo in China. The seeds of activism planted in the pre-Xi era continue to grow even though they are often obstructed by the state censorship. It could be said that #MeToo in China happens at a really good time, that it is meant to happen at this time. The encouragement of the global #MeToo happens in a domestic context with a new generation of Chinese women that are growing up to become independent adult. These young women belong to a digital generation with different understandings of concepts such as civil rights and women' right compared to previous generations. And compared to previous generations of Chinese women, the new generation of feminists in China have the opportunity of using digital media technologies to engage for women.

In an interview posted to YouTube a couple of months before her suicide, Lin Yihan, the Taiwanese writer who detailed her personal experiences of sexual assault in her novel. She says:

The perpetrator can speak elegantly.

The victim is only written in humiliation.

For Yihan and all the other victims of sexual assault, in China and worldwide, #MeToo offers a promise to reverse this, to let the victims speak elegantly.

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Appendix I: Interview guide before pilot interview

For activists:

1. Engagement with #MeTooinChina

   - Can you recall the first time that you actually engaged with #MeTooinChina? (Did u follow the case? Did you use the #? Post or repost? More?)
   - In what ways have you engaged with #MeTooinChina?
   - What are your motivations of engaging #MeTooinChina?

2. Challenges and Difficulties

   - Have you encountered any difficulties in your engagement?
     (if so, what happened? how do you feel about it? What have you done to fix it? if not, are there any reasons?)

3. Digital spaces of #MeTooinChina

   - What specific platforms do you use to engage with #MeTooinChina?
   - What are your aims in building your website/platform?
   - What kind of technology do you use to build the online platform relating to #MeTooinChina? (E.g. technology to protect user privacy/data security)
     (How and why did you start use it? Why do you think it is important to use it? Tell me more about the interplanetary file system/blockchain technology…)

4. Interaction & Connection

   - How do people get in touch with you? Can you describe a typical case when you start interacting with someone?
   - Do you have any connections with other #MeToo related communicative initiatives? (Internationally or domestically? Do you get or give any support?)
   - Based on your experiences, what are the potential advantages of using the online digital spaces to connect and interact with more participants engaging in #MeTooinChina? What are the limitations?

5. #MeTooinChina and potential social change

- What are the impacts (if any) of #MeTooinChina in your opinion? Can you give some examples that you have witnessed?

- In what ways do you think #MeTooinChina is successful or not?

6. Personal reflection

- What are your reflections on #MeTooinChina?

- What do you think are the differences between #MeTooinChina and #MeToo movement in the world (if there is any)?

- Do you consider yourself as a feminist? Why or why not?

- Do you consider your engagement politically active? Why or why not?

For Victims:

1. Engagement with #MeTooinChina

- Can you talk a bit about yourself?

- Do you remember the first time you heard about #MeTooinChina? Can you describe the situation? How did you feel about it?

- In what ways have you engaged with #MeTooinChina (online/offline, your personal experiences)?

- What are your personal motivations of engaging #MeTooinChina?

2. Challenges and Difficulties:

- Have you encountered any difficulties or challenges when engaging with #MeTooinChina? If so, what happened? Can you talk about it?

- Have you experienced censorship? How do you feel about that (being censored and the general censorship in China)?

- Have you ever been afraid? If yes, what happened? If no, why not?

- How's the reactions of your families and friends about your engagement in #MeTooinChina? Do you talk about it openly?

3. Digital Space of #MeTooinChina

- What platforms have you used to engage with #MeTooinChina? What's your personal experiences of using these online spaces to engage with #MeTooinChina?
- Based on your experiences, what are the advantages and limitations of using these digital spaces to connect and interact with more participants of #MeTooinChina?

4. #MeTooinChina and potential social change
- What are the impacts (if any) of #MeTooinChina in the Chinese society in your opinion? Can you give some examples that you have witnessed?
- In what ways do you think #MeTooinChina is successful or not?

5. Personal reflection
- Have your engagement created any changes for you? (if so, can you talk about it?)
- Do you consider yourself as feminist? Why or why not?
- Do you consider your engagement politically active? Why or why not?
- What are your reflections on #MeTooinChina?
- What do you think are the differences between #MeTooinChina and #MeToo movement in the world (if you think there is any)?

Appendix II: Interview guide

6. Engagement with #MeTooinChina

   - Can you talk a bit about yourself?

   - Do you remember the first time you heard about #MeTooinChina? Can you describe the situation? How did you feel about it?

