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THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE FEMINISM ON WEIBO

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June, 2016
Faculty Adviser: Dr. Alexandra Smith

Essay completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Global Honors,
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Abstract

Developed from Western feminism(s), Chinese feminism is based on a belief in gender equality. This paper unwraps a brief history of the development of Chinese feminism through the aspects of Confucianism and communism, which reinforced patriarchy as the dominant ideology in the society. Under the influence of Confucianism, the traditional culture in China considers women as reproductive tools, and believes that men are superior to women. The patriarchy essentially undermines the development of Chinese feminism that has influenced not only the imbalanced gender distribution in modern society, but also people's perspectives on Chinese feminism. However, compared to their predecessors, who passively accepted the patriarchy taught them by society, modern Chinese are more critical of patriarchy, and eager to challenge the traditional culture. Chinese feminism has made great progress toward gender equality, which can be shown through people's perspectives on social media. This paper will select Weibo, one of the most popular social media platforms in China, and two case studies, focused on "leftover women" and rape culture, to further analyze how people's views have changed in terms of Chinese feminism on Weibo.

Chinese Feminism & Western Feminism(s)

Chinese feminism is an indigenous feminism evolved from Western feminism(s). It is based on the belief in gender equality that women should be treated the same as men in all areas of life. Women should be respected for all the choices they make and should not be told by the society how to be a woman. Chinese feminism has mainly grown from Western feminism(s) due to the enormous economic and ideological influences from the West after China's Open Door policy began in 1978, which encourages foreign businesses to invest in China (Chen, 2011). Foreign businesses entering the Chinese market have increased the interaction between Western people and Chinese people, which brought many Western ideologies including feminism into China.

Western feminism, broadly defined, is "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks, 2014, p.1). Through various historical changes, Western feminism has experienced a transformation from "a concern with women to a concern with gender" (Zhang & Moench, 2003, p. 16). This transformation took place over the course of three waves. First-wave feminism started with fighting for women's social, economic, and political rights with a focus on women's suffrage rights, which was during the 19th century and early 20th century (Freedman, 2002). The second wave happened from the 1960s to the 1980s (Gamble, 2001). In contrast to the first-wave feminism focusing on legal barriers against women's rights, such as voting rights and property rights, second-wave feminism extended to a broad variety of gender oppression issues in society, such as domestic violence, workplace discrimination, rape, abortion, and childcare access (Conger, 2016). Starting from the early 1990s, third-wave feminism began to discuss the rights of a diverse group of women, including race, class, sexual orientation, and cultural background (Hewitt, 2010). It also challenged compulsory female heterosexuality and

gender role stereotypes (Snyder, 2008). Currently, most feminists believe in gender equality that every gender should be treated equally and have the same opportunities. In other words, the focus of Western feminism has shifted from women's rights to gender equality. It includes both men and women while criticizing gender stereotypes. According to hooks (2014), people often have the misconception that feminism promotes the hatred of men, instead, it is truly about gender equality.

Adopting many concepts of Western feminism(s), Chinese feminism also incorporates local aspects of culture, history and society to better achieve gender equality in China. As Monhaty (2003) notes, Western feminism often ignores the needs of women of color or women from other cultures, which is why it is important to have an indigenous feminism in China to help bridge the gap between Western and Chinese feminism. In addition, coming from a different cultural background, Chinese feminism might not experience the same obstacles as Western feminism(s). A good example would be how the English word "feminism" is given two different definitions on two different encyclopedias, Wikipedia and Baidu Baike. Wikipedia is a relatively liberal online encyclopedia that is founded and operated by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation, which is currently blocked in mainland China. On the other hand, Baidu Baike is a well-known online encyclopedia operated by the Chinese search engine Baidu.com. It is acknowledged that Baidu Baike could be a governmentally authorized information source because of its content censorship due to the pressure from the Chinese government (Liao, 2013). In contrast to Wikipedia, the content on Baidu Baike can only be edited by registered users regulated by Chinese laws.

Baidu Baike and Wikipedia have two distinct translations for the word feminism that seem to represent different beliefs. Feminism could be translated into two different Chinese

words: *nvquan zhuyi* (Mandrian: 女权主义; Pinyin: *nvquan zhuyi*), which refers to women's "rights-ism" or the more aggressive "power-ism," and *nvxing zhuyi* (Mandrian: 女性主义; Pinyin: *nvxing zhuyi*), which is more like women's "gender-ism", a relatively non-confrontational and neutral term. Even though feminism is generally referred to as women's rights-ism in Chinese society, on Baidu Baike, both the English word "feminism" and the Chinese translation "women's rights-ism" direct the user to the term "women's gender-ism," whereas feminism only appears to have the translation of women's rights-ism on Wikipedia's simplified Chinese page.

