



#MeToo with Chinese Characteristics
– Analysis through The Lens of Chinese Feminism

Abstract

As a victim-survivor and a feminist activist who participated in the #MeToo movement in China, I always have confusion and questions generated from experiences and observations. The limited literature on the #MeToo movements in China rarely applies China situated frameworks, affecting the effectiveness of the understanding. This article focuses on 'how do #MeToo movement(s) manifest and evolve in China' and aims to find out the specificity of its manifestations in China. Through analysing two archives and my autoethnography with He-Yin Zhen's feminist analytical concepts '*nannü*' and '*shengji*', Confucian moral outlook and Chinese characteristics, I find that the #MeToo movements in China are influenced by the underlying *nannü*-ed Confucian moral outlook, which contributes to their Chinese characteristics. I also find that there is not one monolithic #MeToo movement in China but many diversified ones with different agendas, and the mobilisation and formation highly depend on the initiating and participating individuals. These findings stress the importance of the historic-cultural context and understanding personal perspectives in studying social movements. This article illustrates that we need to explore more on situated feminist research to reconstruct the feminist studies in the global south context, and that feminist movements need to challenge the historic-cultural context and the dominant romanticising and elitising discourses to develop sustainably.

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List of Abbreviations and Translations

Abbreviations

#MeTooCN-----#MeToo movement in China

Archive#MeTooCN-----#MeToo in China Archives 2018.1-2019.7

WG-----*women de gushi*

CCP-----Chinese Communist Party

Translations

public-good-----*gongyi*, 公益

name/position-----*ming*, 名

Correct the name-----*Chengming*, 正名

Benevolence-----*Jen*, 仁

Ritual-----*Li*, 礼

Moderation, moderate-----*zhongyong*, 中庸

prosperity and strength-----*fuqiang*, 富强

woman, female-----*nü*, 女

man, male-----*nan*, 男

livelihood-----*shengji*, 生计

male superior female inferior-----*nanzun nübei*, 男尊女卑

male/female equality-----*nannü pingdeng*, 男女平等

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Introduction

On 1 January 2018, Luo Xixi, a former graduate student at Beihang University, shared on Weibo² that her then professor Chen Xiaowu, a well-acknowledged professor and a Changjiang Scholar³, sexually harassed her seven years ago. In her post, Luo mentioned Harvey Weinstein, #MeToo in Hollywood, and her intention to protect future female students from being violated by Chen again (Archive#MeTooCN Volunteers 2019), which signified the start of the #MeToo movement in China (#MeTooCN) (Zeng 2019: 72). Luo's post ignited the higher education sector. 25 professors were exposed on social media by their previous students afterwards, which initiated a public discussion on teaching demeanour and ethics and building anti-sexual harassment procedures in universities (Archive#MeTooCN Volunteers, 2019). However, the disclosures were not limited to higher education. It spread to the public-good (*gongyi*, 公益) sector and mass media nearly simultaneously in July, then onwards to other culture-related industries (Zeng 2019). University authorities started ordering the students to delete posts in March 2018, threatening not to let them graduate or pressuring their parents to control them. In July, the state started censoring #MeToo posts to limit online public discussions after the sexual harassment allegation against Zhu Jun, a well-known host in China Central Television Station (Archive#MeTooCN Volunteers, 2019). Hashtags like 'MeToo', Chinese alternatives 'woyeshi'(我也是) and the other creative mutations were censored and relevant posts deleted, feminist social media accounts were closely scrutinised or completely erased (Zeng 2020, Zeng 2019, Kuo 2018). The movement started subsiding. However, the status of previous cases is still actively updated, and new #MeToo stories keep emerging on social media until now⁴.

² Weibo functions as Twitter in China.

³ Changjiang Scholar (Yangtze River Scholar) is a program with good monetary reward (RMB 100,000 – 360,000 per annum) for Chinese scholars who research and teach in Chinese universities to attract high talents. http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A04/s7098/201208/t20120824_167890.html

⁴ Recently there was a rape allegation against a prominent star Kris Wu in China (BBC News 2021), for which netizens used 'another #MeToo case' to refer to, so in my opinion, although it slowed down due to profit-generating and attention-seeking media logic and political oppression, #MeTooCN will not end.

Initiated by African American activist Tarana Burke in 2006 focusing on marginalised women (Loney-Howes 2019: 30), the US #MeToo movement did not gain broad public attention until the white Hollywood actress Alyssa Milano tweeted 'If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet' in October 2017 (Mendes & Ringrose 2019: 42). This tweet generated intensive global media coverage and public debate (Fireborn & Loney-Howes 2019). Soon the allegations went beyond the US and invoked (re)actions in 33 countries⁵: Feminists in Egypt started their version #AnaKaman and share stories to empower each other (Matar 2018); Korean feminist activists formed a network 'Citizens Action with #MeToo movement', mobilised nationwide and pushed for legal reforms (CIVICUS 2018); feminist activists in Argentina harnessed the public attention as a booster to push forward the existing agenda of legalising abortion (Garibotti & Hopp 2019).

Although it achieved significant influence, there is no unified definition regarding the movement. Introducing Franks's definition, the #MeToo movement is 'an unleashing of women's stories, a wave of women's voices rushing to speak painful truths, to bear witness, to demand justice' (2019: 72). In this dissertation, #MeTooCN is approached as a movement for people – majorly women – to share their experiences of sexual violence both online and offline to raise awareness and pursue justice. I use 'victim-survivor' to refer to people who suffered from sexual violence to acknowledge both parts of our identities, and offenders for those who committed sexual violence. Sexual violence is used as an encompassing term to include all the types of sexual violence involved in the archives including sexual harassment and others.

#MeTooCN made progress as well as missteps. Judicially, on 11 July 2019, the first judicial victory for all the #MeToo cases proceeded to court was achieved in Chengdu (Kuo 2019). Legally, efforted by feminist advocates, the Civil Code passed in May 2020 adopted a more comprehensive definition and more gender-inclusive range of 'sexual harassment' (Li 2020). Socially, many Chinese women were empowered to share their stories, to validate and support each other in the hostile patriarchal environment (Zeng 2019). Although faced comprehensive internet censorship, surveillance and political persecution, #MeTooCN participants pushed forward to

⁵ Wikipedia 'Me Too movement' page: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me_Too_movement

catylase vigorous public discussions (Li 2020). Indeed, #MeTooCN also showed limitations. A hegemonic narrative emerged to exclude other unfitting ones in mass media and social media, in which marginalised women, for instance, lower-classed, less-educated, disabled women's experiences were not effectively heard nor sufficiently publicised (Archive#MeTooCN Volunteers 2019).

As a feminist activist who participated in and contributed to #MeTooCN, I have confusions and questions that I failed to resolve with Chinese and English literature. Therefore, in this research, I explore the question:

How does the #MeToo movement(s) manifest and evolve in China?

Within which I focus on three sub-questions:

- a. What makes #MeTooCN a movement with 'Chinese characteristics'?
- b. What can we learn from its manifestation and processes as a social movement, especially from an insider's personal perspective?
- c. How can we apply the learning to building future feminist movements in the ever-changing authoritarian context in China?

Furthermore, there is limited academic literature on #MeTooCN, most of which applies western theoretical frameworks without contextual appropriation. To answer the questions, I utilise '*nannü*' and '*shengji*' concepts that feminist theorist He-Yin Zhen developed in 1907 as the main theoretical framework, Confucian moral outlook and Chinese characteristics as contextual frameworks to conduct archival analysis and case study on two archives – #MeToo in China Archives 2018.1-2019.7 (Archive#MeTooCN) and *women de gushi* (WG). Archive#MeTooCN was organised by volunteers, while WG was conducted in 2019 by myself on behalf of Wequality - a feminist organisation I founded in 2016. With most academic literature theorising social movement in macro, structural, bird-view perspectives, I deploy the long-standing feminist tradition of 'politicising the personal' (hooks 1989) to provide my personal, emotional, insider's perspective in China's challenging political context. Therefore, with the support of the referred frameworks, I also conduct an autoethnographic

analysis of my experience, learnings, and reflections as a feminist activist working in #MeTooCN. I use Chinese phonetics to refer to He-Yin's concepts and English translation for other Chinese concepts to keep readers on track.

This dissertation includes eight sections: in the introduction, I briefly introduce the topic and the context, stated my research questions and outlined the structure of the dissertation; next, I cover the context of #MeTooCN from four perspectives; afterwards, I review the relevant literature and give the rationale why I study this movement on the selected data with the chosen analytical framework; then, I explain my research context and methodology; next, I demonstrate my analytical framework; subsequently, I analyse the cases and my experience; then, I discuss the findings, the implications, the limitations of the research and suggestions for future researches; finally, I give my conclusion.

