

THE REED

2022



GENDER AND POWER IN A GLOBAL ASIA



Photo: Kristy Kelly

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Gender and Power in a Global Asia



Eugenia Lean
Director, Weatherhead East
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Languages and Cultures

For this year’s issue of *The Reed*, we asked students to respond to the following prompt: “What current topic or issue relating to East, Inner, or Southeast Asia has not gotten enough attention but which you believe ought to be explored further?” The resulting submissions covered a range of important topics, but a surprising number of the essays focused on one issue in particular—challenges stemming from gender inequality.

The strong pool of submissions made it difficult to select a winner, but ultimately we were swayed by the unique and interesting angle explored by Yuxin Chen (CC ‘23) in her essay “Gender and (the Lack of) Power.” Chen’s essay considers the fluid relationship between feminism and nationalism in China in light of what is widely referred to as the “Xuzhou chained woman incident,” and established the theme of this year’s *The Reed*: “Gender and Power in a Global Asia.”

Branching out from the foundation set by Chen’s essay, we are pleased to share an excerpt from Kristy Kelly’s manuscript-in-progress, “Feminist Frictions: The Politics of Gender Mainstreaming in Vietnam.” Kelly, an adjunct associate research scholar at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, offers an in-depth look at policy and progress in Vietnam toward gender equity. The eye-catching poster on the cover of this issue comes from her research. We are fortunate to have also received permission to publish an excerpt from WEAI Research Scholar Leta Hong Fincher’s powerful book, *Betraying Big Brother: The Feminist Awakening in China* (Verso 2018).

The topic of gender and law in China has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. Still, we were impressed to learn that a recent virtual workshop organized by WEAI alumnus Li Chen on gender, law, and the trafficking of women attracted an attendance of nearly 1000 people. A summary of that discussion was kindly provided by Chen for this issue. The 2022 issue of *The Reed* concludes with an overview of the thesis research conducted by recent MARSEA graduate Linda Cheng on gender bias of media attention to protests in China. Cheng was selected as a winner of the 2021 GSAS Master’s SynThesis competition for her presentation of this work.

This issue’s theme was decided back in March, before we knew how incredibly relevant it would become for readers in the US. The articles that follow highlight research from the WEAI community on gender, power dynamics, policy, and activism in Asia, with a focus on China and Vietnam. But they reveal much about the way our globalized world presents new complications and offers new opportunities for the international feminist movement, and are certain to resonate beyond the East Asian scholarly community. On that note, thank you for taking the time to read this year’s issue. We hope you find new insights to take with you wherever you may be.

Sincerely,

Eugenia Lean
Director, Weatherhead East Asian Institute

FEATURED STUDENT ESSAY

Gender and (the Lack of) Power

YUXIN CHEN, COLUMBIA COLLEGE '23



Yuxin Chen is a rising senior at Columbia College majoring in Art History with a concentration in East Asian History.

Tides of outrage have swept across the Chinese internet since the beginning of the Year of Tiger. A Douyin video went viral on various social media platforms. Part of a user's live stream, it captured a woman in a dilapidated shack outside her house in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, with chains around her neck. Now referred to as the "Xuzhou chained woman incident," the original video and the ongoing online discourse it provoked have exposed the issue of human trafficking and sexual assault, widespread in rural China, yet in want of administrative acknowledgment and legislative redress.

On top of the tragedies suffered by the victims of rape and trafficking, the incident offers a chilling dissection of the Chinese government's modus operandi. As the internet maelstrom coincided with the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, during which the maintenance of social stability was the utmost priority, deliberate efforts were made by local authorities to appease the crowd. The self-contradicting details in the official statements proved that they were more about providing a false sense of closure than about actually unearthing the truth behind the crimes.

In her Fall 2021 lecture "Gender and Power in China," Professor Dorothy Ko displayed how, in the period of socialist revolutions in the 1950s, women's liberation was often conceived as secondary to the political reforms. When there existed a conflict of interest, the implementation of the Land Reforms, for instance, would be prioritized over that of the 1950 Marriage Law, one that sculpted the ideal image of a conjugal family in which husband and wife were equals. We see that more than seven decades later, the sheer power imbalance in a conjugal unit still persisted in some parts of China. The same theme is still being reprised—with the Xuzhou incident, an opportunity to address the issue of women's rights was again subjugated to the "grander scheme," that of domestic stability as well as steady economic growth.