The distinctive translations on these two encyclopedia websites may reveal the deep-rooted patriarchal ideology in China; in other words, women's gender-ism may sound less offensive to men and society than women's rights-ism. According to Schaffer and Song (2007), in the literal or original Chinese meaning, Women's rights-ism seems to advocate "a politics of opposition, a battle between men and women, rather than the fluid Taoist belief in yin/yang complementarity between the sexes" (Schaffer & Song, 2007, p.20). Baidu Baike's preference toward women's gender-ism may be because the term suggests a less aggressive ideology that represents a perspective of gender harmony, while women's rights-ism implies a battle for the equality between men and women. Compared to women's rights-ism, women's gender-ism may indicate that promoting women's rights and criticizing sexism in society are unnecessary, as long as sexism doesn't appear to be a problem, so therefore women's gender-ism may be easier to achieve. Baidu Baike favoring women's gender-ism may demonstrate that the Chinese government prefers women's gender-ism as the mainstream form of Chinese feminism, which reveals that gender inequality persists in China.

Women's gender-ism could be likened to the concept of "Smiling Chinese feminism." Huang Lin, the professor of literature at Capital Normal University in Beijing and editor of the journal *Chinese Feminism*, defined Chinese feminism as "Smiling Chinese feminism" (Spakowski, 2011). According to Lin, "Chinese feminism is sharp but not aggressive. It explores female issues. It is concerned with the harmonious development of both sexes. Its utmost focus is on the eternal subject of humanity" (Spakowski, 2011, p. 40). The ideology of Smiling Chinese feminism has been promoted by the Chinese government since 2004 because of its focus on "harmony between two sexes," which will lead to a "harmonious society" (Spakowski, 2011 p. 40). Through the lens of Western feminism, the idea of "harmony between two sexes" could be interpreted as an escape of promoting gender equality and women's rights. This theory seems to advocate "peace" between men and women, rather than criticizing the real issues in sexism. Related to the case of women's gender-ism that is evidently preferred in Baidu Baike, which is sanctioned by the Chinese government, the government's support of "Smiling Chinese feminism" may reveal that, in the national agenda of feminism, the development of the country is the predominate subject, instead of the elimination of sexism. With the government's discouragement of more active forms of feminism, and with gender inequality entrenched in Chinese society, making progress toward equal rights becomes more difficult.

Historical and Cultural Contexts of Chinese Feminism

China came from a 5,000-year-old patriarchal society, which means that many sexist ideologies still hinder the development of Chinese feminism in the modern society. In order to understand Chinese feminism, the culture and history behind the society needs to be further analyzed. As Schaffer and Song (2007) note,

Women in China have had to confront a powerful array of patriarchal traditions, ancient and modern, that include the enduring Confucian belief systems and more recent

Communist ideologies, compounded by the demands of a new market economy and the influx of Western knowledge systems – a profusion of ‘isms.’ (p. 19)

Confucianism was a patriarchal tradition that has been rooted in Chinese culture since the 6th or 5th century BC (Huang, 2013). Confucius (Mandarin: 孔子; 551– 479 BCE) was a Chinese teacher, politician, and philosopher of the Spring and Autumn period (722 – 481 BCE) of Chinese history, who is also referred to as a respected master (Mandarin: 孔夫子) (Huang, 2013). His philosophy, Confucianism, advocates strong family loyalty, ancestor worship, and respect of elders by their children and of husbands by their wives (Craig, 1998). During the Han dynasty between 221 to 206 BC, his philosophy started to boom. From 140 BC until the end of the 19th century, Confucianism was the official imperial philosophy and his writings were required reading for civil service examinations (Elman, 1991). Confucianism essentially defined the mainstream discourse on gender roles in China and taught society what constituted a virtuous woman (Adler, 2006). In Confucian philosophy, many of his quotes reinforced the belief that male status is higher than female in a household; for instance: “When young, a woman should obey the father, when married, the husband, when old, the son;” and “Since the age of seven, men and women should not share a room or food” (Confucius). Confucianism also emphasized women’s virtue of chastity that pressured women to remain single after they lost their husbands, and condemned the moral quality of women who chose to remarry (Adler, 2006). As a patriarchal ideology, Confucianism predominantly promoted unbalanced gender roles, which were responsible for the oppression of women in pre-modern China.

