

Research on the Construction of Chinese Women's Self-discourse Power and Independent Resistance Path from the Perspective of Contemporary Society

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Abstract: At present, in China, the building of women's self-discourse power is one of the main directions of social change. Under the censorship of the media environment in the digital age and in light of patriarchal norms and market forces, Chinese women have taken various means to express their feminist identity, advocate for social equality, and build communities of resistance. Based on discourse theory, feminist media studies and empirical research on Chinese digital feminism are used to explore the theoretical foundations, contextual dynamics and practical paths for how Chinese women construct self-discursive power and engage in independent resistance. The three groups of resistance identified in this paper are digital discourse practice, workplace and legal advocacy, and transnational feminist networking. It is not the case that all Chinese women have shown resistance, and this lack of a unified expression of resistance can be attributed to platform regulations, political forces, and individuals' own risks. Understand the above fluctuations to build theories on feminist agency in non-Western countries and promote the continuous progress of gender equality in China.

Keywords: Chinese Feminism; Self-discourse Power; Digital Resistance; Gender Inequality; #MeToo China; Platform Censorship; Feminist Activism.

1. Introduction

In the first decade of the 21st century, Chinese women have increasingly spoken publicly about themselves, taken the initiative to name their own lives and experiences, challenged patriarchal ideas and demanded systemic reforms. There are many such cases in China: It has a long history of state-led women's liberation, starting from the socialist mobilisation of women's labour during the Maoist era and continuing to formal commitments to gender equality in the post-reform period. However, the rise of a grassroots feminist movement, organised by many ordinary women on social media and driven by their own experiences, has been an extraordinary phenomenon in Chinese gender politics.

The idea of self-discourse power, which refers to the ability of individuals or groups to produce, spread and protect their own understandings of social reality, can be used to provide a theory for what is at stake in Chinese women's resistance. Discourse is not a neutral way to transmit information; it is also a stage where some people have more power to speak than others. Taking the initiative to speak in public is to break the gender stereotypes that have been taught to Chinese women by society. In other words, even though they are short-lived, these places are able to be built to present the life experiences and thoughts of women.

This paper studies how Chinese women have sought the construction of self-discourse power in recent years. Research has been conducted on the theoretical support for studying this process, the contextual pressures it is facing, and the actual countermeasures women have taken in the digital space, at work and in cross-border networks. This paper has added to the academic discussion of feminist agency in the non-Western and digitally constrained context.

2. Theoretical Foundations: Discourse, Power and Feminist Agency

2.1. Foucault, Discourse and Gendered Power

Foucault has studied discourse in this way and believes that it is the system by which subjects are formed, power is distributed and the boundaries of what can be spoken are set. Amigot and Pujal have proposed that Foucauldian concepts of power and subjectivity can be used to enhance feminist studies and reveal how gender norms are enforced and how spaces of resistance appear in power relations [1]. Power in this system is not only repressive; it is also generative. It produces the very categories of femininity and masculinity through which people are disciplined, but it also creates spaces for resistance and discourse subversion.

In the context of China, this view can help explain why the resistance of women is linked to the language, platform and institutional setting in which it takes place. Resistance to patriarchal discourse is also a kind of discourse; therefore, one needs to create alternative narratives, reclaim stigmatised identities and build counter-narratives. The construction of self-discourse power is therefore not an expression of pre-determined interests but rather a struggle and evolution within and against the existing system of knowledge and power.

2.2. Digital Platforms as Discursive Arenas

The circumstances of feminist discussions worldwide in recent years have changed due to the advent of social media, and China is also included. However, the platformisation of feminist politics in China takes place under an all-encompassing regulatory environment that includes widespread content moderation, algorithmic management and the risk of account suspension [2]. Research on platformed Chinese feminism under censorship has shown that feminist

accounts on Weibo operate in an ambiguous governance system; while feminist discussion is permitted, it is also restricted, forming what one study refers to as a "patchwork censorship" that reflects both nationalist and patriarchal tendencies [2].

