

# ***Feminist Developments and Dilemma in China in the Post-epidemic Era***

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**Abstract:** Since the epidemic era, the discussion on feminist issues has attracted a lot of attention on the internet. Many studies on the development of feminism in China have been done in the past, but there is still a gap in the research on the current situation of feminists. In this paper, the current issues faced by feminists in China are analyzed by reading the literature and reviewing the major events related to feminism on the Internet in the past few years. The problems faced by feminists in China are multifaceted, and all these problems will take a long time to be solved. Great progress has been made, as many feminist issues have been brought to the public attention. Yet there is still a long way ahead for feminism in China. It is undeniable that Chinese feminists still require a long time to make attempts to address the various issues.

**Keywords:** Chinese feminist, post-epidemic era, development, dilemma, analysis

## **1. Introduction**

Since the spread of the new crown epidemic in early 2020, Chinese society has changed significantly, and so has the feminist movement in China. Based on the particular era of the founding of the PRC and the subsequent economic policies adopted, the status of women in China has been greatly enhanced. In recent years, however, as economic growth has gradually slowed, the development of the women's movement seems to have stagnated. There has been much research into the women's movement in the past, but there is still a gap in research into the current situation of feminists. Based on a factual perspective, this paper intends to analyse the issues facing feminism in China today by examining the development of feminist movements in China in 2020 and 2021 and their impact. It is proved that many of the incidents that have attracted widespread attention have been forgotten and remain inconclusive to this day. There has been a lack of discussion and analysis of the development of the feminist movement in recent years in academic circles, and even less in the last two years. At the same time, events concerning feminism have been much discussed in recent years, but rarely conclusively discussed, usually, after two groups of people have argued tit-for-tat never to be followed by another article, and many things are even now impossible to find records.

## **2. Literature Review**

After the founding of New China and the economic revolution, due to the policy supports and advocacy of the government, the rights of Chinese women developed enormously in the economic

aspect [1]. The purchasing power and working ability of women have been recognized and their economic status has quickly risen to the same level as that of men, with some women having a much higher economic status than men. The importance of women has been widely admitted by society, but there are still issues of inequality in recruitment and pay, and there are issues of objectification of women that need to be addressed. In this context, the female began to seek a deeper and more radical reform, that is, the promotion of feminism in society. Some of the pioneers hoped that such reforms would improve the political status of women and in so doing promote the development and implementation of relevant affirmative policies. It is remarkable that the feminist movement in China had been influenced not only by Western countries but also by Korea since the 21st century which is also in an East Asian context. Many feminist movements originated in the West (generally in the US), received wider attention in Korea, and were then imported into China and localized. In recent years, the Korean female movement has become more widely known and radical than the Western female movement by the Chinese, and this has deeply influenced young women in China.

Chinese women who aspire to political status and voice have carried out many affirmative action campaigns through demonstrations and other means in the hope that society and the authorities will pay more attention to this. Unfortunately, their revolution has met with great resistance and little success. In the absence of theoretical guidance and deep research, feminists are at a loss in finding the next step. Some feminists have gone to extremes [2], breaking away from conservative feminists and displaying extreme aggression, which has caused much opposition. Furthermore, a section of the population has tried to place women above men for personal profits, which has caused resentment and misogyny among many non-feminists, especially men.

In the aftermath of the epidemic, it was difficult for women's rights advocates to hold events in the real world due to the tightening of relevant policies. So, they shifted their main activities to the internet, in forums such as Weibo and Douban and radiated to the whole internet and attracted a lot of attention [3].

Feminism had almost become a trend. While it has generated a great deal of attention, the feminist community has also become controversial because of the extreme parts of it. Feminism has faced unprecedented stigmatization and growing opposition [4]. Some objectors consider feminism as a lie invented by self-interested people, deny existing gender inequalities and even justify extreme anti-feminist or even anti-human incidents. Some extreme feminists categorise many things as sexist and launch personal attacks on all males and partially conformist traditional females, drawing opposition from many conservative feminists [5]. On the internet today, gender issues have become a very short fuse with an explosive arsenal of male and female groups connected behind it, where a very tiny event can trigger a violent explosion and horrible disaster. Gender antagonism and gender contradictions were raised to unbelievable heights, hatred of the entire opposite sex emerged in some quarters, and the Chinese women's movement was plunged into great contradictions.

In order to understand this process of change and to better resolve conflicts, this study will collate and analyze representative feminist-related events in 2020 and 2021, and sort out the direction of feminism in recent years.