   - In what ways have you engaged with #MeTooinChina (your personal experiences)?

   - What are your personal motivations of engaging #MeTooinChina?

7. Challenges and Difficulties:

   - Have you encountered any difficulties or challenges when engaging with #MeTooinChina? If so, what happened? Can you talk about it?

   - Have you experienced censorship? How do you feel about that (being censored and the general censorship in China)?

   - Have you ever been afraid? If yes, what happened? If no, why not?

8. Digital Space of #MeTooinChina

   - What platforms have you used to engage with #MeTooinChina? What's your personal experiences of using these online spaces to engage with #MeTooinChina?

   - Based on your experiences, what are the advantages and limitations of using these digital spaces to connect and interact with more participants of #MeTooinChina?

   - Based on your perception, what are the roles of these online platforms in your engagement of #MeTooinChina?

   - What are your aims of building your website? (for interviewee who participated in building #MeToo related online platforms)

9. Disengagement with #MeTooinChina

   - After your initial engagement, in what ways have you kept engaging in #MeTooinChina? (if yes, what have you done? If not, what are the reasons?)

   - There must be a huge number of Chinese women who had similar experiences but haven't spoken out yet, what do you think are the reasons keeping them from engaging in #MeTooinChina?

- Do you see any changes of the attention given to #MeTooinChina compare now with last year? Why do you think is that?

10. #MeTooinChina and potential social change

- What are the impacts (if any) of #MeTooinChina movement in the Chinese society in your opinion? Can you give some examples that you have witnessed?
- In what ways do you think #MeTooinChina is successful or not?
 (Do you see a connection between the recent announcement about zero-tolerance of sexual-harassment in campus with #MeTooinChina? What do u think it says the success or non-success of #MeTooinChina?)

11. Personal reflections

- What are your reflections on #MeTooinChina?
- What do you think are the differences between #MeTooinChina and #MeToo movement in the world (if you think there is any)?
- Do you consider yourself as feminist? Why or why not?
- Do you consider your engagement politically active? Why or why not?
- What do you think about the future of this kind of digital feminist activism in China? What do you think about the future for Chinese women of living in a more gender-equality society?

Appendix III: Gallery of Interviewees

Below is the list of interviews which collected for the empirical data of the research and the interviewees who were interviewed for this study. Note that their names have been changed in commitment to anonymity.

"Steven", male 30, Chinese. The website builder of MeTooChina*Me; PhD student in America. Interviewed with Lu Zheng. 2nd of March 2019 via Skype.

"Blair", female 27, Chinese. Victim who made voice in #MeTooinChina; Feminist blogger. Interviewed with Lu Zheng. 13th of March 2019 via Facetime.

"Twelve", female 40, Chinese. Victim who made voice in #MeTooinChina; Former media practitioner. Interviewed with Lu Zheng. 14th of March 2019 via WeChat.

"Madison", female 36, Chinese. Helped to circulating the posts of victim in #MeTooinChina; Environmental activist in International Greenpeace NGO. Interviewed with Lu Zheng. 14th of March 2019 via WeChat.

"Kat", female, 26, Chinese. Feminist blogger who helped to expose stories of victims and provided legal support for victims in #MeTooinChina. Master Student in Law. Interviewed with Lu Zheng. 16th of March 2019 via WeChat.

"Cora", female, 23, Chinese. Victim who made voice in #MeTooinChina; Medical student. Interviewed with Lu Zheng. 17th of March 2019 via WeChat.

"Tracy", female, 24, Chinese, Victim who made voice in #MeTooinChina and volunteers of building NGOMiTu website; Master student in Hongkong. Interviewed with Lu Zheng. 21st of March 2019 via Facetime.

"Joy", female, 26, Chinese. Sending Open Letter to Home University to request establishing anti-sexual harassment mechanism in response to #MeTooinChina; Sex educator and master student in England. Interviewed with Lu Zheng. 23rd of March 2019 via WeChat.

"Sylvia", female, 24, Chinese. Researcher who did research on #MeTooinChina. PhD student in England. Interviewed with Lu Zheng. 26th of March 2019 via WeChat.

"Robin", male, 30, Chinese. Helped victim to make a voice in #MeTooinChina. Works in charity organization. Interviewed with Lu Zheng. 27th of March 2019 via WeChat.

"Tammy", female, 24, Chinese. Donator of #MeTooinChina related online communicative interventions. Master Student in Finland. Interviewed with Lu Zheng. 28th of March 2019 via Messenger.

