A Longer March

CDB Special Issue on Women's Organizations in China

中国发展简报
CHINA DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

This CDB Special Issue is produced by China Development Brief

It features twelve articles that CDB has published over the past few years. We have collected them here so that they can provide a useful resource and reach new readers in the anniversary year of the 1995 Beijing UN Women's Conference - a significant milestone for Chinese women's organizations.

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About China Development Brief

China Development Brief was founded in 1996 and registered in 2003 as the Beijing Civil Society Development Research Center. As a Chinese non-profit organization, we serve as a bilingual hub providing media and communication, research and consulting, and services and networking to NGOs, foundations, development practitioners, businesses, researchers, and policy makers. Our mission is: "Empower China`s civil society through expert observation and analysis, and by facilitating the free flow of resources and views for NGOs"

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An Introduction to Women's Organizations in Modern China

by Tom Bannister, Associate Director of China Development Brief (English)[1]

When the communists rose to power in 1949, Chinese women remained in a significantly inferior position to men. Many repressive customs of the Confucian past remained, while the limited progress made during the short-lived Republican period had been stalled by the chaos of war. In 1949 only a small percentage of women worked, many were illiterate, and arranged marriages remained common. Following communist doctrine, the new government made the 'liberation' of women one of its key policies. Polygamy, child marriage, and prostitution were quickly banned; women were given the right to divorce; and access to education and employment was hugely increased[2]. Within just a few years of communist rule, Chinese women enjoyed more freedoms and rights than women in many countries in both the developing and developed world. However, inequalities still remained during the Maoist period (1949-1976). A gendered division of labor persisted across employment sectors and women continued to receive fewer work-points from their work-unit[3]. In rural areas especially, women continued to have higher rates of illiteracy, and outdated marriage customs and domestic violence continued.

Since the reform and opening up of the late 1970's Chinese society has experienced significant changes in the wake of rapid economic growth, demographic shifts and globalization. In some significant areas the progress made during the Mao-era is showing signs of regressing, as central policies have shifted emphasis to capital generation and away from social innovation. In other areas, social attitudes are increasingly outpacing legislation and showing significant generational and spatial divergences. The tangible requirements of society are also shifting outside the boundaries of established state service provision, even as the state is itself transforming under it's own pressures. Into this complex and fluid situation a new element has been introduced: the emergence of NGOs outside of the state system. NGOs offer Chinese women a new conduit for organizing, advocating, and learning, and, as the power and capacity of NGOs grows, even for influencing policy-making.

Below I will list some of the most pressing issues facing Chinese women. I will then detail some of the organizational responses to these issues.

Education, employment and political participation

Women during the reform-era (post-1978) have faced mounting obstacles in the employment arena. Significant progress was made during the Mao-era and, although many significant inequalities persisted, by the end of the 1970's most women worked part- or full-time. The socio-economic changes of the reform era

[1] A longer version of this article appears as the first chapter of the 2015 CDB Special Report: "Winning Back Half the Sky: Grassroots Chinese Women and Gender Groups on the Eve of Beijing+20" which will be available to download from our English-language website from Spring 2015.

[2] Davin, D, (1976), Woman-Work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

[3] Andors, P (1975). Social Revolution and Women's Emancipation in China During the Great Leap Forward. Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, 7(1).

brought new opportunities for women, providing them with greater options for employment, especially for rural women. However the changes also brought many new problems. Women were more likely to lose their jobs when many large state-owned enterprises were closed in the 1990's, and older women have found it harder to become re-employed. Today, media and advertising promote the importance of employing young and attractive women, maternity leave is being shortened, and men are increasingly paid more than women[4]. Despite female college graduates outnumbering men, men continue to dominate senior-level jobs and face disadvantages in economic attainment, real-estate ownership, and other forms of economic empowerment[5]. In addition, sexual harassment has recently become a major issue in the workplace with many sexual harassment cases remaining undocumented.

Although access to education improved during the Mao era, Chinese women still sometimes face unequal educational opportunities. Although the state promotes equal education for all, in some rural families, girls will be prevented from completing their education because they marry young or are forced to care for family. Due to these trends women still make up a much larger portion of the remaining illiterate and semi-literate population.