As a pushback against this patriarchal society, the development of Chinese feminism started in the New Culture Movement of the mid-1910s to 1920s. The movement promoted the destruction of China’s traditional feudal culture and Confucian oppression of women. During the

movement, because of the increasing global and Western influence and economic growth, women started to expect to be treated with greater respect and the idea of the Chinese “new woman” was born (Koetse, 2012). The concept of the “new woman” represented a new identity for women that rejected Confucian values in a new China (Koetse, 2012). New Culture leaders continued to focus on ending the patriarchal family structure in order to pursue individual freedom and women’s liberation. In contrast to the feudal ideology of “ignorance is a woman's virtue,” women’s education was first valued and encouraged. However, according to Schaffer & Song (2007), even though the movement began to criticize the patriarchal power structures in the family, it still advocated certain traditional cultural mores that implied women’s inferior position to men, such as “filial piety, women’s virtue and maternal sacrifice” (p.18). Also, this social action was driven by the imperative for societal development instead of women’s liberation, as demonstrated by the fact that women of lower status were considered to be a barrier to the modernization of the nation (Dooling & Torgeson, 1998, p. 13).

Under the influence of the New Culture Movement, Peking University admitted the first 11 female students in 1920, and within two years a total of 889 female students had been admitted (Tao, Zheng & Mow, 2004). According to Ko and Zhang (2006), even though these two movements started encouraging China’s society to pay attention to women’s rights, the Chinese Communist Party, which took power in 1949, redirected the feminism movement in its political direction. The government mocked feminism and defined feminists who “refused to identify with the Party’s goal but focused on gender equality” as “bourgeois narrow feminists” (Ko & Zhang, 2006, p.467). In Communism, bourgeois ideology, with its supported beliefs of capitalism and materialism, was generally considered antithetical to the Communist Party’s

goals; therefore, the government might label the feminists who had different perspectives than the party as “bourgeoisie” to attack those feminists as national enemies.

Between 1958 and 1961, the Great Leap Forward was a socioeconomic campaign designed by the Communist Party of China (CPC) to help China rapidly evolve from a farm-based economy to one that was built more on industry. The Great Leap Forward provided many work opportunities to women to participate in various domains of industry, such as mechanized textile and agriculture industries, where they received the knowledge of new techniques, such as operating a tractor (Shen, 2011, p.9). Andors (1983) claims that women’s work opportunities outside the household were key to women’s emancipation. However, women were paid much less than men while performing the same work, and they were usually assigned to the departments that required few skills. At the same time, society’s assumption was still that household labor was the woman’s responsibility (Shen, 2011). Despite the Great Leap Forward, the oppression of women’s status in society was still severe; favoritism for boys was the norm, women were discouraged from pursuing education, and a distinct engendered division of labor remained (Shen, 2011).

During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the Communist Party of China, established an ostensibly egalitarian gender ideology, saying that “women can hold up half of the sky,” and promoted an image of the asexual “iron girls” to promote “gender equality” (Schaffer & Song, 2007, p.19). His ideology was a political agenda to encourage women to join the work place in order to contribute to the economic growth of the nation. By promoting the removal of capitalism and traditional culture from Chinese society, his ultimate goal was to establish Maoism as the dominant ideology within the country (Galan, 1978). Even though Maoist ideology seemed to advocate a raise for women’s social status, it

might lead to an opposite direction. As Dai, Wang, and Barlow (2002) point out, the “Maoist ideology of gender equality camouflaged a socialist impasse that did not so much emancipate as masculinize women” (p.8). His ideology might have partially freed women from Confucian ideologies, but women were still constrained by the Maoist philosophy. In this movement, he promoted a masculinized image of women, which insinuated that women needed to be like men to be able to work. Even though women’s labor market participation and income increased, his ideology ultimately reinforced the belief that men are superior to women, which substantially undermined Chinese feminism.

From the brief overview of Chinese history on feminism, it is evident that Confucian and Communist ideologies reinforced patriarchy in the Chinese society. The traditional patriarchal culture resulted in many gender disparity issues in contemporary China, and could also explain the underlying cause that impedes the development of Chinese feminism.

Sexism in the Imbalanced Gender Distribution in Contemporary China

China has an imbalanced gender ratio; according to the World Bank (2014), in 2013, China had approximately 50 million more men than women. In contrast to the global average of 107 boys born per 100 girls, China had 111 boys born per 100 girls (Bauer, 2016). By 2013, only 37 countries worldwide had a majority of men, whereas 81 countries had a majority of women and 75 were within 0.5% of gender parity (Bauer, 2016). China’s one-child policy and sex-selective abortion are the two main factors that contributed to the imbalanced gender distribution in China. This situation is further evidence of the deep-rooted patriarchal ideology in China’s society.

China’s one-child policy was established by paramount leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979 to limit China's population growth. The policy limits couples to only one child, but exceptions may apply and ethnic minorities are excluded. The Government imposes fines or even pressures

women to abort pregnancies that violate the policy (Whyte, Feng & Cai, 2015). In 2015, the policy began to be phased out and couples are allowed to have two children. Under the one-child policy, since a family could only have one child, the (mostly rural) families who prefer boys would choose to abort their babies if the babies were girls, which is referred as sex-selective abortion. Believing that girls are inferior to boys, the families who prefer boys usually hold the traditional belief that only boys can be the inheritor of the family, because they will pass the family's last name to the next generation. There is proverb in old China which says that "a married daughter is like splashed water," meaning that once a woman gets married, she no longer belongs to her original family because she will be the wife and mother of her new family. Treating woman as a property in the family, this patriarchal ideology might lead many families to choose sex-selective abortion.