"Audrey", female, 24, Chinese. Feminist activist who provided legal supports for victims in #MeTooinChina. Freelancer. Interviewed with Lu Zheng 5th April 2019 via WeChat.

"Molly", female, 24, Chinese. Feminist activist who helped victims to make a voice. Master Student in HongKong. Interviewed with Lu Zheng 7th April 2019 via Facetime.

"Fabio", male, 32, Chinese. Journalist who wrote articles in support of #MeTooinChina. Journalist, writer, PhD student in America. Interviewed with Lu Zheng 8th April 2019, face to face.

Appendix IV: Consent form

Informed Consent Form
Lund University
Project Title: Here to be Heard – Civic Engagement with Digital Feminist Activism in *#MeTooinChina*
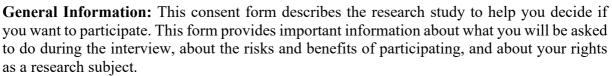**Investigator/Researcher:**

- Lu Zheng
  Master Thesis Student, Department of Communication and Media
  Ällingavägen 11 A 1112
  227 34 Lund, Sweden
  E-Mail: Luciezheng1209@gmail.com
  Phone: +46 790211294

General Information: This consent form describes the research study to help you decide if you want to participate. This form provides important information about what you will be asked to do during the interview, about the risks and benefits of participating, and about your rights as a research subject.

1. What is the Purpose of the Study? This present study seeks to unveil the (dis)engagement that Chinese people have performed in #MeTooinChina to voice against sexual assault as a patriarchal norm in Chinese society. Through qualitative feminist in-depth interviews with participants of #MeTooinChina, the study attends to gain access of their experiences in (dis)engaging with #MeTooinChina and explore their engagement in a full scope from their experiences, including the motivations and the modes of their engagement, the challenges the have met in their engagement, as well as their perception and reflection on their engagement.

2. Request for Participation: You have been asked to participate in this study due to your experience of engaging in #MeTooinChina.

3. How many people will participate? Approximately 12 to 15 people will take part in this study.

4. How long will it take to participate in this study? If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last for a maximum of 1 hour.

5. What will happen during this study? During this research study, the principal investigator will conduct a semi-structured feminist in-depth interview. Interview questions are related to your personal experiences of engaging with #MeTooinChina; your personal reflection of engaging with #MeTooinChina, the digital space of #MeTooinChina and the possibilities that #MeTooinChina provided for the potential social change for Chinese women. The principal investigators have a set of questions designed to help you relate your perspectives; However, over the course of the interview, additional clarifying questions may be asked.
During this study:

    5.1. You will be asked to sign this Informed Consent Document for Research Participation.

    5.2. You will be offered a copy of this document for your records.

    5.3. The principal investigator will conduct an audio-record the interview. See the next section for information about the storing of audio recordings.

5.4. You are free to skip any questions that you would prefer not to answer, and you may end your participation at any time.

6. Audio Recording: One aspect of this study involves making audio recordings of your participation. The audio recording will be used to transcribe the semi-structured interview. Recordings will be made on a digital voice recorder and stored in a locked location until transcription, after which they will be destroyed. No identifying information will be transcribed. Complete transcriptions will be stored on a password-protected computer.

I give you permission to make audio recordings of me during this study:
[   ] Yes [   ] No

7. What are the Risks of this Study? Due to the confidentiality measures in place, there are no foreseeable physical, legal, financial, or psychological risks to participating in this study. However, during the interview you may be asked to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable or self-conscious. You are free to skip any question that you would prefer not to answer, and you may end your participation at any time.

8. What are the Benefits of this Study? While #MeToo and similar hashtags have been studied extensively from Western perspectives, there are little academic studies targeting #MeToo and digital feminist activism in Asia and China in particular, despite China is having the worlds' biggest number of Internet users. This thesis contributes partly to fill that knowledge gap, acknowledging that it is necessary to examine how online protests against misogyny and sexual harassment manifests and operates differently in different cultural and social contexts.

9. Will it cost me anything to be in this study? You will not incur any costs for participating in this research study.

10. Will I be compensated for participating? You will not be paid or compensated in any way for participating in this research study.

11. Do the researchers have personal financial interest in this study? The principal investigators have no financial interest in this study.

13. Further Questions? We encourage you to ask questions. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact the principal investigator Lu Zheng.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research subject or about research-related injury, or to speak to someone other than the research staff, please contact Lund University at the Department of Communication and Media.