Aside from the tension between the rights of women and the power of a regime, the case in Xuzhou brought to light a curious transfiguration of nationalism in China, which calls for more academic attention. Amidst the public outcry, voices of suspicion emerged. Many netizens chose to side with the official mouthpiece and questioned the "ulterior motive" of the social activists who were investigating the true identity of the chained woman. To them, those who challenged and undermined the government's credibility were "brainwashed" by US ideology, and the media exposure was a willful attempt to damage China's reputation in international society.

The stifling of feminist activism in favor of maintaining a nationalist narrative is, to me, a phenomenon worthy of further examination. As I learned from Professor Ko's class, attitudes towards women's rights had been drastically different in early 20th-century China. To first-generation male feminists such as Liang Qichao (1873–1929) and Jin Tianhe (1873–1947), the "women's question" was closely tied to the nation's question. In response to China's changing status from an export empire to a debtor nation, Liang and Jin, feeling the deeper psychological crisis of emasculation, advocated for the education and employment of women after the Western model. Though their polemic was essentially self-serving and misogynistic, it was apparent that they saw the advancement of women's rights as crucial to the advancement of a nation. The status quo, however, appears to be the polar opposite. Championing for women's rights—more broadly, LGBTQ rights, worker unions' rights, and even human rights—were somehow seen as evidence of a foreign power's infiltration. But how did such a transfiguration of nationalism take place?

The feminist movement in China faces different challenges and complexities from its counterpart in the United States. In the context of the present-day US, social issues such as the rights of sexual minorities often become politicized, polarized, and partisanized at the level of the state. In China, however, the ruling party asserts its authority not by arguing for or against these issues, but by not talking about them altogether. If more studies can be done about the different forms of entanglement between feminism and nationalism in China and beyond, a more comprehensive paradigm would take shape that can further complicate and complement the current vectors of global feminist discourse.

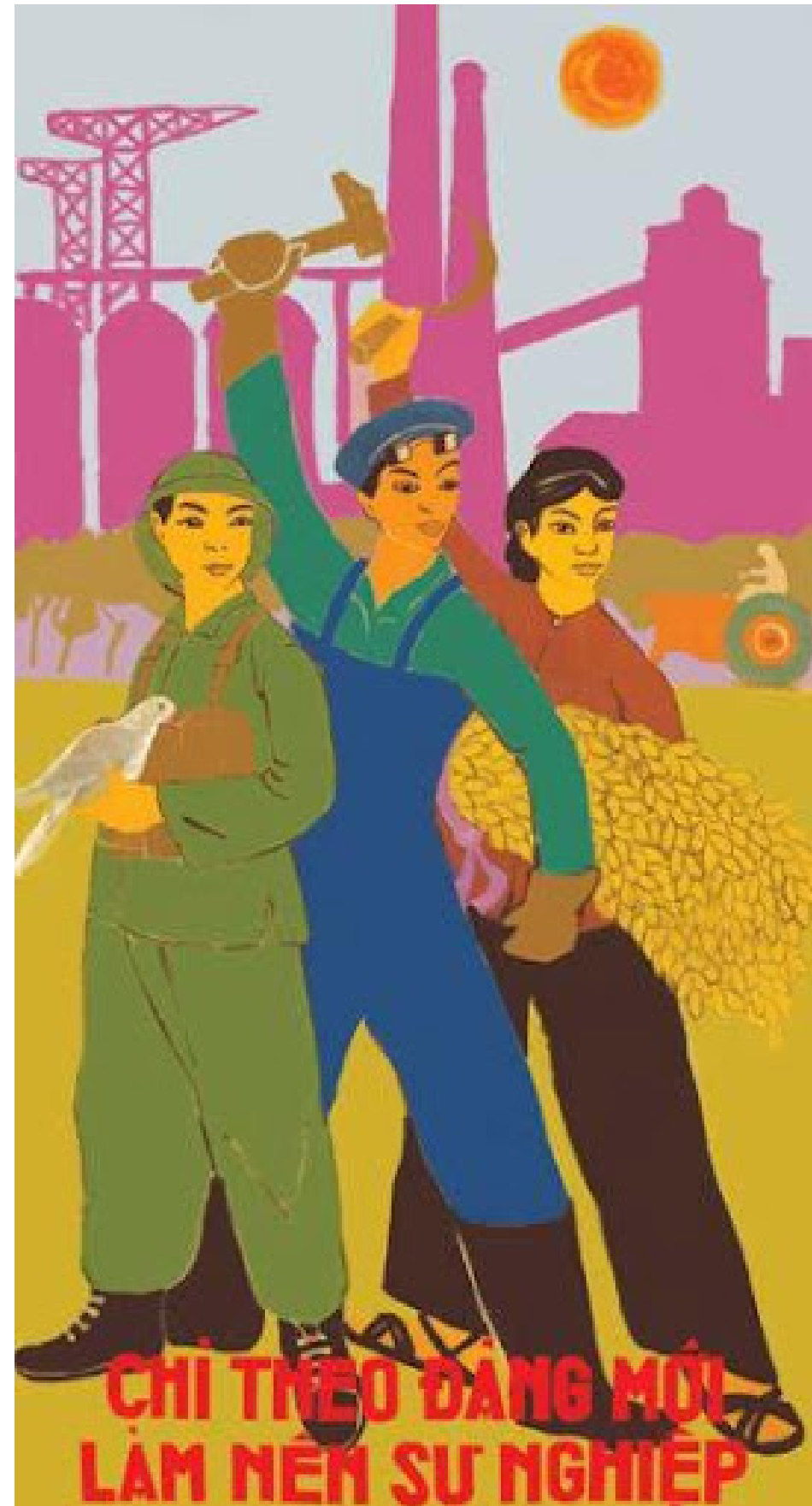
FEMINIST FRICTIONS: THE POLITICS OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN VIETNAM

THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXCERPT FROM A MANUSCRIPT IN PROGRESS,
A 25-YEAR ETHNOGRAPHY OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN VIETNAM.

I first met Chau, a 44-year-old rice farmer, at a workshop designed to train Vietnamese Women’s Union leaders to bring a global development policy called gender mainstreaming into their district and commune-level work. Rather than conceptualizing women as a separate category needing special attention or programs, gender mainstreaming was designed to bring women and gender into all levels of economic development programming. First introduced in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, it quickly became the global strategy aimed at addressing equity during economic growth. Vietnam adopted gender mainstreaming into its national development plan in 2001 with two goals: to align the country with global gender equality frameworks, and to address growing internal inequalities resulting from *đổi mới* (renovation), the policy reforms designed to transition the economy to market-socialism and integrate into the global economy.

As Chau learned about various United Nations conventions, gender equality laws, and communication skills to empower village women to have their voices heard, she also learned the language of choice and markets, rights, and empowerment. This was the language of liberal development and individual achievement, and she was not impressed. “I have always had equality,” she told me. “My husband was a drunk and gambled away our money. I divorced him after my second child. I do all the housework. I fix things when they are broken, and I even take the yoke to the buffalo [work normally reserved for men]. Whatever happened to ‘comrade’? My problems are not because I am a woman. They are because I am poor.”

Chau’s concerns speak directly to the unequal burdens that poor women, particularly older rural farmers like her, faced during Vietnam’s transition to market development. To her, the language of “comrade” (*đồng chí*) symbolized promises the State made to address ethnic and class divisions between urban and rural women, who were perceived as particularly vulnerable to men in general, but also to urban-elite women. “I don’t need help claiming my rights,” she explained to me. “I need development to stop sacrificing them in the name of economic growth.” Her question “whatever happened to ‘comrade’?” was a direct challenge to the younger, urban, and globally connected gender practitioners facilitating the workshop. By asking the question, she challenged them to find a way to reconcile urban-rural, global-local, ethnic majority-minority, and individual-communitarian dichotomies that were reshaping gender, generation and class relations in her community.