Under these conditions, feminist content spreads through creative strategies such as euphemism, humour, symbolic language and emojis to avoid algorithmic detection [2]. Therefore, the situation among Chinese digital feminists is one where they actively reshape and adapt platforms according to their needs rather than passively using the tools provided by society. Therefore, in understanding the power of self-talk for women online, we need to consider not only what these women are saying but also how they are saying it and through what technical and social channels.

3. Contextual Dynamics Shaping Chinese Women's Self-discourse

3.1. The #MeToo Movement as Discursive Turning Point

In 2018, the spread of the #MeToo movement expanded the scope of women's problems to include more parts of society in China. Initially spread via Weibo and WeChat, the movement has given more voices to women speaking out about sexual harassment and assault at universities, in NGOs and other parts of society. Ling and Liao have shown through their study of the intellectual controversy caused by the movement how feminist activists and their supporters have challenged deeply ingrained gender myths, such as the belief that women are responsible for the harassment they face, and advocated for the legitimacy of digital activism as a form of feminist politics [3]. It was no longer about individual cases, but whether people should have the right to define sexual violence and which system of gender relations to favour.

The first reason for the change in the Movement was a public outcry. Women who had previously kept quiet about their experiences of harassment were encouraged to speak, and what researchers have called a change in the shame dynamics of Chinese sexual culture [4]. Discursive communities centered on hashtags and testimonies have gradually formed to provide a shared system of reference for understanding gendered harm and promote a sense of solidarity among all regions.

3.2. Gender Norms, Social Media and the Politics of Representation

Although feminist visibility has been rising in Chinese society and on social media, the main stories are still relatively traditional. Feminist critical discourse analysis of WeChat public accounts has shown that popular gender-related content often promotes maternal ideology, body shame and feminine discipline, although some resistant voices have been made space for [5]. A corpus-based comparison of feminist representations on Weibo and Zhihu also showed that although feminist ideas appear in both places, they are presented and judged quite differently due to the user culture and recommendation logic of these two platforms [6].

Based on the above analysis, the digital construction of women's self-discourse power is neither uniform nor uncontroversial. Even if a platform is officially open to feminist content, it may still be organised in a way that marginalises or sanitises such content. Commercial demands for the engagement of feed content generally favour

emotional, visually pleasing works that may lead to a reduction in feminist discussion to individualistic self-help or lifestyle feminism rather than structural critique. To know about the political reasons for representation in our country, one must look at what is presented and where it is published online.

3.3. Workplace Discrimination and the Limits of Formal Equality

The material conditions of life for Chinese women in the labour market have also influenced the level of self-talk. Although the government has made progress in promoting women's rights, many of the problems abroad have still been rectified. Experimental studies of hiring practices in China have found that female applicants for college graduate positions are significantly less likely to be invited for an interview than equally qualified male applicants, particularly in the fields of engineering, computer science and sales [7]. These behaviours are not only individual biases but also structural assumptions about which occupations are more suitable for men and women.

A systematic review of workplace gender equality research in the Chinese context published in the International Journal of Human Resource Management indicates that, to date, there is still evidence of gender pay gaps, glass ceiling effects, and underrepresentation of women in leadership positions [8]. Significantly, the review notes that critical feminist research on gender in the workplace has been relatively rare in China due to political and institutional reasons. Based on the above, one can see that the construction of a feminist discourse on the organisation is, in itself, a form of power.

4. Paths of Independent Resistance

4.1. Digital Discourse Strategies

One of the primary places for the development of Chinese women's resistance has been the construction of feminist communities and narratives on social media. Research on Chinese digital feminism has identified several repeated strategies. First, women have used hashtag campaigns to create public records of gendered harm and to connect individual experiences with collective patterns [3, 4]. Secondly, feminist influencers and beauty bloggers have engaged in contested forms of advocacy on platforms such as Weibo to raise awareness of gender issues, but at the same time have had to comply with the demands for commercial sponsorships and platform regulations [2].

Thirdly, as domestic platforms have become more restrictive, Chinese feminist communities have increasingly moved to overseas platforms such as Instagram to conduct transnational feminist networking and build a collective memory of gendered experiences that cannot be easily expressed in China's censored digital environment [9]. The overseas network for these ideas has been influenced by both domestic platforms and the resourcefulness of Chinese feminist activists in constructing new space for discussion.