Sex-selective abortion is the practice of terminating a pregnancy based upon the predicted sex of the infant. In 2005, with the goal of normalizing the sex ratio of infants by 2010, the government outlawed prenatal sex determination and sex-selective abortion (Ren, 2015). Doctors are forbidden by the state from exposing the sex of unborn babies or performing sex-selective abortions. They are under the threat of losing their medical licenses and jail time for violation. Despite the policy, the practice of sex-selective abortion continued in rural China because preference for sons was much stronger there (Zeng, Tu, Gu, Xu, Li, & Li, 1993). Some rural couples attempted to pay to know the sex of their children, while having an ultrasound (Zeng, Tu, Gu, Xu, Li, & Li, 1993). These practices behind the unbalanced gender ratio expose the reality that the traditional gender discrimination against women, based on the belief that boys are more valuable than girls, still exists in China.

Chinese Feminism in the Social Media Era

Lu Ping, director of the Chinese NGO Woman Media Watch Network (WMWN) and founder of weekly e-newsletter Gender Watch, points out,

...gender and feminist perspective is almost invisible in the mainstream media...Through social media, NGO activists and feminists are able to form circle and engage in public debate, even though the discussion seldom enter the public sphere. (Feminism in China, 2013)

As Chinese citizens' access to the global internet is increasing, social media offers feminists a low-budget platform to promote gender equality. With mainstream media controlled by the government and the market, social media creates a space for feminists to present their voices because users could easily share information and their perspectives to the world in a second. With exposure to feminist discourses on social media, people have become more aware of feminism, and they are more likely to be influenced by feminist ideology. In addition, social media's popularity within the Chinese population allows people to discuss sexism issues and exchange their perspectives at a fast pace. The social media platforms, such as Sina Weibo, China's biggest microblog website, and Youku, one of the top online sharing video websites similar to YouTube in China, have played a huge role in magnifying Chinese women's voice in the country.

Chinese Feminism on Weibo

Introduction

Weibo, which is also referred as Sina Weibo, is the most popular social media platform in China, and it has over 30% of Internet users in China (Rapoza, 2011). Weibo incorporates the functions of Twitter and Facebook, allowing users to post original content, repost other user's content, comment, and chat on the platform. By the third quarter of 2015, Weibo had 222 million

subscribers and 100 million daily users (Freier, 2015). In recent years, the patriarchy has been substantially challenged by the majority of voices on Weibo through discussion of the hot subject of gender issues, which was barely brought up in the past.

Through the cases of “leftover women” and “Slutwalk,” the following analysis will show that Chinese people have been making progress toward the goal of feminism in the social media era. Weibo, serving as a social media tool, helps people gain information and exchange ideas at a fast pace. Despite the potential for Weibo to promote different messages in terms of gender equality, people’s reactions on these two cases reveal the development of Chinese feminism in contemporary China.

Leftover Women

In 2007, the term “leftover women” (pinyin: Shengnv; Mandarin: 剩女) was defined by the Women’s Federation as women who are unmarried over the age of 27 (Fincher, 2014). Casual use of this derogatory term reveals the patriarchal ideology that values women by domestic roles, such as wife and mother, so that marriage becomes women’s ultimate path. “Leftover women” devalues single women when they pass a certain age, which shows the patriarchal social standard on women, which emphasizes their reproductive value and appearance. The message behind this term suggests that, as women get older, their reproductive value and appearance will diminish, making them less attractive to men and less competitive in the marriage market. The term “leftover women” oppresses women and perpetuates traditional gender roles by giving society and family members an excuse to pressure women into getting married in order to fulfill their patriarchal expectations.

“Leftover women” started as a popular Internet word on social media, but has since evolved into a “buzzword” in not only the internet but Chinese people’s everyday lives. As the

term “leftover women” has been adopted into regular use by the mainstream media and by people on Weibo and in daily life, describing single unmarried women as “leftover” has become normalized. Due to this, the term appears to be less negative, and many people overlook the sexist implication behind it. Not only men but Chinese women have even started to call other women or themselves “leftover women.” Women of older generations, such as current mothers and grandmothers, call their daughters and granddaughters “leftover women” because they agree with the ideology of “leftover women,” as patriarchy is rooted in their mind; women of the younger generation, who might be “leftover women” themselves, do not like the term but may still use it as a joke to describe themselves, perhaps because it is so common and they do not feel empowered to change anything.