Next, I introduce the context for #MeTooCN.

Context

China's unique historical, political, judicial, and socio-cultural contexts at #MeTooCN's emergence are crucial to understanding #MeTooCN's Chinese characteristics. Here I briefly introduce them.

Historically, women's social status and feminist movements have evolved significantly in contemporary China. In the late Qing dynasty, with 'enlightenment' brought in by European countries' invasion, Chinese intellectuals considered women's illiteracy and immobility as the problem stopping the nation's prosperity and strength (*fuqiang*, 富强). They then advocated for women's education, health, and public participation by starting women's school, criticising foot-binding culture, and allowing female intellectuals to share opinions to gain China national power, which signified the beginning of the Chinese feminist movement(s) (Li 2000). At the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), male/female equality (*nannü pingdeng*, 男女平等)

was written in the Chinese constitution as one fundamental national policy; women's divorce rights and land rights were guaranteed by law as the results of state feminists' efforts (Wang 2005). Therefore, state measures boosted women's education and formal economic participation from the 1950s to the 1980s (Bauer et al. 1992). However, the economic reform since 1992 influenced women's status both positively and negatively. On the one hand, Women modernised and integrated with the world (Lin 2003) and gained individual awareness of self rather than being a part of the working unit (Li 2000). On the other, urban women were especially disadvantaged with a higher lay-off rate, earlier retirement, less social support and re-employment opportunities in the lay-off in state-owned enterprises than men (Lin 2003), while rural women remained the last to benefit from the reform (ibid, also see National Bureau of Statistics 2003). In the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 (World Economic Forum 2009-2021), China ranked 107 among 156 countries, going backwards consecutively since 2008. To prepare for the World Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, feminist scholars came together to discuss women's rights in China and exchange feminist ideas (Wang 1997). Women's studies and gender studies research were accelerated, organisations were founded while the leaders maintained their roles in academic and political institutions (Li & Li 2017). In 2012, a new generation of feminist activists emerged with limited resources, whose strategy was to 'make news' by building close relations with the commercialised mass media and utilising social media to focus on specific gender issues (ibid). With the development of technology and personal electronic devices usage, and the increasing time spent on social media, netizens find ways to organise against or for specific gender issues online (Wu & Dong 2019).

Politically, state measures against civic movements, media and cyberspace freedom are becoming increasingly repressive (Freedom House 2019a). The ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has tightened its control over the state bureaucracy, mass media, online speech, religious groups, universities, businesses, and civil society associations (ibid). In March 2018, the amendment of the constitution was passed for the party leader Xi Jinping to remain in power unlimitedly constitutionally⁶. Meanwhile, a new National Supervisory Commission was established to lead anti-corruption

⁶ In the original constitution, the president of China could only be in position for two terms with five years each term. In the 13th National People's Congress in March 2018, the amendment of the constitution passed for the president of China to stay in position for more than two terms.

movements, which blurred the boundary between the party and the state even more (ibid). Furthermore, the crackdown on civil society organisations, prosecutions of activists and human rights lawyers has continued (ibid). On 6 March 2015, five feminist activists were arrested and detained for their planned anti-sexual harassment demonstration on International Women's Day (Wang 2015). After implementing Cybersecurity Law in 2017, numerous new technological measures made China 'the world's worst abuser of internet freedom' (Freedom House 2019a, 2019b). The detainment/imprisonment of Chinese netizens accessing or sharing 'sensitive' information online and the growing erasure of particular contents further generated self-censorship and reduced space for online mobilisation (Freedom House 2019b).

#MeTooCN was constructed as an anti-sexual harassment movement; however, there was no clear definition of sexual harassment in the laws in China until 2021. In 2005, China's 'Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests' revision included regulations against sexual harassment for the first time (CN 2005). However, the protected subject was only women, and neither the definition of 'sexual harassment' nor the remedy procedure was clearly stated. The 2012 'Special Rules on the Labour Protection of Female Employees' added employers' obligation to protect female employees from sexual harassment, without stating what obligation and how to take responsibility. Regarding the practice of these laws, there was a significantly low number of litigated sexual harassment cases, and the offenders often deployed the legal ambiguity against the victim-survivors in court (Wequality 2019: 112-122).

The socio-cultural context is more nuanced, with the traditional Confucian culture, imported liberal market value, and the state manipulation intertwining and intersecting. Confucianism has been a dominant governmental doctrine for more than 2,000 years and reconstructed in the past two decades to consolidate CCP's authoritarian control (Jiang 2018). In the planned economy era, the dominant gender discourse was that state discourse 'male/female equality' manipulated traditional Confucian discourse elastically (Wu 2010). Since the introduction of the market economy, it changed to liberal market discourse as the core driver leading, incorporating and contesting the state and traditional discourses dynamically (ibid). Meanwhile, the state incorporated a denigrating term 'leftover woman' to push educated women to marry and bear

children with comprehensive propaganda since 2006 (Fincher 2014). Traditional Confucian gender values, imported liberal market values, and the state control of women's contest and cooperation paint the socio-cultural contexts in which #MeTooCN emerged.

The historical, political, judicial and legal, and socio-cultural contexts interacted and enhanced each other in a nuanced way in China, which much academic literature fails to consider. Next, I review what has been written on #MeTooCN and what is left understudied.

Literature Review

There is not much literature on #MeTooCN in English academia and even less in Chinese academia, although the public discussion is vibrant in social media and mass media. In this section, I review what has been written on #MeToo and social movement in China, how it is delivered and what I can contribute.

Plenty of English literature on #MeTooCN is on women's empowerment and awareness-raising. Lin & Yang's (2019) investigation on women's engagement individually and collectively in #MeTooCN finds that women are empowered because a) Individually they raised awareness of sexual harassment, rescued themselves and reconstructed their identities, b) They supported each other collectively, which challenged the unequal power system. In Zhou & Qiu's (2020) digital survey, they find that 'hashtag feminism' like #MeToo provides an economically low-cost and politically low-risk means for women who lack resources to participate in social change in China. Through an online survey and the analysis among university students, Chen, Huang & Jiang (2020) find that exposure to #MeToo increases bystanders' awareness of sexual assault and the possibility to intervene.

There is also a lot on social movement formation and public mobilisation in digital China. Zhang & Caidi's (2019) study on Weibo finds that while feminist groups and

organisations face more significant suppression and censorship, Chinese netizens respond rapidly by creating new hashtags and achieve disguised collective action. Applying the connective theoretical framework, Zeng (2020) finds that digital technologies in #MeTooCN are essential to change feminist activism, while the fragmentation of digital allegations maintains the movement's sustainability in the authoritarian political context. Han (2021) finds that social media is crucial in China's authoritarian context to empower women and feminist activists against the oppressive patriarchal hegemonic discourses because it provides a discursive space and a dialogic space. With the convenience provided by the internet, the Chinese diaspora overseas plays a crucial role in introducing the movement to China (Zeng 2020), participating and developing the public discussion to a broader range (Sun 2020, Zhang & Caidi 2019). All the referred literature applies western born and developed frameworks without Chinese contextual appropriation; little acknowledges the influence of the traditional gendered Confucian values.

Although theories produced in the global north dominate global knowledge production institutionally, they cannot analyse the southern subjects and phenomena without adaption or cultural appropriation. The homogenised third-world women image produced by US- Euro-centric feminist and humanist discourses (Mohanty 1988) has been criticised and gradually abandoned, 'the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle' are still not sufficiently taken into consideration in cross-cultural feminist research (Mohanty 2003: 502). Tracing back to African Yoruba society's non-gendered hierarchical family structure, Oyewumi (2002) argues that 'gender' as an analytical category is based on the western nuclear family and thus cannot be universalised in societies with different family structures. Through the organisation of the introduction of the history of introducing gender into China, Hershatter and Wang (2012) find that gender as an analytical category requires a historically contextual analysis. In their study on feminist scholarships, Roberts & Connell (2016) argue that in the global knowledge economy, the global north produces theory as the centre to analyse data from the south as periphery in northern institutions in English, which reinforces itself in the process of knowledge production and enhance the subordination of southern scholarships. With their findings, they call for a more democratic feminist scholarship production. Therefore, to fill in the gap and start gesturing an alternative discourse, I

apply a Chinese born feminist theoretical framework, with a supportive historic-cultural concept and a contextual concept in this paper. I acknowledge that theories cannot exist only in one geographical region without influence from elsewhere, and their travel is crucial for academic development and localisation. Therefore, applying Chinese frameworks does not intend to dichotomise south-north or Chinese-American/European theories; instead, it is to explore a different and potentially more contextually appropriate perspective, to decolonise the research on #MeTooCN, and contribute to the reconstruction of feminist analysis in the south (Mohanty 2003).