This Informed Consent Form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate.

You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this Informed Consent Document. Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

_____   _____
Principal Investigator   Date

Appendix V: Data and Coding

The following illustrates a sample of the coding process, note that the open codes generated from the 14 interviews are originally 480 codes, below are just selected examples. Each color represents the interview to which the open codes correspond to.

Theme	category	subcategory	Open codes
Engagement & Disengagement	Practices	acting/performing	Storytelling to share self-experiences, victims openly accusing sexual perpetrators, keep reposting in support of victims, organizing online WeChat groups for victims, collecting and updating articles and news regarding #MeTooinChina and save them on online platforms, taking anti-sexual harassment billboards to take photos in different cities, attending #MeTooinChina workshops offline, sending petitions of establishing anti-sexual harassment mechanism to the top 500 companies in China, writing open letters to suggest home university to establish anti-sexual harassment mechanism, using overseas servers to build online archive of #MeTooinChina,
		agency	I feel like it is my responsibility to speak out and protect other girls, If no one else has written the petition to my university then I will do it, I showed my attitude and I want to do something for real more than showing attitude, I had some fans on social media so I think I should speak, because I have a louder voice, if I want anything to change I would fight for it myself, I think should engage more because I'm in a more free place, my ability is limited but I will do whatever I can do, people who has access to knowledge and resources should take the responsibility of leading other people. I posted saying I can offer resources to victims if they need legal or mental consultation.

Engagement & Disengagement	Trust	networking	I called some people whom I think will signed the letters; my friends who also concerned about the case contacted me; Some people send emails, some big Weibo accounts shared my website on Weibo, so we get in touch through Weibo; my friends helped me spreading the post and there are 3 victims contacted me later; some victims found me through my Weibo account because they hope I can be their voices; I were added into the anti-sexual harassment group by some feminists I know; we established an anti-sexual harassment network in Beijing for people who want to do something;
		"we"-ness	Even if we don't know each other but we support each other; Many people sending me emails to encourage me, and advertising for my website, so I know I'm not alone in this; I don't only speak for myself, I speak for others as well, because I think we are the same, it could be me too; It is a collective action, not only individual victims, but the whole group which holds the same values, including men, women, social elites and grassroots; Through sharing their personal stories, people connected together, for me it is like collective healing; There were a group of people who followed #MeToo were building the platform; I met many people who hold the same values and we became friends;
	Identities	Global citizens	I am using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media through VPN; I have always been following the international news; I have many friends whom I talk to are living abroad; I am PhD in UK; the hashtag borrowed the global structure and I were encourage by the international #MeToo; most of the volunteers are locating abroad; I have been waiting for it to come to China since it first erupted in America;

Engagement & Disengagement	Identities	Citizens within the great firewall	Both of my parents are working in the government, I don't know if my engagement would influence my parents; I can't sign the letter because I haven't graduated yet; we don't have accesses of this kind western grassroot movement on news feed; I don't think many Chinese people knows #MeToo before #MeTooinChina; Police have found me and threatened me to delete my articles with my social credit and say it will influence me go abroad in the future; You can't fight the system while you are within the system, either you lose your degree, your job or they can take you away in jail without going to trial; I am so scared and worried something serious will happen;
		Heterogeneity	I am a feminist activist with a degree of gender studies, but I am also a powerless victim of sexual harassment; I was planning to get married when I decided to speak out but now I am a feminist blogger who against marriage; I were interested in feminist theories for many years, but it is in #MeToo I became an activist; After I joined #MeTooinChina, I learned about feminism through reading books, Weibo discussion, and now I am a feminist; I were loath to admit I'm a feminist in the beginning, but now I am an open feminist, there's nothing to be ashamed;
	Motivation	politics	we want to break the fantasies and expose the ugly facts; I want to participate in public affairs; The reason is the same with why I studied journalism – for a more justice society, for the have-nots to be heard; am trying to challenge the status quo and working for a more equal society for women, Fighting against censorship is fighting for the right of freedom of speech; I wanted to change the law, the law system in China is not for women; these official interventions made me doubt the system; sexual relations fundamentally is power relations, what we