“Leftover women” have been stigmatized by mainstream media on Weibo as spoiled only-children, and crazy workaholics who are devoid of the traditional virtue of being a “good wife and wise mother” (pinxin: xianqiliangmu; Mandarin: 贤妻良母); and further as self-centered women who are too picky when choosing a partner and arrogant toward men (Chen & Takeyama, 2011). While the majority of people still think marriage is necessary for life, “leftover women” are often viewed as “weird, pitiful and deviant” (Chen & Takeyama, 2011, p.32). Xiao, an editor from a famous middle class-oriented weekly in Guangzhou, said in an interview,

This word is full of discrimination and misunderstanding... What I’m irritated most by is that they (media) shaped Shengnü (leftover women) as workaholics not because they love their jobs but because they are not desired by men...

I’m seriously concerned about mass media’s effects upon Shengnü. A lie becomes truth when it is repeated. I’m just one of the thousands victims. I can read my male colleagues’ eyes. They look at me with sympathy and disdain. It is like I have to be a workaholic to cover up my solitude. Married women’ eyes are loaded with sympathy coupled with superiority. It was like marriage is the only path to happiness... All my informants admitted that they are “single aristocracy” (pinxin: danshengguizu; Mandarin: 单身贵族), single but keeping a decent and free life. (Chen & Takeyama, 2011, p.20-21)

Unlike the misleading messages on mainstream media, in reality, “leftover women” are usually successful in terms of their professional lives. Comparing “leftover women” with their counterpart, “leftover men” (pinxin: Shengnan; Mandarin: 剩男), there is massive gap in their background and situation. “Leftover women” usually are urban, successful, and professional women, who generally have “three highs”: high income, high education, and high intelligence. On the other hand, “leftover men” commonly have “three lows”, which are low income, low education, and low intelligence (Koetse, 2015). In contrast to 48 % of “leftover women” who have a master’s degree or above, only 37% of “leftover men” have the same degree; 36% of “leftover women” earn more than \$2000 U.S. monthly salary, whereas 30% of “leftover men” earn less than \$303 U.S. monthly salary, and 16% have no income (Sohu Content Department UED, 2014). With the disparate gender ratio in present-day China, there could be “a surplus of 30 million Chinese men of marrying age in 2020,” which indicates that one in five Chinese men will not be able to find a female partner (Koetse, 2015). Even though statics show that “leftover women” are far less common than “leftover men” and they are more competitive in terms of income, education and intelligence, the term “leftover women” has always been the target of discussion on Weibo because of the patriarchal ideology in Chinese society.

Mainstream media’s posts on Weibo in 2010 include:

A post from the satellite station Shanghai Dragon Television reads:

Women say: I want to be a wealthy woman who is looking for an interesting man. Men say: you should make yourself interesting first! In our race, men age much slower than women. Our live studio will present you the episode ‘what should we do if our family has leftover women?’ We are going to teach you how to possibly transform from ‘troublesome leftover women’ to ‘successful leftover women.’

A post from a male editor from a health-oriented website reads:

‘Why do breast diseases often happen to ‘leftover women’?’ Late marriage, late reproduction, and late breast feeding are the three risky factors that cause breast cancer.

People’s posts on Weibo in 2014 include:

I heard Chinese men likes women to be inferior to them, so level A men married level B women, level B men married level C women, Level C men married level D women, and level A women accidentally become ‘leftover women.’ I also heard that “leftover women” often have four endings that they become forever single, step moms, lesbians, and nuns. (from a male commenter)

My mentor said that there are some older ‘leftover women’ who are 25-27 years old. Although those women’s conditions are pretty good, being too picky made them become ‘leftover women’ who are under parents’ pressure to get married, but we (boys) are too young to worried about marriage. (from a male commenter)

If I am man, I would rather choose a woman who is simple, not too smart, no ambition, and not self-centered. Those women who want to be successful usually become ‘leftover women’. (from a female commenter)

Sometimes I want to tell myself to stop waiting and just find a guy to get married, but I couldn’t use this excuse to persuade myself. I am getting more scared of people asking me when I am going to get married, and myself being stuck in the box of ‘leftover women’. (from a female commenter)

(The comments above are author’s translation of the original posts)

Four to six years ago, how mainstream media and people viewed “leftover women” on Weibo reveals that the patriarchal ideology was still dominant in people’s mind. People accepted the implications of the term, which perceived women as wife, mother, and reproductive tools to men, and they believed it was normal to judge single, educated women if not married at a young age.

With Weibo popularizing and normalizing the term “leftover women,” people not only talked about the term without criticizing or questioning its inherent sexism, but they agreed with the term “leftover women,” admitting women’s value solely through marriage, which reinforced the patriarchy in China’s society.