While there is little, if not none, Chinese academic literature on #MeTooCN, Chinese social media and mass media articles comprehensively touch upon different aspects of it. Through keyword research⁷ on the yearly tables of contents of 2018, 2019 and 2020 of the leading national academic journal on women's studies 'Collection of Women's Studies', I find nothing on #MeTooCN, only on sexual harassment in higher educational institutions (Li 2014, Zhang 2014, Liu 2018, Lin 2019), legal and judicial perspectives (Lu, 2020, Lu 2019, Wang 2020) and policy analysis and suggestions (Li 2018, Kui 2018, Guo 2021, Xue 2021). It is an entirely different picture in Chinese social media. Sun (2018) responds to the widespread concern regarding presumed false allegations in the movement, points out that in the current patriarchal social environment with the stigmatisation of women's expression of sexual violence, this concern is turning a blind eye to victim-survivors' pursuit of justice. Liu (2018) confesses her realisation of victimising herself by exchanging resources with her good-looking-ness without having the vocabulary of 'sexual harassment', and call to support and protect victim-survivors' precious confessions. Huang (2019) reviews the progress and limitations at the first anniversary of #MeTooCN, shows the public the positive institutional changes regarding sexual violence, and advocates acknowledging the significance of the movement and the efforts victim-survivors and supporters made. Although #MeTooCN is a recent movement, and political control plays a significant role in this contrast, it still shows the neglect of #MeTooCN in academic institutions in China.

⁷ When I reviewed the Chinese articles on #MeToo, I researched on keywords 'MeToo' '我也是' and '米兔' (also see Zeng 2019, Li 2020), with the latter two as the alternatives to the censorship of 'MeToo' in Chinese media.

In response to the un-accustomisation of applying western born social movement frameworks to Chinese movements without historical, cultural, political and social appropriation (Zhao 2005, Qi 2017, Lin & Zhang 2018), literature is developed to adapt those theories to Chinese contexts. Lin and Zhang (2018) appropriate Bennett and Segerberg's connective movement theory in Chinese contexts, introduce 'event entrepreneur' as 'sympathetic elites ... and netizens' (ibid: 33), and classify four types of activism: collective action with and without event entrepreneurs, connective action with and without entrepreneurs. They also consider 'state reactions to activism' and 'time' crucial to dynamically analyse actual cases, as well as the targeted level of governments, media frames, action repertoires, grievances, and movement results (ibid). With the dissatisfaction of the ignorance of an essential Chinese concept, Qi (2017) argues that *guanxi*, a 'long-term interpersonal relation formed and governed by implicit social norms' (ibid: 111-112), plays a vital role in the formation and operation of social movement, affects the outcomes of collective actions, and is also deployed by the state to suppress movements. Understanding *guanxi* as a contextually relevant concept helps us understand social movements in China (ibid). Although Qi's research stresses interpersonal relational formation, the personal, emotional, micro perspectives of social movements are understudied and underrepresented, which I elaborate on in the analysis section.

Although the #MeToo movements progress feminist agendas against sexual violence in many countries, victim-survivors' justices are often neglected. As the handling of sexual violence report through criminal justice system appears generally unsatisfactory, including the distrust and invalidation of victim-survivors (Spencer et al. 2018; Johnson 2017; Holmstrom & Burgess A.W. 1983), the mistreatment of aboriginal and racial minority victim-survivors (Dylan, Regehr & Alaggia 2008; Taylor & Putt 2007), the neglect of 'minor' cases other than rape (Korkodeilou 2016), innovative justice responses were advocated to change the situation for victim-survivors (Daly 2011). Besides, victim-survivors' perspectives of justice do not necessarily involve the criminal justice system. Therefore, I consider 'kaleidoscopic justice' (McGlynn & Westmarland 2019) – a victim-survivor centred approach to justice as 'an ever-evolving, nuanced and lived experience' (ibid: 179) applicable. Viewing from victim-

survivors' standpoints, they find that the implications of kaleidoscopic justice can be but are not limited to: meaningful consequences to offenders, recognising their experiences, being treated with dignity, having active voices, contributing to prevention work, and being socially connected to others.

Academically, reflecting on one's experience and reflexing on oneself is an important branch to show the unique perspectives in social movements, but there is still little literature on feminism and activism. Zhao's (2021) review of her Chinese-descent family's life in Florida, US, in the first 100 hours after the Atlantic shooting, shows the change of feeling and from feeling to action from an Asian American woman/mother's perspective. Boylorn (2013) traces her becoming an internet-famous feminist blogger and a black feminist activist from stigmatising 'feminist' as a dirty word as 'a rural southern blackgirl' in America, to practising her black feminist activism in her positionality and context. Kanjwal's (2011) research with hybrid methodologies of an autoethnographic and analytical approach to her observation, communication with, and knowledge about women in Kashmir showcases the narratives deployed by different parties in the conflict and advocates for historically situated, decolonising, and justice-committed methodologies in researching Kashmir. These are essential testimonies from global north minority and global south women/feminists' standpoints regarding social movements, as we are rarely represented with our permission through our lenses in mass media, social media, and academia. Besides, with no luck finding any autoethnographic literature conducted by Chinese activists, not to mention from a feminist standpoint, I consider conducting autoethnographic analysis on my experiences and learnings as a Chinese feminist activist not only original but also a contribution both practically and theoretically to understanding activism and social movement in China's context from a personal, insider, emotional, micro perspective.

Therefore, I choose to explore #MeTooCN with Chinese frameworks and an autoethnographic analysis. Next, I explain my methodologies.

Methodology

In this section, I elucidate the research context and the accordingly chosen methodologies.

Research Context

China has become an increasingly unfriendly place for academic research in recent years. According to the report 'Free to Think 2020' on China's academic environment, 'the space for creating, sharing and questioning ideas in mainland China has narrowed' (SAR, 2020). Under China's ubiquitous online and offline surveillance, civil society workers, advocates, and activists face many challenges and risks working on social issues and sustaining everyday lives. Therefore, collecting data primarily from participants in #MeTooCN could be politically dangerous for me as the researcher and subjects and local activists; I might also face consequences with my positionality as a feminist activist writing on #MeTooCN after I return to China (SAR, 2020). Although China has witnessed robust online feminist activism during the last two decades (Wang 2018: 269-272), it is hard to retain digital contents of social movements given the comprehensiveness and rapidity of the censorship system evolving with the ever-updating technology (Wang 2020). With the available technological support and time limit, referred risks and ethical problems, I quit conducting primary research by interviewing other participants in #MeTooCN.

Research Methodologies

In response to the challenges, I utilise three methodologies for this research: archival analysis, case study and auto-ethnography.

Firstly, I conduct archival analysis, in particular thematic analysis on archives. Due to internet censorship, most mass media and social media data regarding #MeTooCN are deleted. In this case, archival analysis is the best way to demonstrate a general

understanding of the movement (Beer & Barrows 2013), while thematic analysis gives the flexibility to approach the following archives (Guest et al. 2013):

- 1) '#MeToo in China Archives 2018.1-2019.7'(Archive#MeTooCN) – A publicly downloaded⁸ Chinese archive of media and social media coverage of #MeTooCN from January 2018 to July 2019 collected and organised by '#MeToo in China Archives volunteers'. The archived cases were known to a certain amount of social media audience on a relatively large scale.
- 2) '*women de gushi (WG) (Our Stories)*' – An interview report that I conducted on behalf of Wequality from May 2018 to March 2019 on sexual harassment⁹. The report contains 21 stories told by sexual harassment victim-survivors and harassers, and 5 interviews with informed professionals. Most stories are not published on any kind of media previously and are only told in-person to the interviewer. They are ordinary people's stories around us, providing different perspectives from Archive#MeTooCN.

Secondly, case study. As a detailed examination of an aspect of the studied movement, the case study approach can be utilised to develop explanations, and test general understandings, as Alexander and Andrew (2005: 5) argues. Since this research aims to explain and explore #MeTooCN's manifestation and evolution and learn from it, I will conduct explanatory and exploratory case studies (Yin 2018). Cases exposed in Archive#MeTooCN are diverse in emerging time, sector, victim-survivors' gender, violation level, institutional handling, and scale. The 21 cases in *WG* lie in four sections: 6 in social interaction including my story, 5 on campus, 5 in the workplace and 5 on the internet. These two archives will sufficiently supply cases to demonstrate the findings.