Feedback is collected from users on several mainstream Chinese platforms such as Weibo, Douban, Tieba, Zhihu, on hot issues related to feminism in the past two years, ranking them according to the hotness of the posts, and highlighting the more controversial issues. At the same time, various literature and articles on Chinese feminism are reviewed to understand the analysis of the development of feminism in China in recent years and to find academic support for my research.

Although feminism in China has been developed for a long time and has become known to the public in recent years, its influence is far less deep-rooted than the traditional vision. In other words, although many women are aware of the title of feminism, they are completely unaware of its meaning. There are still many women who hold the traditional notion that men are inferior to women, and are

even willing to be subordinate to men. Feeling sad for these women and enraging by those who exploit them. Probably these findings will have an impact on these people and will be able to push for the elimination of traditional and outdated ideas. Furthermore, this research will provide a measure of strength to advocates of women's rights and help them to bring change.

### 3. Representative Feminist Events Analysis

#### 3.1. Children's Surname

At the beginning of 2020, or even earlier, the plight of China's feminists was already evident: the social depression brought about by the economic downturn had plunged people into a state of mental depression, and the epidemic-induced control policies had put a heavy strain on tourism. With the downturn in the real economy, people have begun to seek spiritual solace on the Internet, and the enthusiasm for discussing various topics has gradually increased; some people use online communities as an anaesthetic for their lives, venting their emotions under various issues boards. As one of the hottest topics on the Chinese Internet in recent years, the issue of women's rights has attracted many people to discuss it, and in some cases, it has even been discussed more than the usual highly publicized livelihood issues. Unfortunately, due to a lack of popularisation and education on the subject, the public's knowledge of feminism is often only superficial. This has led many people, including feminists, to interpret other issues as feminist issues, and even to classify some issues related to women's rights as "just" feminist issues such as the Xuzhou Chained Woman incident in early 2022 [6].

In this context, the term "feminism" has been repeatedly deconstructed and discussed by the Internet public, causing a lot of ripples in public opinion. Meanwhile, a verbal conflict between feminist and anti-feminist groups has developed. In the process, some people created a series of terms that stigmatized feminism based on stereotypes and discriminatory ideas, such as "field feminism" and "female fist" [7]. Initially, such terms were used to describe the more negative and extreme parts of the feminist community and were only associated with a small number of people; as the conflict between feminists and anti-feminists grew and the visibility of feminism increased, more people began to use such terms to describe the feminist community as a whole, making the stigmatising term feminist an intrinsic attribute in the public eye. By 2020, this stigmatisation was largely complete, and 'feminism' was thus reduced to a pejorative term associated with 'the losers of the female community'. The widespread stigmatisation of feminism has shaken many feminists, who have begun to re-examine themselves and reposition themselves to seek a new sense of identity.

In the process, the feminist community has become more internally divided, with many feminists shifting to more extreme views and ostracising those within the community who hold different feminist views or even denying their identity as feminists. 2020's battle over the right to give her surname to the son of Papi is an emblematic example of this. As an early female entrepreneur who was active on the internet, Papi has always presented herself as an independent woman, and she was also considered by the public to be a successful feminist, with many girls once seeing Papi as their hero. Papi chose to retire after a period of fame, doing some behind-the-scenes work and no longer being exposed to the public. In May 2020, Papi posted on her account the news that she had given birth to a child, which sparked public attention. Some netizens then noticed that her child was given the father's surname instead of Papi's, which sparked outrage from some feminists. They believe that Papi is not concerned about the right to give her child her surname, and therefore the image of an independent woman she once presented is fake and that Papi is not really a feminist. The right to a family name is considered a very important part of the Chinese feminist struggle, as it means overturning a millennia-old tradition in Chinese history that has seen the idea of "women being subordinate to their husbands' families when they marry" turned on its head [8]. Women would be

able to develop their own families by having the same surname as men, and their descendants would be more closely linked to them by having the same surname as their mothers, and women and their descendants would no longer be part of the male family. However, not all feminists believe that women's right to a surname will free them from being attached to a male family, and some argue that the right to a surname represents a change of form rather than meaning, especially in areas where family values are already less strong, and that there is little point in clinging to the right to a surname. Other women's rights activists argue that the right to a surname is a superficial change and that a change in the mindset of society as a whole is needed behind the right to a surname. These people believe that the economic and educational aspects of women's education and employment should be improved in order to change the deep-rooted patriarchal mentality in society and to give women the same rights as men.