In April 2015, one Chinese netizen, Beishan Nanren, posted an article on Weibo along with a picture of a poster in a marriage registration office in Beijing's Xicheng District. It is directed at women, saying: "Being a good housewife and mother is the greatest skill of a woman, why do you insist on competing like crazy with men, taking their place and resources?" The "logic" behind this message reflects the ideology of "leftover women." The marriage office claimed that this poster was at outside of a counselling room to persuade the couples who wanted to get a divorce to not do so. Beishan criticized the poster in his Weibo post, saying that "the poster by the Beijing Xicheng district is not only sexist, it is also an infringement of women's economic equality rights" (Koetse, 2015). The post went viral immediately and the article by Beishan was viewed over 900,000 times and received over 13,500 comments on Weibo (Koetse, 2015).

The majority of Weibo comments on this topic condemned the gender discrimination against women in the message of the poster, with users responding: "I am going to divorce my husband if he thinks like this," "I swear that my life is not defined by men and marriage," "Which straight guy wrote this idea?," "We have been insisting like crazy just to not let the society think like this," "As a man I have to say that this message clearly wants to deprive women's rights to pursue their career; this marriage registration office clearly misses the feudal society," and

It is the greatest joke that this poster is meant for mediating the couples who want to divorce. Aren't all divorces led by the wives who are not good wife and good mother? Browsing through the comments, there are many "straight men cancer" (Mandarin: 直男癌, This word describes the straight men whose minds are so patriarchal that they have the cancer of patriarchy) who support this poster, but what I did not imagine is that there are some women supporting the marriage registration office, who grew up in an extreme patriarchal society and are brainwashed by patriarchy. It is pathetic and sad!

(The comments above are author's translation of the original posts)

People's comments on Weibo against the marriage office's poster message show that people started to pay attention to Chinese feminism, and are more critical of patriarchal ideology that oppresses women into fitting into traditional gender roles.

Using the hashtag #changeDestiny, the skincare brand SK-II launched its campaign with a four-minute video named "Marriage Market Takeover," which hit over 10 million views within ten days of its release (Koetse, 2016). The video, along with the hashtag #changeDestiny, gained huge popularity on Weibo, and triggered substantial discussions regarding Chinese "leftover women." The "marriage market" in the video depicts the People's Park in central Shanghai, where thousands of parents hold papers of marriage advertisements for their kids, which usually focus on age, occupation, property and income.

This video features several single women who share their experiences of being pressured by their families to get married, and society's judgments of them for being single. At the end of the video, they decided to go to the "marriage market" with their parents and use their own "advertisements," not to look for a husband but to make a personal statement. Those "ads" include their wall-size portraits along with the texts showing their own thoughts on marriage, such as "I do not want to marry for the sake of marriage. I won't live happily that way," "I want to take time to find the right person," and "even though I am single, I am still happy, confident and enjoy life" (SK-II, 2016). The parents are touched by their daughters' "ads," and express their understanding for their daughters' decision. One father said "if she enjoys being single, we will still respect her decision" (SK-II, 2016).

On Weibo, the topic of "leftover women" raised by the campaign continues to be discussed by Chinese netizens. Many Weibo netizens have shown their support for single women

to speak up for their life decisions, and have criticized the term “leftover women.” Their comments include:

Being confident and independent, marriage doesn't measure my happiness.
Our society shouldn't teach women how to be a woman, we should respect them as individuals.
In this world, nobody is 'leftover' by being unmarried.
It is ironic to hear people say that the majority of single women are single because their standards are too high, and the majority of single men are single because there are too many single women with high standards. It is all women's fault!

(The comments above are author's translation of the original posts)

People's reaction to the campaign #changeDestiny shows that the Chinese people have deepened their understanding about feminism. They believe in gender equality, which refuses to follow the traditional virtue that denies women's value outside of marriage, and consequentially treats them differently as women in society. A business like SK-II making a video that empowers women to stand up, reject patriarchal ideology, and refuse to be labeled by patriarchal standards, shows that SK-II detects the mainstream, pro-feminism trend in Chinese society. However, this campaign is a marketing strategy, and its ultimate goal is to sell beauty products, which may diminish its critique. SK-II is a pricy skincare brand whose target customers are the women who have money, successful careers, and possibly are “leftover women.” By empowering single women in China to go against the label “leftover woman,” SK-II is sending the messages, with which its customers will mostly likely agree.

From the case of “leftover women,” the term “leftover women” has been popular since it was first discussed on Weibo. People started talking about it without criticizing or questioning the implicit discrimination against women that exists behind the idea. The term was accepted by different generations of Chinese as a normalized term to convince non-traditional, single, and educated women to stop being so ambitious and get married at a young age. Weibo essentially

popularized and normalized the term “leftover women,” while promoting the message that “women must marry! Ideally by 27, or you’re on the shelf,” which reinforced existing patriarchal ideology that hindered the development of Chinese feminism. However, people’s recent responses on Weibo on the topics of “leftover women” and traditional gender roles show that Chinese people are more critical about patriarchy and the discrimination against women in society than a couple years ago.