Thirdly, I will utilise autoethnographic analysis on my experience as a third-year feminist activist participating and contributing to #MeTooCN with the support from the selected analytical frameworks. Due to the political risk of interviewing other activists,

⁸ It is available here: <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/616135.html>, and here: <https://www.equalityrights.hku.hk/post/中國米兔志（2018-1-2019-7）>

⁹ It is available here: <https://www.equalityrights.hku.hk/post/性騷擾的訪談報告-我們的故事-2018-10>

following the feminist tradition of 'politicising the personal' and treating myself as a subject in this research is the best available choice. Besides, in theorising social movements, the personal, insider, and micro perspective of analysis is often missing, while the academic investment is mostly on collective, bird-view, and macro perspectives. Therefore, studying my experiences and sharing my learnings will diversify the existing knowledge of the movement. Thus, I will conduct autoethnographic research analytically and critically with Moon's (2004) reflective methodology and avoid unnecessary risks and biases with Yip's (2005) notes.

The strengths and limits of my methodologies are both clear. The strengths are: 1) I already have access to the data for the research; 2) As a researcher, I gained insights and informal knowledge through participating in the studied movement; 3) I have experiences with marginalised victim-survivors and their narratives to provide different perspectives from the 'mainstream' ones; 4) Autoethnographic analysis can provide a deep insight about how feminist organising can happen despite the challenging research context. While the limits are: 1) Secondary data could be seen as less comprehensive than conducting primary interviews with participants in the movement. However, secondary research is the best choice with the explained political context, time and technological resources. 2) The selected data could have built-in biases. With the internet censorship and scarcity of data, Archive#MeTooCN and *WG* are the best available data, while the objectivity of the selection process has little impact on the findings. 3) There is a risk of auto-ethnographic analysis being too descriptive instead of being constructive. I will refer to Moon's practical reflective writing techniques (2004) to analyse my experiences and learnings, with the acknowledgement of my positionality, the transparency of the reflecting process. With the professional guidance from my supervisor and mentioned reflective methodologies, I will analytically and critically reflect on my experiences with the awareness of potential disadvantages.

Next, I introduce the conceptual frameworks I use to conduct analysis.

Analytical Framework

He-Yin Zhen's *nannü* and *shengji*

In this section, I introduce the analytical feminist framework, *nannü* and *shengji*. First, I introduce the theorist He-Yin Zhen.

He-Yin Zhen and her thoughts

He-Yin Zhen¹⁰ (1886 – 1920?) is considered 'one of the founders of Chinese feminism' (Zarrow 1988: 811). Little is known about her other than being Liu Shipei's¹¹ wife. She founded and edited an anarcho-feminist journal *tianyibao* (Natural Justice) in 1907 as the institutional journal for *nüzi fuquanhui* (Society of Restoration of Women's Rights) (Liu 2003), which initially focused on women's concerns and later socialist, anarchist and communist contents (ibid). Since 1840, the invasion of European countries challenged China's political, social, and economic models and brought enlightenment thoughts, which Educated elites and intellectuals deployed to advocate for socio-cultural and political-economic reforms and revolutions (Liu, Karl & Ko 2013). The intellectuals decided that 'women' were the foremost hurdle to civilisation and advocated for women's emancipation to benefit the Chinese nation from a patriarchal nationalist positionality (ibid). The enlightenment thoughts informed He-Yin's feminist thinking, but she refused to accept 'women' as the problem or the intellectuals' solutions (ibid). She also criticised the western suffragette thought of emancipating women under the liberal nation-state institution (Song 2016; Liu, Karl & Ko 2013). Influenced by anarchist ideas from Tokyo, she developed an original feminist analytical framework, with her criticism of Confucian patriarchal values, feudal class oppression, male intellectuals' selfish solutions and western suffragette feminism (Liu, Karl & Ko 2013). Next, I introduce the key concepts.

¹⁰ He was her father's family name, and Yin was her mother's family name. To practice her feminist thought about family names, she put her mother's family name in her name as well.

¹¹ Liu Shipei on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liu_Shipei

nannü and shengji

The first concept, *nannü* (male/female or man/woman), is an analytical category not only applicable to gendered social relationships, but also to 'relationship of the past to the present, of China to the world, of politics to justice, of law and ritual to gendered forms of knowledge, interaction, and social organisation' (Liu, Karl & Ko, 2013: 10). He-Yin defines the category of 'woman' as embedded in 'endlessly reproduced historicised social relations' (ibid: 10). she develops the concept *nannü* to comprise the dynamically evolving intersectionality of historical, cultural, political, racial/colonial, gender, class and all unjust power dynamics in China (ibid). She considers class and *nannü* inseparable because *nannü* is a more primary kind of class making than any other social distinctions. Her concept of *nannü* could be summarised as follows:

- 1) The *nannü* category is the foundational material and metaphysical power mechanism around which socio-political life is organised in China. The Confucian patriarchal system and ideology maintain the power mechanism (ibid). In 'On Revenge of Women', He-Yin reviews historical texts exhaustively in previous dynasties and shows that *nanzun nübei* (male superior female inferior) is the basic doctrine organising lives in every society (He-Yin in Xia 2013; Liu, Karl & Ko 2013).
- 2) The *nannü* distinction is fundamentally political because it generates different social identities and creates power and domination accordingly (Liu, Karl & Ko, 2013). This politicalness does not mean that gender inequality overrides other inequalities; instead, it means that gender hierarchy should be considered in relation to and intersectional with other unjust hierarchies, so as other hierarchies to gender.
- 3) Considering the capitalist state's domination and hierarchy as the source of class-based distinction and discrimination amongst its people, she criticises women's suffrage and economic participation movement for their dependence on the state to guarantee equality between men and women, which is unachievable according to the exploitative nature of capitalism (He-Yin in Xia 2013; Liu, Karl & Ko 2013).

The second concept, *shengji* (livelihood), supports *nannü* 'with a radical critique of capitalism, modernity, coloniality, the state, and imperial traditions' (ibid, 22). He-Yin holds the legal institution of private property, especially the enslavement of women, as the original cause of social injustice in capital accumulation (ibid). Taking labour as the basic human ontology to organise social life, she considers the state instrumentalises and commodifies human beings to secure the reproduction of the powerful and the wealthy, thus denies their *shengji* (ibid: 23). Believing that feminist struggle is a beginning and an end to generate 'true social equality' and end 'all social hierarchies' (ibid: 7), she considers the state one of the biggest obstacles to achieving true equality regardless of *nannü* and *shengji*. He-Yin takes an anarchist approach to advocate for true equality for all.

Although developed more than 100 years ago, He-Yin's concepts *nannü* and *shengji* are still best applicable to analyse #MeTooCN. They emerged in an era when traditional Confucian values, capitalist ideology and state/empire domination intertwined, contested, and cooperated, similar to China's current context (See context section). They include but go beyond gender, class, and intersectionality situated to China's context (Liu, Karl & Ko 2013). He-Yin Zhen insists that *nannü* and *shengji* should always be applied together to enable a holistic analysis with historical, cultural, and political sensitivity and critique with material grounding and ideological awareness. He-Yin also acknowledges the simultaneity of macro and micro in her concepts, that dichotomisation is inappropriate because the world and the history are native and non-native, Chinese and global, and male and female at the same time (ibid). Her concepts of *nannü* and *shengji* constitute a precursor to contemporary intersectional feminist critiques of neoliberalism. Moreover, her critique of the state corresponds to the state violence against feminist struggle in current China. I will use the key concepts *nannü* and *shengji* to analyse my findings in this study.

In the following section, I introduce Confucian moral outlook and Chinese characteristics as contextual concepts.

Confucian Moral Outlook

Since He-Yin Zhen developed her feminist thoughts upon criticising Confucian oppression of women, it is fundamental to introduce Confucian moral outlook to understand her concepts. Also, I explain some dimensions of my findings with reference to Confucianism. In my observation, Confucian morality is deployed in plenty of aspects in #MeTooCN. The Confucian moral outlook in this dissertation is referred to as the moral principle developed from Confucianism to influence the organisation of social life in China. Here I illustrate three relevant points: Self-sustaining rigid hierarchy, *nannü*-ed division of social life, and importance of education.