Chinese women also face inequality in the political arena. Women's participation in politics reached its zenith during the Cultural Revolution when women reached some of the highest positions of power, with Jiang Qing (江青) and Ye Qun (叶群) becoming the first women to enter the Politburo at the 1969 Party Congress and female participants reaching their best representation in the 1975 National People's Congress. The Chinese government has a stated goal to increase female representation from 20 percent to 30 percent, yet this still has not been accomplished. Representation at the National People's Congress has not significantly increased over the past three decades and women continue to be a minority in the Chinese Communist Party[6]. Chinese women not only face skewed social perceptions but also an acculturation process that encourages passivity toward political participation. Women's attention to politics in the media, political knowledge, and non-electoral participation is lower than that of men in China, particularly when women have low levels of education[7].

"Chinese women not only face skewed social perceptions but also an acculturation process that encourages passivity toward political participation"

Domestic abuse and homophobia

Domestic abuse remains a significant problem in China. Although it was reported by the Mao-era state to have been largely eradicated, it persisted into the reform-era. It is estimated that a quarter of women in contemporary China have been victims of some form of domestic violence although many women do not report domestic abuse, sharing the widespread belief it is a personal or family matter and not a public one[8]. Negative social perceptions of single or divorced women also encourage women to feel they have little choice but to remain in abusive marriages. Rural women in particular face abuse, especially when their

[4] Woo, MYK (1994). 'Chinese Women Workers: The Delicate Balance between Protection and Equality'. in *Engendering China: Women, Culture and the State*, CK. Gilmartin, Hershatter, G, Rofel, L and White, T (eds.), pp. 279–298 Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

[5] Tatlow, Didi K. (2013), 'Chinese Women's Progress Stalls on Many Fronts', *New York Times*, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/07/world/asia/chinese-womens-progress-stalls-in-varied-standards.html?pagewanted=all>

[6] China Philanthropy (2010), 'Women's Issues in China: An overview from 1949 to the present', *China Philanthropy*, 26 Jul 2010, 18 Sep. 2013, available at <http://blog.socialventuregroup.com/svg/2010/07/womens-issues-in-china.html>.

[7] Zeng, B.X. (2014), 'Women's Political Participation in China: Improved or Not?' , *Journal of International Women's Studies* 15(1), available at http://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1739&context=jiws

[8] Larson, C (2013), 'In China, a Conversation About Domestic Abuse Begins', *Business Week*, February 6th, available at <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-02-06/in-china-a-conversation-about-domestic-abuse-begins>.

husbands lack education or engage in drug or alcohol abuse.

Even though homosexuality was legalized in 1997, homosexual Chinese women, often referred to as 'tongzhi' (同志) or 'lala's' (拉拉) continue to be confronted with extreme social bias, with their sexual orientation often characterized as "perversion". Alongside tongzhi men, they often face societal pressure to marry and have children. One solution to this problem has been cooperative marriages, where tongzhi men and women marry each other to dispel these pressures and gain legal status and privileges not afforded to homosexuals. Currently, no laws exist in China preventing workplace discrimination against homosexuals, adding an extra dimension to the discrimination that Chinese women already face in the work environment. Sex education in China, which is deficient in most areas, remains discriminatory towards homosexuality which was only removed from the official list of mental illnesses in 2001. Alongside this general discrimination towards homosexuality, tongzhi women face greater social bias than tongzhi men, and have therefore taken even longer to organize around gay issues. Part of this slow progress stems from a suspicion of the LGBT movement in China, which is seen by many tongzhi women as a male-dominated effort.

Health issues and the male-female gender gap

A big issue that women in China face today is the male-female gender gap. Having male babies has always been preferred since males carry on the family name while females marry and become part of their husband's family. The traditional view that boys provide extra income and labor, while females are an expense that fails to generate any profit, has persisted. Furthermore, the One-Child Policy has further influenced couples to have one male child. As a result abortions, abandonment, and infanticide have become widespread problems. Even though the One-Child Policy is being relaxed, instances of forced abortions and coerced sterilization are widely documented. These factors have created a large gap between females and males. Currently there are 118 males to every 100 females born in China, compared to 100 to 107 in other countries[9]. The government has become aware of this situation and aims to eliminate the One-Child Policy by 2015. Currently, however, these problems, combined with overall lower-fertility rates, have significantly impacted how women are viewed, perceived, and treated in Chinese society. Women's health issues also call for attention. Maternal mortality and fertility are issues that affect Chinese women. Lack of awareness of health knowledge and/or access to funds to obtain health care have also presented barriers to women's health.

