

# ***Analysis and Suggestions of the Current Development of Feminism on Weibo—Taking the Incident of Tang Shan as an Example***

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**Abstract.** During the past years, feminism has become more and more popular in China, with its development closely related to the prosperity of social media. Among all those platforms, Weibo served as the biggest contributor. For example, this June, the Incident of Tang Shan went viral on this platform and started a huge wave of feminist discussion on the Chinese Internet. However, few researches had been done related to feminism on Weibo or this incident. Thus, by analyzing and focusing on the case of Tang Shan, this paper attempts to showcase the current progress of feminism on Weibo and provide some suggestions for its further development. In addition, research methods used in this article are mainly literature search, content analysis and case analysis. As for conclusions, it can be observed that the overall development is pretty good. Suggestions are that official organizations should take the responsibility of leading, that the platform and media press should acknowledge that feminism is the general trend of the world, that more men should be encouraged to get involved, and that feminists should maintain rationality as well as teach themselves constantly about feminism.

**Keywords:** feminism, Weibo, the incident of Tang Shan

## **1. Introduction**

Feminism, “the idea that women and men should have equal legal and political rights, sexual autonomy, and self-determination (agency)[1]”, is now developing rapidly in China, especially on the Chinese social media. Weibo, as one of the largest social platforms in China, which some also call the “Chinese Twitter,” plays an important part in this progress.

Up to now, many researchers have focused on the general development of feminism in China, but only a few studies have been published about the impetus of Weibo, this major social media platform, on the feminist movement. This June, an incident, the Incident of Tang Shan, related to sexual harassment and violence ignited Weibo yet again, displaying the latest progress and existing problems of this online feminist movement.

In the article, reactions of different online groups, the advantages of Weibo, problems of current development and possible suggestions have been introduced, using methods of literature search, content analysis and case analysis.

All in all, analyzing this case can help reveal the current status of feminism on Weibo, provide insight into its impetus for feminism in China, offer some suggestions for its problems, fill in the blanks in this field, serve as a reference for further studies, and eventually push the development of feminism in China.

## **2. The Incident of Tang Shan**

### **2.1. The Original Incident**

On the night of June 10, 2022 in Tangshan, China, a middle-aged drunk man attempted to sexually harass a woman at a barbecue restaurant by putting his hand on her back. After being rejected and scolded, he slapped her hard. The two then started to fight. Seeing this, the woman's female friends joined in, so did the man's friends. These men beat them to the ground and caused severe damage on them. According to the police, two of the women ended up in the hospital.

The clip of this incident quickly went viral on Weibo. Apart from provoking internet outrage, it also started another, if not the largest, public discussion on feminism on the Chinese internet.

When it comes to the effects and results of this online wave, here are several of them: In the first place, the next day after arresting all nine criminals involved in the incident, the local government carried out an anti-violence action city-wide, aiming to improve public security in general. With this being announced, the halls of the police bureau throughout Tang Shan were immediately filled with people who had something to say. The incident not only helped solve numerous cases from the past, but also suppressed the sinful behaviors in town.

In another, it has yet again raised awareness for the situation of women in China and opened up public discussions of this kind on an unprecedented scale. Thanks to the development of social media and big data, headlines of the day are just a lick away. Weibo has successfully drawn enough attention to this incident while providing platform for women and men to speak up or to share their experiences of a such yet "sensitive" and "delicate" topic in China. "Women's voices are increasingly present in public issues"[2], which is really beneficial because discourse can produce power. In addition, during this process, influencers has also encouraged the cyber citizen to do actual things such as filling in their suggestions for laws related to the protection of women's rights and interests or go out and help a female who was in trouble in their real life.

### **2.2. The Celebrities**

Generally speaking, many people expressed their concerns and thoughts during this wave. First, plenty of the celebrities publicly condemned this savage act. For example, Jackie Chan called for strict law enforcement against the criminal and protection for the victims. Together with this, he shared a letter of his friend in which his friend addressed the same idea. This post has received 757,700 likes by now. In addition, an actress named Tianai Zhang said she was willing to offer help for these injured women.

### **2.3. Weibo Influencers**

Second, numerous Weibo influencers, especially key opinion leaders in this field, used this opportunity to educate the public. Key opinion leaders, "introduced by Lazarsfeld and others in 1944 in *The People's Choice*," refer to people who are active in interpersonal communication networks, often provide information, opinions, or advice to others, and exert personal influence on them.[3]" In this case, they covered topics like the perfect victim, structural gender oppression, not all men, misogyny, male gaze, girls helping girls, invisible predators, etc., introducing the

mechanism behind those phenomena and helping more people become aware of the current situation of Chinese women.