1. Self-sustaining rigid hierarchy. *Jen*¹² (interpreted as benevolence, 仁) represents the ultimate moral achievement in personal, social, and cultural life (Lai 1995). *Li* (originally meaning ritual, 礼) refers to ritualistic maintenance of social roles and statuses. *Li* dominates interpersonal relationships, ensuring appropriate behaviour in line with the Confucian hierarchical order (ibid). *Cheng-ming* (literally 'correct the name', 正名) means that every person has a 'name' or a position in relation to others that they should behave in accordance with (ibid). Therefore, a Confucian intellectual gentleman should follow benevolence (*Jen*), ritual (*Li*), name/position (*ming*, 名), or else he does not deserve the name/position and should be punished (ibid). In this way, the hierarchy is maintained.
2. Gendered division of social life. Ritual (*Li*) regulates women and men's lives with a fundamental principle that men are superior while women are inferior (*nanzun nübei*). Women are strictly restricted inside the home while men oversee the external affairs and dominate women in the public sphere (Li 2000), which ritual men and women must follow to be appropriate.
3. Importance of education. Education and learning are essential to Confucianism for personal development and societal advancement, through which one can learn and cultivate benevolence (*Jen*) and regulate oneself with the built-in high moral standard in ritual (*Li*) (Lee 1996). People who convey knowledge are considered to have already achieved a higher level of personal perfection, self-

¹² Lai (1995) uses a different pinyin to refer to mandarin texts from my pinyin, so I use Lai's pinyin here to refer to her concepts.

realisation, and contribution to society thus being respected in Confucian society (ibid). '

4. *zhongyong* (middle, 中庸) as the best way of life. *zhongyong* means that 'moderation' is the best optimal and justest way of dealing with conflicts to achieve a harmonious society (Suh 2020). It also underlines that individual interests should be moderated to enable the harmony of society (ibid).

Confucianism is a rich and complex philosophy. I can only provide a brief analysis of Confucian concepts which I will deploy to help explain the #MeTooCN. To make the concepts easier for non-Chinese speakers to understand, I will use the terms 'ritual' to refer to *Li*, 'benevolence' for *Jen*, 'name/position' for *ming*, and 'moderation' for *zhongyong*. I am aware that using English words to describe these concepts can compromise their meaning, so I follow the English terms with the Chinese character and its phonetics.

Chinese Characteristics

In this dissertation, 'Chinese characteristics' refer to the hybrid of Confucian moral outlook, liberal consumerist market-oriented culture, and China's authoritarian political structure. It is an explanatory concept widely used in academia, media, and Chinese people's daily lives to explicate unique features in China, primarily in response to western critics. There is no clear definition or scope of application regarding 'Chinese characteristics'. It is deployed, often by the government, to justify what is happening in China, especially the consequences of measures taken or decisions made by the ruling Chinese Communist Party. Deng Xiaoping first used the term in 1982 to explain the economic reform and opening up. He moved from labelling China as socialist to 'socialist with Chinese characteristics' (Deng, 1982). Since then, the term has been deployed by official media to rationalise China's particular approach to issues like human rights, internet censorship, surveillance (Gagliardone 2015), and within academia to touch upon China's unique economic, political, historical, social, and cultural issues (Bell 1999, Wu 2003, Edney, Rosen & Zhu 2019). In the utilisation, the term refers more often to China's political and economic particularities than to its cultural specificities.

In the next section, I utilise the referred concepts to help elucidate the archival analysis, case study, and my autoethnography.

Analysis

Thematic Analysis on Archives

The concepts of *nannü* and *shengji* help explain several dimensions of #MeTooCN: its theme; origins; emergence, evolution, and subsiding; counter-discourses; presentations and narratives; and the feminist agendas present in this movement. I elaborate in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, the theme 'sexual violence' itself is a *nannü*-ed problem in China. Within the 53 widely known cases included in Archive#MeTooCN, all the 53 offenders are male; 29 cases involve more than one victim-survivors, which means at least 82 victim-survivors are involved, only one of whom was a man. 23 cases contain more than sexual harassment allegations, and 3 expose sexual violence against minors. Sex is a private issue in the Confucian moral outlook in China. It is perceived to be strictly restricted inside the home, in which a woman and her sex belong to her husband. He-Yin's conceptualisation of *nannü*-ed Confucian social organisation illustrates the power imbalance which makes men more often the offender and women more often the victim-survivors. Solutions to sexual violence are also in line with the referred social organisation. Public discussions often propose protection as the way to prevent sexual violence, like limiting women occupying public places (Wequality 2019), participating in formal work (ibid, MeTooCN Volunteers 2019), pursuing higher education (ibid, ibid), and utilising digital tools (Wequality 2019). This limitation of women's public participation in the name of protection essentially reduces women's labour participation, thus reinforcing the *nannü*-ed Confucian social organisation.

Secondly, in the origin and importation of #MeTooCN, *nannü*-ed framing of gender interlinking with other unjust social hierarchies help make visible the unequal relationships between global north and south, English and Chinese language in the global context, and capitalist logic and people-centred logic. The #MeToo movement was imported from an English dominant global north context, with a social media logic for the importers to follow. Although initially, the movement started in 2006 by an African American feminist activist Tarana Burke, the most referred and imported #MeToo movement is incorporated by white female celebrities, focusing disproportionately on white upper/middle-class women (Phipps 2021). The pain of women of colour was primarily invisible (Tambe 2018). In Archive#MeTooCN, other than cases involving minors, most victim-survivors are highly educated. Social media remains the primary platform for victim-survivors or representatives to share sexual violence stories, with mass media coverage as boosters to get more attention. In the importation to China, the hashtag #MeToo was reserved in English until being censored on social media. With the censorship of journalism in China, the mass media coverage of #MeTooCN is not as explosive as in the US. In Archive#MeTooCN, only 14 cases out of 53 with the most famous and influential offenders or happening in the best-known institutions are covered in mass media. For instance, among the total 116 mass media pieces in Archive#MeTooCN, China Central Television host Zhu Jun, billionaire and chief executive of Chinese e-commerce company JD.com Liu Qiangdong have been covered the most with 33 pieces. The attention-seeking and profit-chasing logic of social media and mass media companies was retained, and the racial- and class-biased nature was adapted to the Chinese context of hierarchies. Lower-classed, uneducated, ethnic minority, disabled women are disproportionately under-represented.

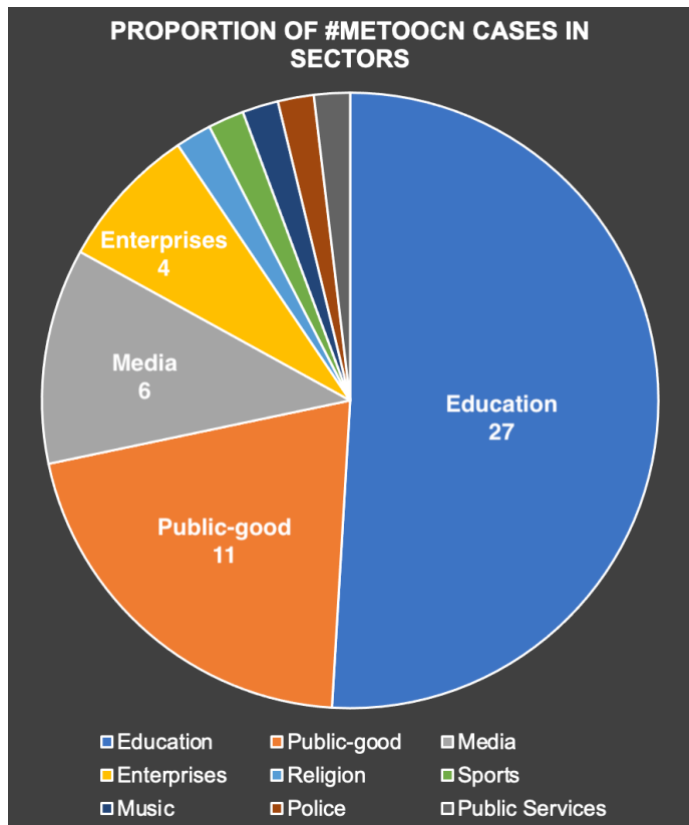


Figure 1 Proportion of #MeTooCN cases in sectors

Thirdly, the Chinese characteristics of #MeTooCN's emergence, evolution and subsiding can be understood through the *nannü* and *shengji* framework. #MeTooCN emerged in the higher education sector and gradually spread to public-good (*gongyi*, 公益), media and other sectors, only to get to the entertainment industry in 2021 (BBC News 2021). Within the 53 cases in Archive#MeTooCN, 25 are from the higher education sector, taking up nearly 50% of the total. The second flagged sector

was public-good with 11 cases, then media with 6 cases (See Graph 1). Before July 2018, all the cases shared on social media and reported by media were from the education sector; July was the peak month with 30 new cases emerged: all the 6 archived allegations in the media sector, 10 out of 11 in public-good, 10 in education, and 4 cases in other sectors. Internet censorship accompanied the whole movement period, but the comprehensive censorship from the state started intervening since Zhu Jun's case (from 26 July) gained public attention (Zhang & Caidi 2019). From September 2018 to January 2019, only 4 cases emerged with little public attention nor media exposure, #MeTooCN subsided (See