Engage ment & Disenga gement	Motivation	affect	done is to challenge the deepest foundation of the power structure; my personal experiences, personal statement, and my engagement is my response to a social structure in which women are systematically dominated, exploited, and oppressed.
			I was upset for many days, I don't know how to process it, my feelings and my memory is haunting me; I wanted to tell my stories, but it was really difficult, I hesitated for a long time but I still don't know how to start; When I see similar cases happening but nothing we can do, I feel powerless; I am scared it will influence my graduation, it will expose my personal information; the anger made me wants to research into the phenomenon; I am sympathetic to their stories, it encourages many people including me; I was so touched by it, because her story sounds very similar with what happened to me 10 years ago; It was also shocking to hear, knowing that I am not the only one who experienced this; After reading other girls 'experiences, I totally broke down, I cried the whole night; speaking this out is a big relief for myself. I feel so relieved now.
	space	Interactive digital platforms	Weibo is like an open square, your voice can be ultimately big without censorship; WeChat made me feel more safe because only friends I know can see what I posted; Mainstream media has no space for this movement at all; Weibo is an active space for public discussion; our account was deleted, then we have to change other platforms, for example Matters (block-chain based website); Because of quick censorship, It is hard to keep updating information on domestic platforms, so I built the website using overseas servers; it plays a really important role in disseminating information, even though there are many situations like delating or blocking content under different pressures; The biggest feminist social media account was erased at

			the international women's day in 2018; You have followers who agree with you on Weibo which provides a little piece of place for discussion;
Challenges		Digital oppression	My account was erased 2 times; I was banned for speech for 3 months; My open letter was censored within 72 hours; They blocked me, blocked all my contents and I can't comment on others; The hashtag of #MeTooinChina was blocked in about 10 days; I tried to post images and screen shots, but even so I was unable to successfully send it; Voices were censored when it spread into some level or created a certain social influence; It's like a black box, and you have no clue of how the rules been written and the logic of it; Traditional media blocked the movement; Censors change the setting of my post into private, so no one can see it except me. It became invisible to public;
		socio-cultural resistance	My family doesn't support me, my parents banned me openly saying I am feminist, saying it is a stain on my resume; There's no sex education in China regarding self-harassment, how to prevent it and how to cope it if it happens; School is extra sensitive to students movement; Public opinion is not friendly to victims; There's no afterwards support of legal, policy, etc; Women have been teaching to downplay the discomfort of subjectivity; It is considered as a stigma in our culture, sex is dirty, being raped is even more dirty; In my hometown, people are quite conservative, rumors gave me more pressure;
		Self-censor	I stopped posting personal opinion online anymore, too easy to be censored; When I am making a voice I am actually really scared; The mental pressure it gives me exacerbated my self-censorship; The biggest obstacle comes from myself, the fear of uncertainty and unsecure; You have to stay in the corner to be safe; I am panicked and worried, what if they put me in jail? You don't know where

			the line is, you don't know why and when, you just have to stay silent, don't say anything;
Changes		Breaking the silence	#MeTooinChina has generated discussion in society; #MeToo gave pressure to school to make them respond; #MeToo created social atmosphere for women to speak, speaking under the hashtag amplified our voice; Bringing the topic into the public sphere; #MeToo is a chance to break the silence, let public, people outside of feminist activist circle to concern sexual-harassment as a societal problem; People can read my story through their reposts in this way even if it can only exist a short time; It made sex, sex harassment, anti-sexual harassment more visible in societal discourses;
		Raising awareness	Many men reflecting their behaviors before, women realized there are something that they can say no to; It breed a group of generation with the awareness, I believe they will become the seeds of activists; Most people like me didn't realize the existing and severity of the issue before because people haven't publicly talked about it before; When many people, especially key opinion leaders and elites are discussing this, it is a process of public education, reflect on your own life and experiences, raising awareness in this regard; Empower many people with power consciousness, you can say no to something; A common sense of the boundaries of respecting other people's body; A reminder for school and work place, they need to pay attention and establish policies to prevent sexual-harassment;

Appendix VI: Transcript sample

13ᵗʰ March 2019
"Blair", female 27, Chinese. Victim who made voice in #MeTooinChina. Feminist blogger

Lu: Can you talk a bit about yourself?
B: I have been a freelancer for almost two years now, I'm a feminist blogger and I'm going to start my own business with feminism soon this year. I'm 27 years old.