## **2.4. The General Public**

Third, the general public has become unprecedentedly vocal on this topic. This could be concluded by the fact that trends related to this incident on Weibo eventually added up to dozens of them. As the main participants of the wave, people actively gave likes, reposted, or commented to show their support, many also voiced their own relevant experiences and opinions.

## **2.5. The Press Media**

However, the press media wasn't favored by the internet this time, for many of them tried to downplay the incident by using vague or misleading expressions. For instance, one called "Zheng Guan Video" described this incident with the following phrases: "a man approached several women at a table and to talk to them" "he attempted to touch the woman's back but got rejected" "then two sides got into a conflict" "his friends joined in to fight against these women", which obviously avoided words like "sexual harassment" or "violence", and intentionally portrayed this dreadful crime as a somewhat evenly-matched fight. This attempt to deny the sexual factor in this case, defining it solely as a violent case, as well as its ridiculous frame of narrative, met angry backlash throughout the internet, which later forced it to adjust its wording. Netizen's negative attitude towards them could provide guidelines for their future writing and further reflection for the whole industry on their professional spirit and moral standards.

## **3. The Advantages and Problems of Weibo and Suggestions**

Through studying the incident of Tang Shan, it can be concluded that the development of feminism in China has been promoted by Weibo and that its current panorama on the platform is pretty good.

### **3.1. Advantages of Weibo**

#### **3.1.1. Easy Access**

It's prosperous development owes itself to the following factors. Above all, social media platforms like Weibo is able to provide easy access to all sorts of contents of feminism for everyone who registered. This exponentially increased the number of people that the concept could reach. Except from augmenting the public base, Weibo significantly lowered the barrier of participation for them. "The new media enable women to speak.[4]" Users can easily take part in this movement by simply clicking "like," "reposting," or writing a word or two in the comment section, which is convenient yet completely free at the same time.

#### **3.1.2. Key Opinion Leaders**

Furthermore, key opinion leaders in this field played an important role in the whole process. Not only did they serve as hubs to connect the masses together, but they also output quality content such as introductory articles, catchy slogans, or lists of appeals to the behavior of all women.

What's more, the anonymous character of the platform allowed people to freely express their opinions. Unlike offline socializing, where people can feel ashamed to talk about this type of sensitive topic or could be concerned about their image, they can tell the entire truth and frankly speak their mind in the cyber space.

## **3.2. Problems**

### **3.2.1. The Stigmatization of Feminist and Repulsion of the Public**

However, several problems can also be spotted in this process. To begin with, the stigmatization of feminist and repulsion of the public. While expressing their concerns about this incident, it's natural to feel angry and use some strong words to make your stance. But a great portion of irrational women have turned this into pure cyber violence. They would verbally abuse men or sometimes mock less-awakened women in order to vent their negative feelings or gain a sense of superiority, ignoring the core goals of feminism and thus causing misunderstandings among the audience[5]. Nowadays, they are way too often depicted as "crazy women", which severely hindered the process of the feminist revolution.

### **3.2.2. Unreasonable Strict Censorship and Inaccurate Coverage of Press Media**

Secondly, the unreasonable strict censorship of Weibo and intentional inaccurate coverage of certain press media. Given that the whole society avoids talking about avant-garde things like sex or feminism, it's not surprising that online platforms and the press want to downplay such incidents too. On the contrary, netizens, especially those of the younger generation, are often open-minded and vocal. The unreasonable removal of some content by platforms or imprecise description of certain press media will not only slow down the spread of feminism, but will also deeply irritate the public, making the crowd even more irrational.

### **3.2.3. Low Proportion of Male Participants**

Thirdly, the low proportion of male participants. This unconcern of men is predictable in the first place because they don't share the same life experience as women. First, according to the TED talk of Michael Kimme, "privilege is invisible to those who have it.[6]" Second, we all share the characteristic of misogyny, which can be defined as the contempt of male for female and the self-loathing of the latter. Third, it's natural for them to feel uncomfortable and lift their self-defense when the whole world seems to turn on them all of a sudden. However, the deep estrangement between Chinese men and women that we see today on Weibo is clearly excessive and even harmful to the process of eventually achieving gender equality.