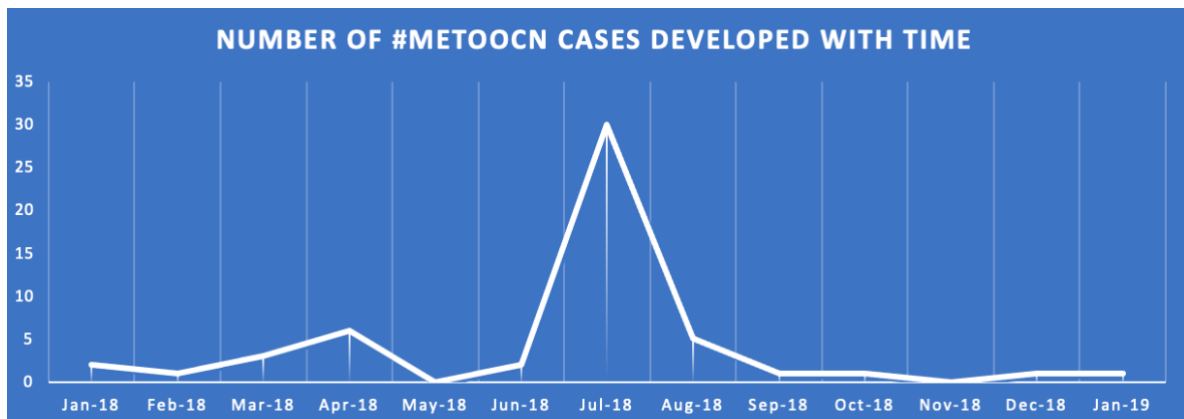


Figure 2 Number of #MeTooCN cases developed with time

Graph 2). In Confucian moral outlook, university professors, educators and high intellectuals are considered with high moral standards and guaranteed to behave to their name/position (*ming*, 名) according to ritual (*Li*, 礼) with benevolence (*Jen*, 仁) both to follow their personal principle and to maintain the social hierarchy. In contrast, people in entertainment are not considered as educated as intellectuals and belonging to a lower social class and moral hierarchy, inferior to intellectuals. Women are omitted because they do not belong to the public sphere. Therefore, when intellectuals on the higher moral hierarchy sexually violate their students, they lose their benevolence, fail to safeguard their name/position, and threaten the social order. These intellectuals are condemned and punished for their threat to the social order more than the sexual violation, whilst in the same social hierarchy entertainment people are not taken serious enough to be able to threaten the social order when they commit similar violations. So, although #MeTooCN is a feminist movement, its emergence and evolution are regulated by the *nannü*-ed Confucian moral outlook in which gender intersects with class and educational level. The state practises its ultimate power to and comprehensive censorship to stop the public discussion from broadening and the mobilisations from widening, which caused the subsiding of #MeTooCN. In He-Yin's critique of state in *shengji* frame, the state maintains the social order for the powerful and wealthy and hurdles the realisation of equality.

Fourthly, the counter-discourses from offenders and their supporters are *nannü*-ed. In the exposed online chat records in Archive#MeTooCN, many offenders approached the victim-survivors with a discourse of 'like', 'fond' or 'favour' to justify their offences. According to the victim-survivor's friend, Shen Yang, then a professor at Peking University, coaxed the 19-year-old victim-survivor to believe that 'it was because of love' that he 'did something she disliked to her' 20 years ago (MeTooCN Volunteers 2019). Some reacted angrily at the victim-survivors' allegation and accused the victim-survivors of having had multiple sexual partners. Zhang Wen stated in his response to the allegation that he 'had flaws in his private morality' (*side youkui* 私德有亏) without acknowledging his offences; to prove his liability, he slut-shamed the well-known resourceful allegators. Some supporters of the offenders weaved an intimate relationship between them to elute their offences and harm. In Zhou Yu's case, his colleague defended his rape by fabricating an 'intimate relationship'. In the gender

aspect of the Confucian *nannü* hierarchy, a woman's sexuality is rigorously restricted to inside the home exclusively to her husband. Therefore, privatising the accused sexual violence takes away the legitimacy of public opinion trial toward the offenders, thus the possibility of punishing the offenders and giving justice to the victim-survivors. Furthermore, accusing a woman of not sufficiently 'looking after' her sexuality is a legitimate way of discrediting her allegation.

Fifthly, the deployment of sexual harassment as the representative of all sexual violence and the hegemonic narrative of stories in #MeTooCN follow the *nannü*-ed Confucian moral outlook. In Archive#MeTooCN, #MeTooCN is primarily described as an anti-sexual harassment movement, although only 28 out of 53 cases are purely sexual harassment allegations. In Confucian moral outlook, the best solution between the allegators and alleged offenders is being moderate (*zhongyong*, 中庸); therefore, sexual harassment with its understated nature is deployed as 'moderation' to refer to #MeTooCN cases. The *nannü* norms guide the widely used and publicised hegemonic #MeTooCN narrative, with younger ignorant unresourceful women (and men in Wang Pan's case) being the victim-survivors while the older resourceful intellectual men with fame as the offenders, in which gender hierarchy intersects with social class and age. Other narratives are submerged in the attention flood to the hegemonic ones and fail to appear in Archive#MeTooCN.

Finally, the feminist agendas incorporated are hierarchical. The most advocated feminist agendas in #MeTooCN parted in two ways: legal reform against sexual harassment started from the 1990s by the first generation of feminists (Li 2020), which led to putting 'sexual harassment' into law in 2005 (Feng 2020), and sexual harassment being better-defined in the newly enacted civil code in 2020 (ibid); institutional anti-sexual harassment regulation and procedure building in institutions initiated by the second generation of feminists, although made some progress, still has a long way to go (Archive#MeTooCN volunteers 2019). However, in the 53 cases in Archive#MeTooCN, only 4 victim-survivors and representatives sued the offenders, while offenders sued them for libel in 6 cases. Moreover, only 26 offenders were punished institutionally with minor penalties; the other 27 were left unaffected. Some of the punishments appeared to be temporary. Wang Pan was returned the

qualification of supervising graduate students two years after the allegation of his physical and psychological abuse causing a male graduate student's suicide. Although the qualification was cancelled when netizens found out, this gesture showed the institutional attitude toward Wang's offence. Besides, not all victim-survivors wanted judicial remedies, as they have different needs to be fulfilled and diverse perspectives to be heard. He-Yin's concept *shengji* can help understand this phenomenon. *shengji* criticises the legal institution of private property, especially the enslavement of women, as the foundation of the state. Hence, the state is essentially oppressive and exploitative to maintain the *nannü*-ed social order and keeps reproducing the powerful and wealthy through instrumentalising people. Therefore, prioritising institutional solutions over others or state-dependent solutions over potentially anarchist ones in #MeTooCN will only maintain the existing Confucian patriarchal order. Without challenging the fundamental *nannü*-ed social order, ending sexual violence and achieving true equality to all regardless of *nannü* is impossible.

There are three problems I need to acknowledge in this analysis. Firstly, sexual violence as a nuanced matter cannot be categorised judicially, culturally, or socially. The categorisation in this dissertation does not intend to definitionally distinguish one type from another, especially not sexual harassment from others; it aims to show the diversity of #MeTooCN cases and the deployment of 'sexual harassment' discourse. Secondly, I am aware that it is better to use *nannü* to retain the nuance of the historicised contextualised concepts He-Yin developed and the Confucian concepts. However, to make it convenient for readers and avoid confusion, I used men to refer to *nan*, women to refer to *nü*, and gender to refer to the gender aspects of the *nannü* framework. Thirdly, there is still a lot to explore in these archives, especially the considerable discussion generated by a female intellectual Liu Yu's critique regarding #MeTooCN, which is not covered in this research.