Vietnam has been promoted as a regional leader for gender equality and gender mainstreaming policy, which is part of the development lexicon. It is also a country where the United Nations and other international donors have played a decisive role in building institutions and connecting women into the regional and global women's movements. These international norms evoked particular state responses. Early on, domestic roles for women were promoted in the state-controlled media as Vietnam's best defense against the "social evils" of a capitalist global economy. The Vietnam Women's Union, which operates directly under the umbrella of the Communist Party, played a central role in conveying official norms for gender relations. These official norms prioritized women's role in promoting family harmony and improving household production. As might be expected, promoting gender mainstreaming and women's equality vis-à-vis men often, but not always, came into conflict with the task of empowering women in their roles as wives and mothers. Chau's story reflects the experiences of many women for whom gender equality intersects with class, generation, ethnicity and geographic location (with rural and ethnic minority women having different needs and interests from women in urban and peri-urban spaces).

Understanding what gender mainstreaming means, why and how it is used, and what role it plays (or how it is resisted) at the local level, illuminates different political projects operating in Vietnam. In my research, I find there are four political projects, each vying for power over the framing and implementation of development policy, and each embedded in different assumptions about gender, equality and development.

The transnational feminist project includes the work of national, international and transnational organizations engaged in bringing Vietnam's commitment to gender equality in line with globally agreed-upon standards of women's rights, as delineated in international conventions to which Vietnam is signatory. Vietnam was one of the first countries in the world to adopt gender mainstreaming as national policy in 2001.

This was the result of feminist organizing by Vietnamese women who participated in the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. They brought back with them notions of "women's rights as human rights" connecting Vietnamese women to a "global sisterhood" of leaders working to dismantle patriarchy.

The transnational feminist project often comes into tension with the national cultural preservation project, which works to maintain women's privileged position as bearers of neo-traditional motherhood ideals with responsibility to preserve family harmony and raise happy, healthy children. It aims to maintain family relations across the different roles and responsibilities imagined for men and women in society (men as "pillars of the household," income-producers and decision-makers; women as wives and mothers fulfilling their "heavenly mandate" to produce and raise children). Although defined in terms of difference, the value of women's contribution is considered equal to that of men (as each hold up "half the sky"). This project is reinforced by state and non-state actors through discourses and practices that reify women's work as wives and mothers. The Women's Union (as one arm of the Communist Party) plays a particularly important role in helping women achieve and maintain family harmony.

Similarly, the socialist political independence project is also primarily a state-centered project, working under the guidance of the Communist Party of Vietnam, and also through national universities and research institutes, the media, government offices, and mass organizations. The goal is to maintain a socialist political system and collectivist socialist identity among the face of global capitalism. Part of the state's intent is to preserve the control of a one-party system of government and thus the control of the Communist Party. This has become an increasingly important political project in recent years considering growing disparities in wealth between the different regions, urban-rural, and between ethnic communities.



Democratic processes and language used by those engaged in the socialist political independence project stress the importance of inclusive participation by all citizens in development and nation-building. Gender mainstreaming as a policy and process is promoted with the aim to increase all women's representation in local and national decision-making bodies. It engages gender equality frames—such as the “comrade” frames employed by Chau— to address growing class, age and ethnic divisions among women.

The fourth political project, although by no means the least important, is the global economic integration project. It is promoted by the Vietnamese nation-state as a stated goal for integration into global markets and raising GDP. It is supported by the international and national business community, the international financial system and most multilateral donors such as the World Bank, IMF and Asian Development Bank. It is also supported by most bilateral donors, who have a stake in improved trade relations and markets for their products. The dominant understanding of gender and gender equality is to integrate women into productive enterprises for greater efficiency in national economic growth. The focus is on women's labor-market contributions, either in the public sphere as paid workers, or as leaders in what has been termed “shopfront” capitalism where women manage shops and small and medium enterprises started in their homes. Gender mainstreaming in this project aims to “empower” women, particularly the rural poor, ethnic minorities, or those with less education, to overcome their disadvantages in competing in local and global markets, or to become more efficient workers. The global economic integration project overlaps with the previous two political projects through an emphasis on women's work as small-scale producers and service providers at home where they retain “flexible” schedules to provide important support in elder-care, sick-care and childcare in the face of declining state support for these services.