“SlutWalk” and Rape Culture

“SlutWalk” is a transnational movement that protests against rape culture (Leach, 2013), which perceives rape through the perspectives of victim-blaming, sexual objectification, and trivializing rape (Attenborough, 2014). Rape culture is socially constructed based on patriarchy that stigmatizes women who express their appearance and sexuality. It perceives women as sexual objects, and female victims as the problem in sexual assaults instead of the offenders. Victim-blaming in the context of rape culture means holding the victim of a sexual assault responsible for the harm. The SlutWalk movement started on April 3, 2011 and has spread across the world after a Toronto police officer advised that “women should avoid dressing like sluts” to avoid sexual assault (Bell, 2011). In China, this movement was triggered by Shanghai Metro’s official “dress code” to women passengers to prevent been victimized on Weibo. On June 20, 2012, Shanghai No.2 Metro Operation posted a cautionary message along with a photo of the back of a women wearing a black see-through dress on Weibo, saying “Riding the subway dressing like this, no wonder [some] get sexually harassed. There are too many wolves to catch in the human-wolf war on the subway lines. Girl(s), you’ve got to respect yourself!” (Zhang & Kramarae, 2014, p.72). This message implies that women who do not dress “properly” in public space are ultimately responsible for sexual harassment instead of the offenders, which are tied to

the ideology of rape culture. Shanghai No.2 Metro Operation's post raised huge discussions on sexual harassment. According to Zhang and Kramarae (2014), the responses on Weibo were diverse in regard of this topic. Positive comments included:

One Shanghai based feminist NGO "shanghai women love" said, "Strongly demand @shanghai no.2 metro apologize and delete the message! Again, 'my short skirt is not an invitation.' Women have the personal freedom of dressing and should not be harassed however they dress!"

"shanghai no.2 metro once again shows the damn official logic. Passengers have the freedom to dress however they wish. It is your poor management that leads to the harassment of passengers. Do not you understand what free will is?"

"Manage your subway well first. Do not have glitch everyday. What she wears is none of your business."

"What's wrong with the see-through dress?"

"Talking like this, no wonder the official Weibo has been criticized. The Metro even stands on the side of the wolves. Official Weibo, you've got to respect yourself!"

On the other hand, negative comment included:

"This women's dress only yells one message: begging to be harassed."

"Dressing like a whore makes a whore. Dirty slut, deserving to be fucked."

"This is also sexually harassing men."

"Support @shanghai no.2 metro's kind and necessary reminder. That is the style of an official Weibo. It is her business if she insists on dressing like this, but it is a fact that dressing like this is more likely to be sexually harassed!" (p.73-79).

The diverse reactions on Weibo regarding Shanghai No.2 metro's sexist comment reveals that a couple years ago, Chinese society was saturated in rape culture that people often perceive women as sex objects, and insult women who express their appearance and sexuality. Though rape culture was rooted in most of the people's mind, there were some people starting to question the patriarchy behind it.

On April 4, 2016, Weibo user Wanwan_2016 posted a surveillance video that shows her being dragged and violently assaulted by a strange man in front of an elevator entrance in a Home Inns hotel located in Beijing's 798 art district, which is one of the most popular hotel chains in China. The video also reveals that there was a hotel staff member and other hotel customers present while the girl was attacked, but nobody intervened to help the victim. In the end of the video, the girl was finally saved by a female customer, but she would likely have been kidnaped otherwise. The victim also posted an article describing the details of her attack along with the hashtag #WomanAttackedAtYitelHotel, where she asked people to share her posts in order to warn other women to be more careful and call for justice for her incident. Her posts went viral immediately and by April 6 the surveillance video was shared more than 920,000 times and had attracted over 260,000 comments (Guo & Kortse, 2016).

In Wanwan's article, she explained that one of the reasons why the hotel staff and customers did not help her because they thought the man was her partner. There is also a rumor on Weibo, which claims that the reason the victim did not get help was because she was a prostitute. After the criminal was arrested, he confessed that he was engaged in a prostitution business that delivers advertisement cards in the hotel. He thought the victim was a prostitute that may influence his business, so that he was trying to "disperse" the victim (Safety Beijing Weibo account, Weibo). Even if the criminal's statement was true, Wanwan's experience aggravated people on Weibo, who asked "why is it socially accepted in China that girlfriends, wives and prostitutes could be violent assaulted by men?" After the event, the state media People's Daily posed security guidelines and tips for women to protect themselves, "Please keep this in mind: 1. Please do not go to appointed places with strangers. 2. Do not go into dark streets

at night by yourself. 3. Do not just open the door for anyone. 4. Do not cling to your property in dangerous situations...” (Koetse, 2016).