Reflection and learnings on My Experiences Working in #MeTooCN

Wequality's and My Positionality

I was introduced to feminism in 2014. Suffering from being a 'leftover woman'¹³, I found it providing a refreshing and empowering perspective as a Chinese middle-class unmarried migrant woman in Shanghai. I converted to feminism in 2015. Feeling frustrated by so many Chinese women being trapped by 'leftover woman' yet so few knowing about feminism, in November 2016, I started the grassroots organisation¹⁴ Wequality with a WeChat subscription account. From May 2017, Wequality started offline activities. I was the only full-time employee with no salary due to Wequality's illegal organisational status. Democratic as I claim to be, I planned and led most activities, wrote almost all articles as the founder with dedication. Together with the growing Wequality volunteer team, I participated in #MeTooCN by conducting WG on sexual harassment, interviewing and sharing victim-survivors' stories on other forms of sexual violence on the Wequality Account, and organising discussions and film screenings, and collective healing events offline.

Studying decolonisation in IDS during COVID-19 inspired me to apply the Chinese analytical frameworks on #MeTooCN. Decolonisation was a new topic to me, by studying which my thinking was formed and informed while living 'under western eyes' (Mohanty 2003, 1988). As the only Chinese student in the cluster, I often find it hard to understand and discuss my concerns, nor do I always feel heard. Without nuanced knowledge, 'China' easily falls into two dichotomic images presented in international media – a human rights violator or an economic giant. With the confusion, frustration, fear, and trauma generated from state violence to my activist work, I was a 'perfect' victim to reinforce the first discourse. However, I was informed that the simplifying and generalising of China and Chinese feminist activists would only cause more misunderstanding of the country, the people, feminist activists and movements. Living

¹³ Leftover woman, in Chinese 剩女 *shèngnǚ*, a term released by the Chinese Ministry of Education in its 'The Language Situation In China' in 2007, meaning "urban professional women who are over 27 years old who have high educational level, high salary, high intelligence, and attractive appearance, but also overly high expectations for marriage partners, and hence are 'left behind' in the marriage market" (To, 2015). China's National Women's federation endorsed it and suggest "aged leftover women" to not be so picky on selecting a husband. The state deployed this term to push accomplished women to marry to maintain the national stability and change the unhealthy population structure (Fincher 2014).

¹⁴ Under Chinese Charity law, Wequality is (still) an illegal organisation as it did not register as the law required: affiliate under a state-certified foundation or organisation or government bureau, and work on issues with the party's guidance.

in a white-dominant country with constant on-and-off COVID restrictions do not help resolve my Chinese 'minor feelings' (Hong 2020). These complicated, nuanced, unspoken, even unspeakable feelings urge me to try to show the world our real faces instead of the flat paintings in English media or subjects with a partial agency in academic literature. Therefore, with my fresh memory of participating and contributing to #MeTooCN, with unanswered questions and unsolved confusions, I choose to apply He-Yin Zhen's feminist framework to explore #MeTooCN with the knowledge learnt in IDS.

In the following sections, I will firstly paint a draft of Wequality's and my journey in #MeTooCN, my learnings and reflections.

Wequality's and my journey in #MeTooCN

Interviewing, writing and publicising *WG* was a complicated journey. Among all the victim-survivor interviewees, two told stories of being raped or sexually abused as a child, but they referred to it as sexual harassment¹⁵, most used ambiguous words to replace 'sexual harassment', which corresponds with the understatement in #MeTooCN discussed in the Analysis section. The two offenders interviewed stopped harassing and showed a certain level of remorse and reflection. These findings demonstrate the importance to talk about and clearly define the boundaries of sexual harassment. Not only could victim-survivors recognise and validate their experiences and feelings, get the necessary support for their justices, but the offenders also realised their offences and the potential consequences. Victim-survivors' stories also show that sexual harassment offences differentiate depending on victim-survivors' feelings. Therefore, while conducting *WG*, I set its goal to raise awareness of sexual harassment, sort out its definitional boundaries, support and empower victim-survivors and initiate or engage in an effective discussion.

¹⁵ Instead of being included in *WG*, these two stories were shared on the Wequality WeChat subscription account as they are not sexual harassment stories.

When the interviews started, I often felt ashamed to 'use' victim-survivors without sufficiently supporting them. Approximately half interviewees said the interview was the first time they talked about their experiences. As a victim-survivor myself, I was also blamed for being harassed and I knew how hurtful it could be hearing closed ones searching for reasons for the offenders. However, my experience also helped me gradually realise that my interviews and *WG* were an alternative for the victim-survivors to achieve a sense of justice. The interviews were conducted in a victim-survivor-centred manner, they were informed of their rights to proceed or withdraw at any stage, and the presentation of their stories would be in their own words authorised by them. I also listened to their stories like a friend without judgements, which validated their narratives and provided emotional support. Knowing their stories would be published together with other victim-survivors' and even offenders' generated a sense of belonging and community. The publishing of *WG* also provided an opportunity for the interviewees to participate in #MeTooCN. Knowing that their stories will help potential victim-survivors also contributed to their sense of justice (McGlynn & Westmarland 2019).

Conducting *WG* was rewarding for Wequality and me, through which I realised that Wequality should focus on awareness-raising. Besides the interview and writing skills, the connection formed with other victim-survivors, I also found *WG* an effective means to raise awareness. There were emails and WeChat messages from readers telling their shock of the extensiveness of sexual harassment, their stories and confusion about sexual violence, or their intention to help victim-survivors. Worrying about the stories victimising the victim-survivors and exploiting their agency while writing, I realised that we practised agency in our way: we told our stories, fought back in our capable ways, and tried to prevent it from happening again (Wequality 2019).

However, Wequality had trouble promoting *WG*. With no luck getting mass media coverage, I consulted a feminist journalist and was kindly told that the offenders and victim-survivors *WG* presented were not famous enough to attract the mass media audience. I was frustrated and angry. Our intention to present non-hegemonic stories and voices was limited due to our lack of publicity. As a victim-survivor, I felt blamed for not being famous enough and not being harassed by a famous-enough person. I

also felt like failed my interviewees. The mass media and social media's attention-seeking and profit-chasing logic decided that our stories were not worthy of being heard, and #MeTooCN abandoned our struggles.

Next, I demonstrate my reflection of the experience and thinking about #MeTooCN and feminist movements in China.

Reflections

Reflecting on my hurt feelings, I realise the dominant discourse of romanticising and elitising feminism and feminist movements exists in China. It is part of the reason for many activists, including me, to join the movements. I had an idealistic simplifying imagination regarding the feminist movement(s) when I started Wequality, and I was hurt when they turned out to be different from my imagination. The *nannü* concept can help understand this romanticised discourse that doing social good is morally good on a higher hierarchy so that the complexity of human beings and movements is discarded. Dismantling this myth may be a necessary experience for new activists, but a kind warning from predecessors may be helpful. Meanwhile, the Chinese feminist movements that originated from academia are still primarily dominated by academics, and the terminologies are mostly academic instead of quotidian. This phenomenon leads to a perception that only elites have the vocabulary and legitimacy to talk about, write on and participate in the feminist movements in China. That is not true. As an undereducated grassroots feminist activist, Ye Haiyan initiated feminist movements to advocate for sex workers' rights in ways that challenge Confucian moral outlook (Zhao 2017). Some women deployed capitalist and Confucian gender moral values to pursue economic security (Wu & Dong 2020). Their existence and contribution are denied in the romanticising and elitising discourse, and future grassroots feminists discouraged, which harms expansion of the feminist movements in China.

Like He-Yin Zhen, I do not believe institutional solutions could provide victim-survivors justice in this patriarchal misogynist society. With experiences supporting victim-survivors in China, hearing their experiences with the law enforcement, I do not believe

that the institutional system can do victim-survivors' justice unless its patriarchal misogynist nature changes. With legal reforms and regulation-making prioritised in the feminist agenda, other agendas such as awareness-raising, victim-survivors' well-being are put on a lower ranking and marginalised and neglected. These marginalised agendas and communities need acknowledgement and support to diversify and sustain our feminist movements.

The founder's positionality and personality affect organisational and movement development. Starting Wequality as a second (or younger) generation feminist with no previous connection or resources, it is hard to figure out the appropriate position and methods for the organisation and movement. However, with no experience, I experimented, made mistakes, and improved. My positionality guaranteed the organisation and movement necessary skills and resources but limited my mindset regarding marginalised women that *WG* mainly documents urban middle-class women and men's stories. My extroverted proactive passionate personality quickly pushed forward Wequality's agenda, but the lack of social skills and knowledge limited the organisational and movement development.