Gender mainstreaming trainings, such as the one that Chau attended, are taking place at the intersection of these four political projects. As gender and development practitioners work to translate gender mainstreaming policies into local discourse and practice for participants, they reframe gender equality away from critiques of patriarchy, colonialism or global capitalism for which solutions are structural. Instead, gender equality becomes an individual problem to which women are taught how to recognize their rights, or “lean in” to claim them. As Chau notes, focusing on individual needs and action turns the responsibility of gender equality to individually empowered citizens rather than the state. Her question, “whatever happened to comrade?” is a challenge on behalf of nationalist, socialist and post-colonial feminists questioning liberal and neoliberal assumptions about gender, equality and development. If not taken seriously gender mainstreaming risks both (re)inscribing global systems of intersecting gender-generation-race/ethnic-class inequalities and perpetuating the development project itself. How these struggles get worked out on the ground illuminates the transformational potential of gender mainstreaming, and the political opportunities for transnational feminist activism in Vietnam and around the world.



All images provided by Kristy Kelly



Kristy Kelly is a research scholar at Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia and Associate Professor in the School of Education at Drexel University.

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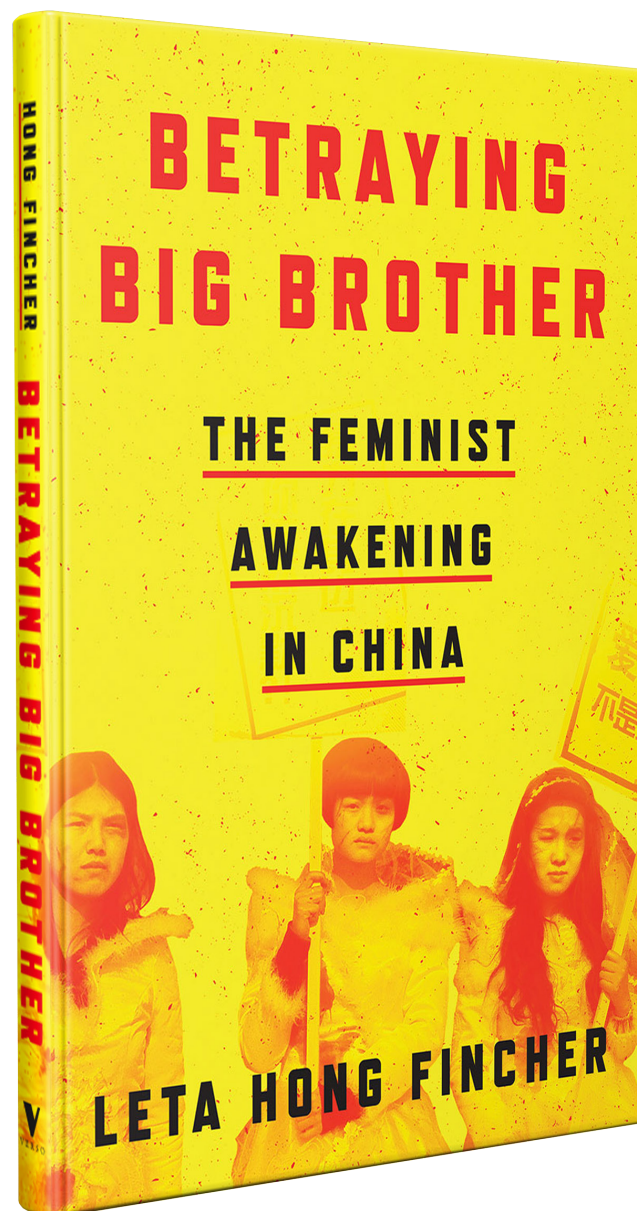
An excerpt from

Betraying Big Brother: The Feminist Awakening in China

by Leta Hong Fincher

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Verso (2018)



Leta Hong Fincher is a research scholar at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Columbia, and a journalist.

When I visited Hangzhou in November 2015—roughly half a year after the Feminist Five were released—two feminist activists in their twenties invited me to tour the city’s most scenic landmark, West Lake, in the middle of a rainstorm. We paid an old man to row us across the lake in a small boat covered with an awning to keep us semi-dry. As the rain fell, Gina (a pseudonym) and Zhu Xixi, a feminist PhD student at Zhejiang University, told me how state security agents had summoned them for questioning several times since the detention of the Feminist Five. Gina’s landlord had just threatened to evict her after coming under pressure from the police, while Zhu Xixi was warned that she might be expelled from her university.