Lu: Can you recall the first time that you heard about #MeTooinChina? What was the situation and how do you feel about it?
B: It was in July 2018, I was preparing my wedding. One day on July, I was on Weibo, I saw lots of my school mates were sharing a post, which is one of my juniors from university exposed her experience of sexual assaulted by a professor in our university. It was the first time I heard about #MeTooinChina. I was so touched by it, because her story sounds very similar with what happened to me 10 years ago. When I read it, I realized I have never forgot anything during the 10 years. It is also shocking to hear, knowing that I am not the only one who experienced this (sexual assault in school). #MeTooinChina made me realize that this subject (being sexually assaulted) is not a taboo anymore, I have never openly talked about it (experiences)with anyone else before, except my two most close friends. It has always been considered as a stigma for women in our culture and society. I never thought this kind of movement like #MeToo could happen in China, where women can publicly share their experiences of being sexual harassed and assaulted on their own initiatives. For me, speaking it out under the trending hashtag is like a self-healing and a collective healing.

Lu: In what ways did you engage with #MeTooinChina?
B: I am a 2012 graduate student from XX university, it happened when I was in school, 10 years ago. I was 18 at that time, I was too young to know what to do with what happened. I was scared by his power and I was also scared to call the police, so I didn't really do anything with it, except tried to process by myself. Until last summer, when #MeToo became popular in China, one of my juniors from my university exposed her story online which inspired me to speak out my experience. I registered a new account on Weibo to post my story and openly accuse the then vice principle of my university of sexual assaulting me 10 years ago.

Lu: What are your motivations of engaging in #MeTooinChina?
B: At the beginning I didn't have so many considerations, it was quite an impulsive decision. After reading other girls' experiences, I totally broke down. I cried the whole night, what happened 10 years ago all came back to me. I had this strong desire to tell my experiences, to say me too. I also think it's my responsibility to do so. On one side it is my responsibility to give myself an answer, to face the trauma inside me. On the other side I feel like it is my responsibility to protect other girls, I need to warn other girls who ever got a chance to be close with him by speaking out my experience. Another motivation for me to engage with #MeTooinChina was I were hoping my university can give me some responsible responses

with the attention and pressure given by the Internet and #MeTooinChina. In the case of my junior's accusation, my university made a quick statement that they promise to investigate her case and give her a fairness by dismiss this professor. I was encouraged by this statement, I thought if the attitude of school is good, then maybe I can get my fairness too. However, my school never made any responses to my case, and my friend in school told me that the school covered it up. Maybe because the one I exposed was the vice principle of the uni.

Lu: How do you feel about that (your accusation didn't get response from the university)?
B: Emmmm, I'm really disappointed, but it is how it is in China, hard to find fairness/justice when you are just an ordinary person. But what comforts me is speaking this out is a big relief for myself. I feel so relieved now. Maybe it didn't cause more broad attention, but at least everyone in my university, his family, his friends, everyone knows him know what kind of a person he really is, his reputation destroyed. At least what I reveal took off his disguise. In this level, I felt like I revenged him.

Lu: You said the first time you heard about #MeTooinChina is in July, but before that, have you ever heard about anything regarding #MeToo movements in the world?
B: Actually not. I have to use VPN to access news abroad which I don't usually do. and I don't think in China we have this kind of western social movement covered on media feed. It is after me using the hashtag of #MeTooinChina, I started to scroll everything online about #MeToo and gradually learn what is #MeToo in the world.

Lu: So, in your perception, do you think #MeTooinChina is a gradually formed movement or a movement swept over the country overnight like a forest fire?
B: From my personal perception, it is like a forest fire. Before July, I never heard about it, but in July, sexual harassment was the most popular topic. #RiceBunny; #MeTooinChina; #I will be your voice, etc. I started to follow #MeTooinChina. Later I knew there are cases of #MeToo emerging before, it's just the wave of #MeToo came so strong in July, which influence more people including me.

Lu: Have you encountered any challenges or difficulties in your engagement?
B: Yes, mainly from my parents. They really scared that this guy will revenge me. Also, they don't really understand internet or social media, these online platforms. They worried it could influence my life. Plus, in my hometown, people are quite conservative, rumors gave them huge pressure too.

Lu: Have you ever experienced censorship?
B: Yes. After I posted my open letter on Weibo, censors change the setting of my post into private, so no one can see it except me. It became invisible to public. I also tried to post images and screen shots, but even so I was unable to successfully send it. The good thing is all my friends, school mates, and other Weibo big account helped me to circulate my posts through images and screenshots. People can read my story through their reposts in this way even if it can only exist a short time.

Lu: How do you think it happened? how long after you posted?