Finally, there is no monolithic #MeTooCN, but many movements from the participants' and activists' standpoints and perspectives. Acknowledging the diversity can lead to investments into less resourceful movements, get ordinary people's stories heard, different perspectives of justice respected and consulted, and victim-survivors' needs centred. Thinking in a diversified instead of centralised way can eventually de-elitise and de-romanticise the feminist movements, and inspire and include more future feminist activists and movements. However, without challenging the underlying Confucian social order like He-Yin Zhen points out, true equality between all is impossible to achieve.

Discussions

In this exploratory research, I asked, 'how did the #MeToo movement(s) manifest and evolve in China?' Firstly, I find that #MeTooCNs are not one movement but many

decentralised movements with different agendas and approaches. Secondly, they emerge, evolve, subside and manifest with Chinese characteristics. Approaching with He-Yin Zhen's *nannü* and *shengji* as the analytical framework, with the support from Confucian moral outlook and 'Chinese characteristics', I find that the formation of the Chinese characteristics of #MeTooCNs is *nannü*-ed due to different levels of power imbalances. Specifically, gendered power imbalance in sexual violence; the systematic class and racial biases in the capitalist value; the dominance of English language over Chinese and others in academia and global social movements; the hierarchical ranking of people regarding Confucian moral outlook by gender, class, educational level and age; the power disparity between the state and its people, the state and social movements in China's context; institutional justice over victim-survivor centred kaleidoscopic justices; the public sphere over private sphere; being moderate (*zhongyong*, 中庸) over pursuing ultimate justice; institutional solution seeking feminist agenda over the others. Thirdly, there is a hegemonic discourse romanticising and elitising the feminist movements in China, which limits the development of future feminist movements. Fourthly, homogenising feminist movements' agendas with institutional reform will not lead to justice for victim-survivors, although it is undoubtedly crucial for women's rights in China. Finally, the formation of a feminist movement in China's nuanced context highly depends on people who participate and initiate the movement(s), with the influence of knowledge and movement(s) travelling from other countries.

In #MeTooCNs studies, little literature stresses the influence of the historical, socio-cultural context, although most considers the political context. However, the historical, social, cultural and political contexts co-exist, intersect, and intertwine to affect social movements in Chinese society; stressing one over the other can cause misrepresentation. The over-emphasis on political context also reinforces one side of China's face depicted as a human rights violator with no complexity, thus creating no constructive solution for people and activists. Therefore, this research intends to restore the complexity of #MeTooCNs' intersecting and intertwining context and situate the movements into it. Moreover, studies on social movement rarely focus on the micro, personal, emotional perspective of the mobilisation of social movement. So, the auto-ethnographic analysis attempts to deploy the feminist methodology of

'politicising the personal' and demonstrate to the readers an insider's perspective of initiating a movement and participating in #MeTooCNs.

Due to the insufficiency of applying western theoretical frameworks on #MeTooCN without adaptation, in this research, I analysed #MeTooCN's emergence and development in China with a contextually sensitive Chinese feminist framework developed 100 years ago, on two Chinese archives as well as my autoethnography. This approach proves to provide another perspective of conducting feminist research and social movement research in China. He-Yin's historicised contextualised framework, although developed in 1907, is proven to be applicable to contemporary China and potentially other Confucian influenced countries in this research. My findings say that #MeTooCNs as social movements are influenced by the underlying *nannü*-ed Confucian moral outlook, which contributes to its Chinese characteristics. Moreover, personal perspectives are essential to understand the formation, expansion and limitation of social movements. Although the research context is politically challenging in China, especially around social movements, there are still alternative ways to conduct situated research to present them more accurately.

Sexual violence is a global development problem. As the main implication of gender-based violence, it affects women's health, education, public participation and other aspects of life (WHO 2018). Yet victim-survivors' voices and struggle against sexual violence are not sufficiently heard, studied, funded and supported, especially from minority groups and non-global north regions. This dissertation aims to provide development practitioners, especially gender and development practitioners, a socio-culturally situated approach from a grassroots activist's insider's perspective to understand social movements in Confucian based and global south societies. Furthermore, as a Chinese feminist activist who is going back to my movement, I also intend to share the findings with fellow activists and academics to work out a way to de-romanticise, de-elitise and diversify the movements, further to challenge the dominant Confucian moral order.

I acknowledge that this research cannot comprehensively cover all aspects of #MeTooCN's Chinese characteristics due to research time length and space limit in

this dissertation, such as the lively public discussion ignited by a well-known female intellectual Liu Yu's critique on #MeToo CN. The challenging research context in China exploited the opportunity to conduct primary research on #MeTooCN participants, which I consider would have brought different perspectives first-hand for this research and future research. Due to internet censorship, we cannot access the original posts or articles studied in this dissertation but only depend on the archives, whose accuracy and scope could affect the analysis. Adding economic respect, given the rapid economic growth in China and the changing dynamics between China and other countries, it could potentially bring another perspective. It is also an early stage to apply He-Yin Zhen's feminist framework to a modern phenomenon, with a lot to unpack and adapt to rapidly changing contexts in China.

Firstly, I suggest that researchers do more research on #MeTooCN and explore Chinese characteristics to understand social movements more situationally in China's complicated contexts. Meanwhile, coming back to Mohanty's (2003) call to reconstruct feminist research in a more complex, reality-based, agency-respected, place-conscious way, I suggest researchers pay more attention to the nuanced interactions and intertwining of historical, socio-cultural, political, and now technological perspectives, especially historical and socio-cultural instead of the overemphasised political. With my attempt to apply He-Yin Zhen's feminist analytical framework to Chinese movements, I expect to see more and deeper analysis utilising her analytical framework and the development of the framework itself. More micro-level qualitative research, especially hearing victim-survivors' voices, is also crucial in future research. Chinese characteristics, as a term with abundant layers and aspects of meaning, also needs more exploration. Following the long-standing tradition of 'personal is political' in feminist movements and studies, I encourage Chinese feminist activists to conduct autoethnographic research on ourselves to bring insiders' perspectives to academia, demonstrate the complicatedness of feminist movements in China, and eventually contribute to reconstructing southern feminist analysis from the personal, micro and emotional perspectives.

Conclusion

As a sexual harassment victim-survivor, a feminist activist and a grassroots organisational leader who actively participated in #MeTooCNs, I chose to study #MeTooCNs as my dissertation topic. I had confusion and questions both as a participant in and an observer of feminist movements in China. In my journey of studying decolonisation theories in IDS, I found the literature informative but not sufficiently resolving my confusions or answering my questions. Besides, I cannot find the vocabulary to explain my context or the phenomena accurately. Therefore, at the beginning of this dissertation, I asked, 'how does the #MeToo movement(s) manifest and evolve in China?' with three sub-questions: What made #MeTooCN a movement with 'Chinese characteristics'? What can we learn from its manifestation and processes as a social movement, especially from an insider's perspective? How can we apply the learning to building future feminist movements in the ever-changing authoritarian context in China? I deployed He-Yin Zhen's concepts *nannü* and *shengji*, contextual concepts 'Confucian moral outlook' and 'Chinese characteristics', to analyse Archive#MeTooCN, WG and my autoethnography. I found that #MeTooCNs are not one monolithic movement but a series of movements with different agendas. They manifest and evolve in ways with Chinese characteristics. Besides, #MeTooCNs are *nannü*-ed in all the studied aspects due to the underlying Confucian moral outlook as a social organising principle in contemporary China, contributing to their Chinese characteristics.

As an exploratory research, the research question I asked is open-ended, that could be further explored from other perspectives. Although the severe research context in China exploited the possibilities of conducting primary research on activists and participants in #MeTooCN, analysing the two selected archives and my ethnography as an alternative with the appropriate framework answered my question sufficiently. I do not agree nor intend to create a dichotomy between the west and the east, European/US and China, the north and the south, imported and indigenous through advocating for applying contextually situated frameworks on materials and data from the global south. Instead, I aim to raise awareness of the hegemony of applying northern theories on southern materials (Roberts & Connell 2016) and contribute to reconstructing a more situated southern feminist research (Mohanty 2003).

I consider it a contribution to the reconstruction and decolonisation of southern focused and situated feminist research that I analysed #MeTooCN with He-Yin Zhen's historicised contextualised Chinese born feminist framework. The attempt to utilise China-conscious and context-specific frameworks could also contribute to showcasing underrepresented Chinese feminist theories in the global feminist academia. The demonstration of Chinese characteristics in Chinese feminist movements with Confucian concepts is also an attempt to situate social movements into a historic-cultural context and point out an understudied factor. Understanding social movements with situated knowledge in China may help incubate more #MeTooCNs, feminist movements and social movements to make China a more feminist and people-caring country.

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