After talking and rowing for a while, Gina and Zhu pointed to one of the fog-shrouded, gray stone bridges curving over the lake and said that the tomb of China’s most famous feminist revolutionary, Qiu Jin, was near there. A native of Zhejiang Province, Qiu Jin was beheaded in 1907 in the city of Shaoxing, about thirty-seven miles from Hangzhou, for plotting to overthrow the Qing empire.

Zhu explained that she and her feminist sisters used to sing Qiu Jin’s protest song, “Demand Women’s Rights.” “But the words were too archaic and hard to remember,” said Zhu. When the film *Les Misérables* came out, a team of feminists adapted one of the songs, “Do You Hear the People Sing?” and rewrote the lyrics into “A Song for All Women,” which is much easier to memorize. “Will you join me / In the long fight for our rights?” goes the new song. It has become the feminist movement’s anthem of solidarity.

“Hey, let’s take a picture here!” Zhu suggested, so I took out my phone and we snapped some photos from our boat as Gina and Zhu smiled, holding up two fingers to flash the V-for-Victory sign. That moment with young feminist activists in a rainstorm on Hangzhou’s West Lake, near Qiu Jin’s tomb, seemed pregnant with history.

One hundred and ten years earlier, at the tumultuous turn of the twentieth century, the cross-dressing feminist icon, Qiu Jin, was writing songs, lyrical poems, and essays aimed at emancipating Chinese women and urging them to join the Nationalist (Guomindang) revolution. In 1905, she joined the revolutionary league of the future president of the Republic of China, Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan). She also began writing one of her most important—yet unfinished—works, *Stones of the Jingwei Bird*, a song combined with traditional oral narrative in a form known as the *tanci*, which alternated between prose and sung poetry.

Qiu Jin left her husband and two children behind in China to study and give political speeches to Chinese students in Tokyo, where she wrote much of *Stones of the Jingwei Bird*. As one version of the Chinese legend of Jingwei has it, the youngest daughter of Fiery Emperor Yandi was named Nüwa, meaning “Little Girl.” Nüwa longed to see the sun rise over the ocean, so she rowed in a boat out to the East Sea at dawn. As she was rowing, the cruel East Sea whipped up a heavy storm that capsized her boat and drowned her.

At the moment of her death, Nüwa transformed into a magnificent bird with a white beak and large red claws, screaming out “jingwei, jingwei!” in anger and pain. Jingwei, the soul of Nüwa named after the sound of her anguished screams, sought revenge by picking up stones in her claws from the mountain where she used to live, flying back and dropping them into the sea each day to fill it up. The East Sea mocked Jingwei and told her to abandon her pitiful effort. “You silly little bird, how could you ever dream of filling me up with those stupid stones?” But she vowed never to give up. Jingwei would persist every day for thousands of years—no matter how long it took—until she succeeded in filling the sea.

Qiu Jin used the myth of Jingwei as a metaphor for the struggle of Chinese women fighting for their freedom and their country. “With all my heart, I beseech and beg my [two hundred] million female compatriots to assume their responsibility as citizens. Arise! Arise! Chinese women, arise!” she wrote. “Chinese women will throw off their shackles and stand up with passion; they will all become heroines. They will ascend the stage of the new world, where the heavens have mandated that they reconsolidate the Nation.”

Qiu Jin herself was beheaded at the age of thirty-one, before she could finish writing *Stones of the Jingwei Bird*. Her life and work have interesting parallels with the resistance of young feminists in China today, who are so often ridiculed as inconsequential “little girls.” The legend of Jingwei gave rise to the Chinese aphorism *jingwei tian hai*, “Jingwei fills the sea,” meaning perseverance in carrying out an enormous task against seemingly impossible odds.

Translated excerpt of Qiu Jin’s “Stones of the Jingwei Bird” from *Writing Women in Modern China: An Anthology of Women’s Literature from the Early Twentieth Century*, edited by Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 45.

AN INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON GENDER AND LEGAL TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN CHINESE HISTORY

On March 6, 2022, an "International Workshop on Gender, Law, and Women in Chinese History" was held in response to the enormous public interest in better understanding the social, cultural, juridical, and historical conditions of women in China and the continued struggle for effective solutions to the problems of women trafficking and mistreatment both there and in other countries.