Responses on Weibo related to #WomanAttackedAtYitelHotel show that the majority of people rejected and criticized rape culture and the patriarchy behind it. The comments include:

Why is it tolerated in the minds of Chinese people that wives or children are beaten? How many times has it happened that suspects pretend to be spouses or head of the household, so that bystanders do not care about their cruel acts?

Whether the victim was in a relationship with the suspect or the suspect was drunk, the hotel is responsible to protect the victim when she shows her resistance to the suspect, even though they were a married couple who were on their anniversary at the hotel. Why does mainstream media teach women to be careful and learn self-defense after those kind of cases. We came to this world not to fight with the criminals. Do not women deserve to go out without Kong Fu?

Those warnings to women to be careful, not wearing exposed clothes, and not go out alone just put the responsibility of being violent assaulted on women’s shoulders!

Is not it the job of the police to make sure women can safely go out?

(The comments above are author’s translation of the original posts)

From Wanwan’s case, it is obvious that Chinese people on Weibo criticized that the society placed a burden on women to be responsible for their sexual harassments instead of the offenders, which shows that people were making more progress toward challenging the objectification of women in rape culture.

On May 5, 2016, Chinese media reported that a man was sexually harassed by a woman on a bus in Jinan, Shandong Province. The bus team claimed that this woman had been involved in similar harassments on different buses (Sina, 2016). This news went viral on Weibo immediately, as many female Weibo users saw the opportunity to do reverse “slut shaming” on the male victim in order to reveal how absurd and unfair slut shaming is, and also make a statement against blaming female victims and hold responsible for sexual harassment. Slut

shaming is a part of the rape culture that is a form of stigmatization, which is used against people, especially on girls and women, who do not reflect traditional expectations for sexual appeals and behaviors (Tanenbaum, 2015). It is also a form of victim-blaming that often targets women who become the victims of sexual harassment (Guo, 2016). According to Tanenbaum (2015), slut shaming “is the essence of the sexual double standard: Boys will be boys, and girls will be sluts.”

According to Guo (2016), reverse slut-shaming posts on Weibo include:

“This man must be walking around with revealing clothes on, so he deserves to be touched. Why did not anyone else get touched? Next time, just wear more clothes and do not go outside by yourself.”

“Shameless! Skimpily dressed just to seduce women! No wonder you were harassed; be thankful that you were not raped!”

“Look at you, wearing such revealing clothes in Summer, of course people will harass you! Remember to wear your winter jacket next time you go out!”

“Do not take the bus alone; go outside in groups, especially at night... learn some self-defense also, so you can avoid danger!”

“These are sarcastic comments meant for those with ‘straight guy cancer’ [chauvinist pigs] who blame girls when they are assaulted.”

The reverse slut-shaming comments on Weibo shows that Chinese women are eager to challenge the gender discrimination against women in society, such as women are portrayed as sexual objects, and women often receive different treatments than men in variety of aspects of life, including sexual harassment. Reverse slut-shaming on Weibo demonstrates that Chinese feminism has made huge progress toward gender equality and that women are more aware of the gender inequality in China and willing to act on it.

Conclusion

Weibo, as a social media platform, offers a space for people to discuss and criticize the patriarchal ideology in China, which may ultimately raise people's awareness about Chinese feminism. Weibo is a tool that has been used by feminists, celebrities, and citizens to promote different messages regarding gender roles. The constantly increasing critical discussions on Chinese feminism on Weibo have reflected the progress of people's perspectives on gender equality. Weibo is more like a mirror reflecting the progress, which Chinese people have made on the way to feminism.

Conclusion

Chinese feminism combines the Western concepts of feminism(s) and the local aspects of culture, history and society to better achieve gender equality in China. The history of Chinese feminism in regard to Confucius and Maoist ideologies promoted and reinforced patriarchal messages, such as the idea that women are men's reproductive tools and that women are inferior to men, which hindered the development of gender equality in Chinese society. The patriarchy rooted in traditional culture has influenced not only the imbalanced gender distribution in modern society, but also people's perspectives on Chinese feminism. Whereas, historically, people passively accepted the patriarchy taught to them by society, Weibo in the social media era, as a communication tool, offers a space for people to promote different messages, as well as express their opinions on gender roles, which opens more conversations about Chinese feminism, both online and in people's everyday lives.

Even though Weibo creates the chance for people to hide behind the screen, rebuke people with few consequences, and follow and receive information that supports what they already likely believe, these common features on social media could encourage women to speak up about the things that they are afraid of in real life, and also give them access to many

empowering messages from feminists' groups. Weibo provides a platform where both Chinese women and men can criticize and challenge the dominant patriarchy, and possibly overturn it in the future. Throughout China's history to the social media era, it is clear that Chinese feminism has made enormous progress toward gender equality, and Chinese people are today more critically aware than ever of patriarchy in their society.

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