Rural migrants, sex trafficking, and prostitution

While the relaxation of registration laws has enabled rural women to find new employment and opportunities in urban areas, millions of rural migrants also face significant problems. Rural migrants in general, and rural migrant women especially, are given "other" status and marginalized into silence and passivity. Extensive regulation and surveillance of female rural migrants, including a marriage and reproduction permit, has created a difficult and humiliating barrier to urban entry[10]. Rural migrant women often work for far lower wages and in much poorer working conditions than both urban residents and their male counterparts. In addition, it has been shown that rural women who do not migrate to urban areas have to perform more manual agricultural work when other family members migrate. This has reinforced rural women's low status and has generally not provided women with additional decision-making powers. Finally, rural migrant women are more acutely exposed to physical and sexual violence.

While prostitution and sex trafficking was mostly eradicated under Mao, they rebounded following China's economic opening up in the 1980's. Due to its continued non-compliance with standards set forth by the United States' Victims of Violence and Trafficking Protection Act passed in 2000, in 2013 China received an automatic downgrade by the U.S. State Department from a Tier 2 Watchlist country - a position it had held for nearly a decade - to a Tier 3 country, the lowest rating given. The report described China's Single Child

[9] BBC (2012), 'China forced abortion photo sparks outrage', *BBC News Online*, June 12th, Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-18435126.

[10] Jacka, T (2005), Rural Women in Urban China, ME Sharpe: Armonk, NY.

Policy and the resultant sex ratio imbalance, as well as the household registration system (hukou, 户口), lack of enforcement of existing laws, corruption, lack of transparency, and domestic and international migration amongst the most significant contributing factors to China's ranking[11]. Some Chinese women end up getting trafficked abroad as well for slave labor and underground prostitution industries. In addition, foreign women are also trafficked into China from neighboring countries. Finally, the correlation between drug use and the prevalence of sex workers infected with HIV/AIDS and other STDs is high, demonstrating a relationship between drug use and high-risk sexual activities and practices.

Organizations and initiatives addressing women's Issues

There are many organizations and initiatives that strive to address the issues detailed in the section above. State initiatives have unsurprisingly dominated efforts to improve women's rights and gender equality issues in post-1949 China. However, today, with the gradual growth of Chinese civil society over the past couple of decades, and the influx of international and intergovernmental programs into China, the landscape of initiatives is now much more varied. It includes projects that operate locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally; and organizations that are non-profit, private, public-private, and government-created. There is also significant overlap between issues; with many initiatives that focus primarily on other issues having a gender element to their work (e.g migrant labor organizations often include specific programs that address women's issues). Below I will outline the landscape of these varied initiatives.

Government initiatives, laws, and GONGOs

As discussed in the previous section, one of the stated goals of the Chinese Communist Party is to 'liberate' women from their traditionally unequal status. While in some areas state initiatives have had some notable successes, in other significant areas their momentum has stalled, or they have failed to keep pace with economic, social, or demographic changes. A major reason for this, as academic Jude Howell argues, is that "though state institutions have played a crucial role in enabling women's economic and political participation, the essentially top-down approach to women's empowerment has key limitations."[12]

"the 1995 conference was also a watershed moment for disseminating the discourse of NGOs into China and inspiring a number of NGO initiatives in the women's sector"

In 1991, China won its bid to host the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, forcing the country to re-examine its policies towards women and make them more progressive. New programs were introduced, such as a program to increase rural education access, and women's study courses were established at universities. Although coverage and attendance was strictly regulated, the successful hosting of the 1995 conference encouraged further government action, with the central government beginning a new campaign based around the 'Beijing Declaration' (北京宣言) and 'Platform for Action' (行动纲要), which encouraged women's activism according to government approved guidelines. As will be discussed below, the 1995 conference was also a watershed moment for disseminating the discourse of NGOs into China and inspiring a number of NGO initiatives in the women's sector.

More recently China has developed and implemented new national guidelines, called the National Program for the Development of Women (中国妇女发展纲要). The third version of this (from 2011 to 2020) will

[11] State.gov (2013), *Trafficking in Persons Report 2013*, available at http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2013/

[12] Howell, J (2008), 'Gender, institutions and empowerment: lessons from China', in: Roy, Kartik and Blomqvist, Hans and Clark, Cal, (eds.) *Institutions and Gender Empowerment in the Global Economy*, World scientific studies in international economics, 5. World Scientific Publishing Co.: London: 103.

focus on ensuring equal participation in politics and employment, reducing the educational gap, improving quality of life, increased legal protection and access to social security, and enhanced ownership and capacity[13]. Government programs have also focused on women's health problems. For example, in order to combat maternal mortality, the Chinese Ministry of Health established a maternal mortality surveillance system to record the rates of maternal mortality as well as the causes of maternal mortality in order to create policy for change.