The recent surge of Chinese public interest in these issues was mostly caused by the viral images and reports on the Internet and in Chinese social media right after the Lunar New Year of 2022 about a woman who was suspected to have been sold to a man and was found to be chained in dark rural house in Jiangsu province in the images.

Although the provincial government's investigations later challenged most of the suspected criminalities in this case, this controversy by then had already captivated tens of millions of Chinese netizens for weeks and they eagerly shared earlier reports of other instances of women/children trafficking and mistreatment while explicitly or implicitly criticizing the institutional and societal neglect of these tenacious problems.

For a few weeks, the public demonstrated an

insatiable interest in scholarly publications and systematic analysis regarding the related topics. Reviews of academic books on women trafficking in China, the US and other countries were avidly read and widely shared. It is in this context that the workshop was organized.

In the three and a half hours of the webinar, a range of relevant issues were discussed at the roundtable, including gender roles and women trafficking in historical and modern China, what legal, socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors might have caused or perpetuated these problems in different time periods, and what kinds of effective remedies might be advisable from historical and comparative perspectives. We received a lot of positive feedback from the audience and panelists.

The international roundtable was attended by nearly 1000 people and was just one of the public scholarly conversations we have organized as part of two well-received monthly public lecture series ("International Lecture Series on East Asian Legal Cultures" since August 2020 and "New Directions in China Studies" since September 2021).

We organized this event mostly through a multi-linguistic new-media platform, known as the Yunli Scholars, that Professor Ruoyun Bai and I have started

in June 2020, using digital media and new technologies to create and distribute public knowledge and promote scholarly collaboration and conversations across national, cultural, linguistic and political boundaries in response to the rising anxiety and isolation in the eras of the pandemic and escalated geopolitical tensions.

The platform has since published more than 160 issues of original content, including accessible research articles, newsletters about new books and research talks, and more than a dozen in-depth interviews with leading international scholars of China, including Professors Dorothy Ko, Eugenia Lean, and Lydia Liu of Columbia University and Professors Peter Perdue of Yale University and Prasenjit Duara of Duke University, among others.

We have a series of other scholarly events coming up and details can be found at <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/cgi-bin/home?t=home/>

About the author:

Li Chen is currently Associate Professor of Chinese History and Law at the University of Toronto. He received his PhD in Chinese history from the History Department of Columbia University in 2009 and his JD from the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign).

Organized by Ruoyun Bai and Li Chen & Yunli yuetianxia

International Roundtable on Gender, Law, and Women Trafficking in Chinese History

6:30-9:30 p.m., March 5, 2022, EST

Free Zoom Registration @ <http://t.cn/A6x2Uchg>

7:30-10:30 a.m., March 6, Beijing time

Live broadcast also @ <http://navo.top/UN7ZFv>

ROUNDTABLE CHAIRS

Li Chen

University of Toronto



Ying Zhang

Ohio State University



ROUNDTABLE SPEAKERS



Ruoyun Bai

University of Toronto



Shuang Chen

University of Iowa



Xiaoping Cong

University of Houston



Mara Yue Du

Cornell University



Siyen Fei

University of Pennsylvania



Mio Kishimoto

Ochanomizu University



Sida Liu

University of Toronto



Zhao Ma

Washington University in St. Louis



Johanna Ransmeier

University of Chicago



Matthew Sommer

Stanford University



Tianian Zheng

SUNY, Cortland

Accounting for the Gender-Protest-Media Triad Using Quantitative and Computational Methods

LINDA CHENG, MARSEA '22

Introduction

Is media attention to protest events gendered? This is the central motivating question of my MA thesis research (Cheng, Lu and Zhang 2022). This question is pertinent given the rise of women's representation in protests worldwide (Henderson and Jeydel 2007)—even in countries like China, where collective action is taboo (Chan and Ngai 2009; Smith and Ngai 2006). The increasing relevance of the media—particularly social media—in the spread of information and protest mobilization makes this question all the more salient (Caren, Andrews and Lu, 2020; Qin, Strömberg and Wu 2017; Roberts 2018; Stockmann and Luo 2017). Furthermore, much research in diverse contexts have demonstrated the importance of media attention for raising public support for protests and increasing their chances of success.