B: The second I posted, it was automatically set into private, I had no idea how it works to be honest. Then I found the link of my post still works, so if people repost the link of my letter, they can still open it through the link. But the link soon became invalid too on the second day. So, my post only existed for one day.

Lu: How's your account now? are the posts available to read now?

B: No, all gone. The l account used to post my stories is already "bombed", which means the account was erased throughout. The account doesn't even exist anymore, of course everything in my account was gone.

Lu: How do you perceive the general censorship in China?

B: Very strict. I am a feminist blogger now, I post content about feminism every day, and I feel it every second. Basically, if you ever post anything considered sensitive in any level, it will be censored. The other cases of #MeTooinChina I followed and helped to circulated, most of them either being deleted, either the account has been erased like what happened to me. To conclude, really strict, they don't want us to speak, to make a voice. Not only on social media, traditional media as well. I was interviewed by two big magazines before because of my participation in #MeTooinChina, they are both big media outlets but none of them made through censorship and published the article in the end. If we are using Wechat to do the interview now, I may be too scared to talk about this. In one word: big brother is watching you.

Lu: When you as a victim tried to make a voice for your fairness, but you were forced to be silent in this way, how do you feel about it?

B: I feel so angry. Why they wouldn't let me speak for myself? I also feel reluctant and helpless. The big environment in China is like this, what can we do? Not only feminism is a sensitive topic, so many other things are considered sensitive. You never know what's the points that are being too sensitive, you never know what you say will be censored. Every day we live in a tight corner. In the feminist blogger circle, I only experienced one "bombed", some experienced 8 times, 13 times. It happens all the time. There are even more sensitive topics, if you engage in human rights or political topics, then things wouldn't be as easy as being "bombed" on social media.

Lu: Have you ever been afraid?

B: Yes. When I first posted it, I was scared of I might be sued in court. He's a high-profile figure with power, from both economically and social relations aspects, he is way more powerful than me. I didn't plan to tell my parents in the beginning, but a friend of mine reminded me that it may be better I tell them by myself, otherwise if they heard it through somewhere else, may give them a panic attack. After my parents know about it, my dad has to call me every day to make sure I'm safe. I am a feminist blogger now, when my account was "bombed" I was also scared. But I can't really sit there and doing nothing either, I still have to try my best to fight them.

Lu: What kinds of platforms do you use to engage with #MeTooinChina?

B: Mainly on Weibo. Except Weibo, other platforms are misogynist, not friendly with feminism. For example, on Zhihu, *clitoris* is a sensitive word which is blocked, they didn't block it for pornographic reason, because if you search penis then there are lots of findings will come out. Weibo in general is also misogynist, but on Weibo, at least you can have followers who agree with you, which provides a little piece of place for us to speak.

Lu: Based on your experiences, what are the advantages and limitations of using these digital spaces to connect and interact with more participants of #MeTooinChina?

B: Weibo is an open platform, it like an unlimited big square, when u stand there talking, everyone can see you and hear you, everyone can start a conversation and interact with you. Ideally, the reach of the information you disseminated can be unlimited. The limitation I think is censorship, being a Weibo feminist blogger myself, I experience everyday how easy to be censored on Weibo, "traffic restriction" is everywhere. When it happens, other people can't see what I post and people who follow me can be secretly unfollowed. The worst is being "boomed", no matter how many contents you have, how many followers you have added up, being boomed made it all disappeared. Back to zero. "This account doesn't exist anymore". Wechat compared to Weibo is a closed friends' circle, so it not as influencing as Weibo.

Lu: After your initial engagement, in what ways have you kept engaging in #MeTooinChina?

B: As a feminist blogger, keep following and reposting other victims' allegation don't need to mention anymore, I do it all the time. I also participated an offline activity that sending petitions of establishing anti-sexual harassment mechanism to the top 500 companies in China I helped as a volunteer to collect the address and information of these companies, and to spread the information.

Lu: Do you see any changes of the attention given to #MeTooinChina compare now with last year? Why do you think is that?

B: yeah, the popularity of #MeToo has been dropping since last summer. I think on the one hand it is because most of the cases were not handled properly, which made the crowd think that it is not an inefficient way to accusing sexual offenders. And it may cause you a law suit and slut shaming, so eventually there are not many people want to make a voice anymore. However, I don't think the popularity of digital feminism is dropping, gender equality and feminism is still hot topic in society now, they are discussed in public sphere, not only limited to feminist circle, but public.

Lu: There must be a huge number of Chinese women who had similar experiences but haven't spoken out yet, what do you think are the reasons keeping them from engaging in #MeTooinChina?