In addition to government programs are those initiatives organized by mass-organizations and GONGOs like the All China Women's Federation (ACWF). The ACWF, established at the beginning of communist rule in 1949, remains the overwhelmingly dominant GONGO in the gender equality and women's rights field. Although from 1995 the ACWF began to increasingly label itself a 'non-governmental organization', its organizational hierarchy and ideology remains entwined with the CCP. This limits its ability to respond to the many social, demographic, and economic transformations that are resulting from the rapid developments of the reform-era. As a mass organization the ACWF has a level of authority that is lower than a ministry within the state hierarchy. This limits its effectiveness as it is not able to proactively create agendas, nor to make policy itself. However it can propose new policies or changes to existing policies, and voice opposition to policy proposals. For example its reviews of the Marriage Law have led to some progressive amendments and its opposition to certain clauses in the Tenth Five Year Plan or resulted in the dropping of proposed alterations to labor laws[14].

NGOs

Since the beginning of the reform-era there have been a growing number of organizations and associations that have weak or no links with the state. These organizations, often termed 'NGOs', have been closely monitored but generally tolerated, occasionally repressed, and, especially in recent years, sometimes even supported by the state and its affiliated GONGOs. The field of women's rights and gender equality has proved a particularly fertile seeding ground. A rich variety of organizations, networks and initiatives promoting a diverse range of issues using assorted strategies, and with varying relations with the central state and its GONGOs, have emerged. Certain issues and types of organizations within the field are far more likely to be tolerated, and sometimes even supported, by the state than others. In this sense the field of women's rights and gender equality is similar to other fields of the Chinese NGO sector. However, several distinguishing factors set the field apart. One is that there exists a richer typology of organizations than in most other fields of the Chinese NGO sector. This is mainly because the issue of gender equality and women's rights is well established in China, making it easier for organizations to achieve legitimacy with state and society (and also because of the impact of the 1995 World Forum – see below).[15] A second distinguishing factor is the dominant and active position of the long-established and extremely powerful GONGO, the ACWF. For women's organizations this factor can both help and hinder NGO development and the promotion of the grassroots agenda. Another distinguishing factor is the importance of the 1995 Beijing World Women's Conference. Partly as a result of state support and partly as a result of increased awareness, NGOs emerged in the years leading up to the Forum and remained after the delegates had all gone home, expanding in effectiveness and scope as they became increasingly professional. Nationwide networking and monitoring associations were therefore established earlier than in other fields of the NGO sector.

Jude Howell identifies a spectrum of women and gender organizations with varying degrees of independence and autonomy[16]. Least independent is the ACWF, with its strong government ties. Next are organizations that have been created by the ACWF,

[13] *ACWF* (2011), 'China National Program for Women's Development' (2011-2020)', available at http://www.womenofchina.cn/html/womenofchina/folder/142021-1.htm

[14] Howell, J. (2003), 'Women's Organizations and Civil Society in China Making a Difference', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 5(2): 191-215

[15] Howell (2008)

[16] Howell (2003, 2008)

followed by social organizations registered with Civil Affairs that are required to have a government sponsor. Most autonomous are the unregistered organizations that sometimes have no affiliation with the ACWF or government. As in other fields in the Chinese NGO sector, increased autonomy brings both advantages and disadvantages, freeing the organizations from bureaucratic and ideological constraints but significantly reducing the resources available to them.

These organizations have worked on a variety of issues. For example some have focused on assisting unemployed women. The Service Center for the Promotion of Women's Employment in Zhabei District, Shanghai (闸北区促进妇女就业服务中心), provides poor women with employment and technical training. The Women's Business Incubator (妇女创业中心), started in 2000, has sought to encourage female entrepreneurship by providing training services and facilities to women. Some have focused on domestic violence. The Anti-Domestic Violence Network (ADVN, 中国反对家庭暴力网络), discussed in two of the articles in this collection, was the first popular NGO devoted especially to this issue. The organization conducted research and gender training to educate individuals on women's socially imposed gender roles, and interfaced with the ACWF to bring about policy change. The ADVN also worked with scholars to change China's legal system to better protect women from domestic violence, engaging the state through the ACWF.