As such, the question of whether gender bias influences media attention to protests is highly relevant for understanding mechanisms of patriarchal stratification in contentious politics. However, while there exists a rich bank of scholarship regarding the media and protest in China, there is scant literature to be found regarding the gendered stratification of media attention to protests in any regional context. To this end, my MA thesis presents the first systematic analysis of gender bias in media selection and description of protests, with particular application to China. At the larger level, my MA thesis analyzes the triadic relationship between gender, protest, and media.

Methods

With the introduction of applied novel computational methods to the social sciences, the boundaries of what sociologists can analyze has greatly surpassed previous limits, especially with regards to scraping and analyzing previously unattainable data—this is especially salient in the Chinese context (Cheng and Lu 2022). The data that my MA thesis uses, CASM-China (Collective Action from Social Media in China), contains over 100,000 actual protest events spread throughout China from 2010 to 2017. CASM-China was developed by Zhang and Pan (2019), and applies a two-step deep learning algorithm to identify collective action events and their related data points from both text and image posts on Weibo (Chinese microblogging site). Manual validation tests demonstrate that CASM-China identifies 10 to 100 times more protest events than newspaper-based datasets. Under the supervision of Professors Yao Lu (Columbia-Sociology) and Han Zhang (HKUST-Sociology), I utilized natural language processing (NLP), descriptive statistics, and regression models to measure the relationship between media selection and description, and protest events as categorized by gender ratio.

Findings

The gender makeup and characteristics of protest events within my MA thesis distinguishes itself from the common findings of gendered protest behavior in the Euro-American contexts: I found that women-dominated protests in China are (1) represented more in violent forms of protest, (2) target the government more, and (3) make up a higher proportion of protest events overall, as compared to men-dominated protests. Furthermore, I found that the top three protest-motivating issues of women-dominated protests are rural land disputes against coercive (and often violent) commercial buyouts, medical-related disputes, and unpaid wages disputes. In essence, women-dominated protests in China are highly represented by rural, working-class women; they undertake violent methods and target the government more than corresponding men-dominated protests.

In accounting for gendered media bias, I distinguish between two types of media accounts present in China: government and news media outlets. The results indicated that women-dominated protests, despite being more violent and risky, are less likely than men-dominated protests to receive coverage in both government and news media outlets (media selection bias). Furthermore, when reporting on women-dominated protests, government media sources tend to describe them as more passive than men-dominated protests (media description bias). The behavior of these two media types manifest in similar yet distinct ways, both with negative consequences for women-dominated protests. Specifically, government media is more likely to enact description bias against women-dominated protests, while news media is more likely to enact description bias in favor of men-dominated protests (i.e. describing men-dominated protests in a more favorable sentiment).

The Gender-Protest-Media Triad

Taken together, my research illuminates a triadic relationship between gender, protest, and the media, in which (1) largely lower-class women participate in protests as a reactive response to exploitative conditions, often targeting the government and undertaking violent methods; (2) women-dominated protests are disproportionately underreported and misrepresented in the media, depriving them of public attention and leaving them less able to push institutions to respond to their demands; (3) women protesters are left with little choice but to continue protesting.

While my MA thesis focuses specifically on China, the gender-protest-media triad is by no means unique to China. Patriarchal mechanisms of political stratification is a world-wide phenomenon, and my findings mark one point of a larger system that unevenly distributes resources, opportunities, capital, and life outcomes among hierarchical socially-created groups.

My MA research is the first to systematically investigate gender bias in media attention to protests in China. The results have important ramifications for social science subfields spanning gender studies, protest studies, political sociology, media studies, China studies, and computational social science. It is my hope that this research can encourage more scholars to undertake a gender lens when analyzing media and political institutions in diverse international contexts, exploring how institutions both engender and are molded by cross-cutting sociopolitical hierarchies.



Linda Cheng is a 2022 graduate of the Master of Arts in Regional Studies - East Asia (MARSEA) program. She was awarded third place in the 5th Annual GSAS Master's SynThesis competition in 2021 for her presentation, "Gender Dynamics of Protest and Visibility in China: Biased Erasure and Manufactured Passivity"

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