Conflicts of perception do not only exist within the feminist community but also between feminists and anti-feminists. The anti-feminist community in China is largely made up of men who have a vested interest in gender inequality, gaining status over others, and who are in some ways the perpetrators of women's oppression. Anti-feminists see the demands of feminists as unreasonable and irrational, trumpeting the progress made by women in China in the 1950s and claiming that women's current economic status is already so great that no further reforms are required while denying the existence of many inequalities. Some anti-feminists argue that women's advancement means that they are being squeezed out of existence, for example, that women workers are 'taking jobs' from men, leaving some men unemployed; some career-focused women tend not to marry men or choose better men, leaving some men without the right to choose a spouse. This is unfair to some men as they lose their legal rights.

### 3.2. Jokes on Men's Self-esteem

The conflict between feminists and anti-feminists has existed since the dawn of the internet, and in 2020, several of the larger clashes carried out by both sides were over a stand-up comedian - Yangli. Yangli made her first appearance in 2019 and chose topics that were the most sensitive gender issues. Yangli's rhetoric was so sharp that she once mocked some men on her show for being "ordinary but so confident", which made Yangli the center of attention for a while. Yangli's detractors accused her of being indiscriminate and offensive to all men, arguing that her views were too aggressive and biased and that she was nothing more than a clown for the masses [9]. Yangli's supporters said that they found a lot of empathy in Yangli's show, and that although Yangli's rhetoric was sharp and unrelenting, it was true to the weakness of modern people, and that some people were offended because they are self-replacing, which in itself means that they are the target of Yangli's mockery. The two sides were at loggerheads and even now Yangli and her views are still highly controversial.

The situation for feminists in 2021 has become even worse: a succession of low fertility rates has led the Chinese government to take control, implementing a series of policies to increase fertility rates. Some feminist-related statements on the internet have been removed and banned because they are thought to affect women's willingness to produce children, and the 64BT-related forum on Douban (a famous Chinese website) has been banned and permanently blocked. 64BT first originated in South Korea in 2019 and has since spread to China and gained several discussion groups on the Douban website. 64BT is considered radical because it advocates for social frameworks that deviate from the traditional ones, such as anti-marriage and anti-fertility. In April 2021, Douban banned eight discussion groups that used 64BT as a consensus and contained a lot of anti-marriage and anti-fertility content. Although there are still many young women who support 64BT advocacy, the platform administrators' move has certainly dealt a blow to feminists' online activism, and feminists' comments about not getting married and having fewer children have been blocked and removed from several platforms.

In the past two years, it has been noticed that feminists are facing a variety of problems: the lack of support and recognition of the feminist movement by the government; the economic downturn that has caused some women to be unemployed and thus lose part of their voice; the opposition and suppression of feminism from the mainstream of society; and the divisions within the feminist community [10]. Unfortunately, these issues seem to be difficult to resolve in the short term and may even create many historical legacies in the future. Conflicts over feminist issues continue to be amplified on the internet, most of which have shown no sign of being resolved until now. In this respect, the feminist movement of the past two years seems to have been a great failure. However, for Chinese women in the wider community, the rising popularity of feminist issues on the Internet is gradually making them more well-known. Where once feminism was a rare term belonging to a minority, the spread of the internet has made it commonplace, and incidents such as the chained woman have brought feminist issues to the attention of almost all the nation. From this point of view, feminists have been very successful in promoting feminism. It is undeniable that Chinese feminists still require a long time to make attempts to address the various issues.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is expected that this study can serve as a reference to help feminists address their problems and hopefully alleviate their dilemmas in the face of tightening policies and public pressure, given that the feminist movement in China is in a notable predicament. Meanwhile, the gender dichotomy at present can be explained to some extent and promote the development of the affirmative action movement.

It should be clear that the long and shortcomings of the feminist movement in recent years are equally evident. The issues facing feminists today are indeed complex and difficult to resolve, but the feminist movement in China has also been well-publicised and developed over the past few years, and the future of feminist development in China is still bright.

Feminists have encountered many insurmountable problems in the past few years, yet a positive attitude should be kept. First of all, the concept of feminism is being planted in the minds of more and more women. Where once it was only known in first-tier cities, there are now many women from third and fourth-tier cities and even rural areas who are taking up the fight for equal rights. More and more women are rebelling against traditional thinking and taking the initiative to break free from the shackles it imposes on them, even making men realise the huge burden that so-called tradition places on both parties. Women may be able to live in a more affirmative and enlightened society in the next decade than they do now, and celibacy may be more widely accepted and women's rights better protected.

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