### **3.2.4. Extreme Negative Emotion as Driving Force**

Fourthly, the movement is driven by extreme negative emotions which will come and go real fast. Incidents like this can ignite the internet mainly because they provoke the long-term collective fear, anger, and grievance of women. Their personal experience of being the second sex. However, the natural result of this is that people will forget about this quickly. Their attention will be distracted instantly. So feminism can only improve slowly with such inconstancy. Even worse, repetitive disappointment and frustration can cause political depression, pessimistic perspective towards the whole movement or even Cynicism for those feminists. This will result in less and less active feminists.

## **3.3. Suggestions**

### **3.3.1. Official Organizations Taking Responsibility**

Therefore, here are some possible solutions to the problems. First of all, official organizations should actively take the responsibility of spreading feminism. The reason is that feminism is still

rather new to the majority of the Chinese people, and the people is pretty used to gain knowledge particularly from official sources and will give high credit to what these authorities say. Consequently, if accounts like China Women's daily take active parts or even take lead in this process, it will be super effective, because is a sign for the public that the government endorses this "new western movement". To be more specific, these official sources should provide introductory article or guide to educate the public on what is feminism and how to practice it correctly. On one side, this could accelerate the process of awakening and generalization. On the other, this could greatly mend the relations between women and men nowadays by correcting the behavior of some women and help more men realize that patriarchy is also suppressing them too.

### **3.3.2. Weibo and Media Press Acknowledging Feminism as the General Trend**

Second, the platform and media press should acknowledge the fact that feminism is the general trend of world and nothing can hold it back. Deleting people's voice can't silent them, nor create "a better cyber environment", instead, it only fuels their anger. So, for Weibo, it is wiser in the long run to establish clear and fair rules for netizens on how they should engage. And for the press media, choosing the right frame of narrative can avoid hurting the victims again, convey they correct message to the public as well as being welcomed by them.

### **3.3.3. Encourage Men to Get Involved and Become Vocal**

Third, encourage men to get involved and become vocal. Men make up half of mankind, so it's crucial to gain their support. As the privileged group in gender issues, men need to reflect whether they have disrespected or exploited a woman, intentionally or not. Whats more, they have to come to realize that gender equality is beneficial for both gender. Men have also been victims of patriarchy, for example, by not being allowed to express their emotions or being asked to take on more financial responsibility in their family lives. They need to understand that women and men are on the same to free ourselves from this system.

### **3.3.4. Feminists Maintaining Rational**

Fourth, as for the feminists, they need to maintain rational when necessary while engaging in the activities and teach themselves constantly about feminism. Although intense negative feeling like anger and frustration may be the best incentive for incidents to go viral, excessive anger and aggressiveness can only push others away. So self-restraint comes in really essential here. For example, when one feminist can really relate to the victim, and it's getting to the point where this empathy starts to affect her or his life, she or he needs to build up emotional barriers and cut off these sorrow or fear from others. In another case, when some are feeling a strong urge to swear at a random guy on the internet, they need to stop and reflect whether insulting another person it's too much. Aside from these, feminists must continue to learn about it and develop the ability to think independently and critically. Feminism is a profound and complex subject, it requires systematic study and constant reflection, or else it's easy to got stuck or misled. "Some users' one-sided and subjective views on feminism and women's discourse are misunderstandings of its true meaning, the knowledge is not properly understood, which directly leads to many debates among netizens.[7]" However, once enough books being read, one would understand that this a cause of hundreds of years, requiring firm faith and belief, so instead of cursing others online, it's better off going out and doing actual day-to-day things that can actually help real-life women.

#### 4. Conclusion

The article dives into the case of Tang Shan, through which it also analyses the current development of feminism on Weibo, the "Chinese Twitter," and provides some possible suggestions. In conclusion, it's overall development is pretty good. Celebrities, influencers and the general public all took active parts in it, local government also took action to improve the public security, and feminist topics have been discussed publicly at an unprecedented level. However, several problems emerged too: the stigmatization of feminist and repulsion of the public, unreasonable censorship of the platform and bad frame of narrative of certain press media, low proportion of male participants, and the excessive anger of some feminists. The suggestions are as follows: official organizations actively taking on the responsibility of generalizing, the platform and media press acknowledging the fact that feminism is the general trend of the world, encouraging men to get involved and become vocal, and feminists maintaining rationality as well as teaching themselves constantly about feminism.

When it comes to what could be improved about the essay, lack of reference comes in first. Due to the newness of the topic, there aren't enough materials for the research to study. Thus, further researches could collect more data or read more material to get to more comprehensive conclusions.

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