B: In china, the power mechanism in any institutions is unbelievable steady, which is the position and power of men is much higher than women. And it is so common that everyone already got used to it. If a woman tried to fight it, what she really fights is the whole system. Either you lose their job, either you lose your degree, most of the cases that speaking it out

has no actual benefits for women. Another reason I think is, the patriarchal view that women are inferior than men is much worse in the grassroot people, not in urban cities, not in universities, but in the rural parts and grassroot.The places where more fall behind, this situation is worse, women are considered as second-class citizens. But these groups somehow became left out audience of the movement.

Lu: What are the impacts (if any) of #MeTooinChina movement in the Chinese society in your opinion? Can you give some examples that you have witnessed?
B: I think the biggest impact is that #MeTooinChina arose social awareness to reflect on the rape culture in China. Women started to realize that being sexually harassed is not my fault, it is not a stigma for us. For the whole society, many people started to reflect on the phenomenon and discuss it. Speaking with my own examples that my former colleagues, classmates, friends who have no idea that I am a famous victim in #MeTooinChina, they were all following #MeTooinChina, and discussing the issues of sexual harassment.

Lu: In what ways do you think #MeTooinChina is successful or not?
B: I can't say if it's successful or not, what is successful? Achieving gender equality? But it's impossible. I can only say that at this stage, #MeTooinChina has some fruitful results and it's a meaningful movement.

Lu: can you see there is a connection between the recent policy of ? Do u think it says anything about the success or non-success of #MeToo?
B: Yes, I do see there is a connection. The establish of a policy must be comprehensive, but #MeToo definitely pushes forward the publish or at least have a positive influence in it. However, I doubt in what level can these policies be implemented. It has a positive impact in disseminating gender equality, but it lacks future legal support of the enforcement of the policy. In the justice system, legislation and law enforcement still has flaws and problems. We won a policy, which is good, but we also need a mechanism to make sure this policy can be implemented on place and actually works.

Lu: How do you reflect #MeTooinChina
B: it's a really good movement, it arouses individual consciousness and collective consciousness of women, and it correspond to the international #MeToo movement. In China, #MeToo is facing substantial problems in many aspects. The control over of free speech and public voices through censorship; deficiency of justice system and legal support; conservative cultural conceptions. However, we can't except any movement to be accomplished in a short time, we have to see it in a historical process. #MeTooinChina has some non-successes in this early stage, but it has also brought some subsequent impacts on the potential social change. The most important thing is #MeTooinChina has already opened up the discussion about anti-sexual harassment, I expect the snowballing of the movement, the next time and the time after next time.

Lu: When and how did u become a feminist?

B: Since last July, after I joined #MeTooinChina. I started to collect the information about #MeToo and I learned about feminism through reading books, weibo discussion. Gradually I became a feminist myself. I know there are lots of misunderstanding about feminism in China, I was loath to admit it in the beginning, but now I want to be an open feminist, there's nothing to be ashamed. I think women, we are born as feminists. As long as you also agree that women should live in a gender-equally society and you also want to fight for women's right, then you are a feminist.

Lu: Do you consider your engagement political active?
B: Yes. The personal is political. This is a famous rallying slogan in second wave feminism, and I agree with it. As a woman and a feminist, my personal experiences, personal statement, and my engagement is my response to a social structure in which women are systematically dominated, exploited, and oppressed. And I do have a political appealing. For the past half year, I integrated the resources I had as a feminist blogger and found a weibo group, called "sister editing", we create works related to feminism and gender issues content including comics, paintings, articles and we open for public contribution.

Lu: What do you think about the future of this kind of digital feminist activism in China?
B: I think the future is bright. One direct evident is that the number of followers of feminist bloggers is soaring. I registered my new account 4 months ago and I already had 7000 followers. As long as censorship can't silent all of our voices, we will always have our potential. But is there anything in this world can be totally silenced? Especially in the digital world, we have no entities, no organization, no leadership, every participants' engagement is unprompted, voluntary, spontaneous. If you need one word for it, we call it "de-centralized" communication and engagement. It is hard to censor or silent others. Even if one day, any kind of free speech is not allowed on these online platforms, but us, all these participants are everywhere, in China, in the world, they can censor us in any way they can, but we will always find another way.

Lu: What do you think about the future for Chinese women of living in a more gender-equality society?
B: Hard to say. We can only try our best, no matter how far it will go.