4.2. Legal and Institutional Advocacy

At the same time, Chinese women have also sought to raise self-awareness within the legal and institutional frameworks. The #MeToo movement in China has led to disciplinary actions for some perpetrators at universities and NGOs, and it can be seen that public disclosure has had an institutional effect even without official legal support [3, 4]. Research has

found that changes in the sentencing behaviour of female judges have occurred in response to an increased awareness among the public of gender-equality standards after the #MeToo movement, with more severe punishments for gender-based violence being handed out by these judges in cases following the movement [10].

The above evidence shows that feminist discourse has spread but not achieved actual results in the institutions. When women's selves are allowed to speak publicly, a new set of norms will develop and thus affect the legal and organisational system of decision-making. Although these effects exist, institutional inertia, backlash and continued repression by the government still prevent the realisation of feminist organisation.

4.3. Alternative Identities and Counter-Discourse

The third path of resistance is to create new forms of feminist identity and counter-discourses that do not accept the conditions established by both the state and commercial media. Researchers have shown that young Chinese women are forming new types of femininity that run contrary to Confucian gender ideals and at the same time deal with the demands for "neoliberal self-improvement" and "digital visibility" [5, 6]. Some of these identity experiments fall under what Liao refers to as the politics of 'unpopular feminism', a type of feminist identification that is not co-opted by commercial platforms' feminist language and is also not alienated from feminism due to its stigmatisation as radical or anti-social [11].

Not all of these identity practices are explicitly political; they also function as discursive means to broaden the scope of subject positions for women and show that feminist identification can be complex, humorous and culturally engaged. The construction of alternative identities is thus an extension of the entire construction of self-discursive power and can occur at any level, such as in everyday language, fashion or social media interaction.

5. Implications and Future Directions

The research results in this paper provide some support for the investigation of feminist agency and self-discourse power in modern China. First, it indicates that resistance cannot be assessed based on a single index of political visibility or confrontation. There are many kinds of resistance by Chinese women, such as public hashtag campaigns and quiet adjustments to self-descriptions; there is also legal testimony and ironic humour. These different ways of life show that the circumstances for various women are also different.

Second, the paper also shows that platform architecture is a political factor. The governance of digital platforms determines which types of feminist discourse can be produced and disseminated on a wide scale, and who bears the risks of such production [2, 6]. In the future, we will continue to study how platforms are designed, how they manage content, and what kinds of feminist expressions they allow to emerge globally through Chinese digital platforms.

Thirdly, this paper also proposes to conduct more research on the correlation between digital discourse and material changes. We need to know how Chinese women express and discuss gender inequality online, as well as whether digital activism is effectively bringing about changes in institutional practices, legal protection and everyday gender relations [7-

8]. Longitudinal studies have been conducted to observe the changes in the culture at work, judicial attitude and family norms brought about by feminist campaigns. Therefore, the research topics will be based on real empirical data and have a clear political direction; we will study Chinese feminist practice according to its own historical circumstances rather than being restricted by universal ideas of feminism.

6. Conclusion

Chinese women's construction of self-talk power is one of the major social phenomena in contemporary China. Amidst the long-standing problem of gender inequality and state control over public speech, as well as the commercial logic of digital platforms, women have developed various creative ways to seize the initiative in discourse and construct communities of resistance. The above measures are not free from deficiencies or shortcomings, and the underlying imbalances will not be corrected.

However, based on the evidence presented in this paper, Chinese women's feminist agency is neither superficial nor ineffectual. It has altered the public's views on sexual violence, made changes in the judicial spirit, formed a new kind of feminist identity, and built a cross-border support system. To understand the above process, one needs theoretical systems that can consider the special circumstances of non-Western feminist politics, the advantages and disadvantages of digital platforms, and the complex links between talk and structural changes. The construction of Chinese women's self-discourse power is still in progress and has not reached completion; therefore, its path will depend on continuous research, advocacy and the courage of the women who are creating it.

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