Other NGOs such as Rural Women (formerly Rural Women Knowing All, 北京农家女文化发展中心) have focused on enhancing technical training and knowledge building of rural migrant women, and helped rural migrant women to redefine their own identities. Another, The Migrant Women's Club (打工妹之家), organized social activities, helped rural migrant women to find jobs and supported women in difficulty, lobbied the state and the ACWF to pay more attention to women's issues, and exposed problems faced by migrant women in the media[17].

Chinese NGOs have also sought to improve women's health. Examples include The Maple Women's Psychological Counseling Center（北京红枫心理咨询服务中心）which, in partnership with the Women's Federation of Tianjin Municipality（天津市妇女联合会), implemented a project to encourage female self-confidence and self-esteem by providing social work along with community support. Homosexual females have also organized NGOs to discuss their issues. Tongzhi (同志) women organized informally starting in the mid-nineties, discussing sexual relations, experiences, and politics. The first National Women's Tongzhi Conference (女同志大会) was held in Beijing in 1998, with twenty people in attendance[18].

While most grassroots organizations start out to provide services, often to meet demands that the state and the ACWF fail to adequately fulfill, some are beginning to be interested in influencing the broader structural frameworks that surround women's issues. The CCP remains ideologically committed to gender equality and this gives women's groups – both GONGOs and NGOs - opportunities to theoretically influence policy. However, at the same time it is also wary of groups that operate autonomously outside of the state sphere. Concordantly, the dominant position of the ACWF is both a bane and a boon for NGOs. On the one hand it can make it harder for NGOs to gain legitimacy because both the state and the public see that womens issues are already represented by a long-established and powerful force[19]. The ACWF is also often more open to co-operating with and listening to those organizations that it helped create, or are members of its own group. On the other hand, the presence of the ACWF gives women NGOs a route into the state structure that NGOs in most other fields do not have.

"With its significant resources the ACWF can publicly push agendas on a scale far beyond any of the NGOs"

[17] Jacka, T. (2005), *Rural Women in Urban China*, ME Sharpe: Armonk, NY.

[18] Shen, G.Q. (2011), 'The development of women's NGOs in China', In *NGOs in China and Europe*, Ashgate: Burlington, VT.

[19] Howell and Mulligan (2003).

With its significant resources the ACWF can publicly push agendas on a scale far beyond any of the NGOs. More significantly, with its close ties to the policy makers themselves, the ACWF can also promote women agendas directly within the state structure; a position unavailable to NGOs working in other fields. For example activists working through the ACWF have attempted to emphasize that women's political participation will not automatically arise as economic development improves, but rather that it has to be brought about through gender-specific programs.

International programs and corporate initiatives

Alongside efforts from the Chinese state, GONGOs, and domestic NGOs, international organizations and corporations have also played a role in the women's rights and gender equality field. Since reform and opening-up China has participated in most of the key UN women's rights programs. It ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1980, submitting its first assessment report to the Convention in 1985. As already discussed above, the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, hosted by China in 1995, was a watershed moment for Chinese women's rights groups. The Conference led to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and drew attention to issues that Chinese women face.

Alongside UN programs, other international organizations have also played a key role during the reform era. One key player has been the Ford Foundation, which has both supported the ACWF and independent women's groups. Examples of other international organizations that have been involved are The Asia Foundation, the Great Britain China Centre, and Oxfam. International scholarly undertakings on women's issues include the International Chinese Society for Women's Studies (CSWS, 海外中华妇女学会) which aims to bring together scholars and activists on the topic of women's studies[20]. Several significant corporate initiatives have also played an influential role in the field. The ACWF in particular is working to forge partnerships with U.S. private foundations and corporations to empower and help women. In partnership with the ACWF, Yale University will work with the group and other similar organizations to train senior-level women leaders, and McKinsey & Company will help train the All-China Women's Federation to enhance women's leadership in all sectors in China. A further example is the U.S.-China Women's Leadership Exchange and Dialogue (美中妇女领袖交流与对话), which is a partnership between the U.S. State Department, the ACWF, and the private sector to create and foster women's empowerment throughout China.

[20] Bao, X.L. and Xu, W (2001), 'Feminist collaboration between diaspora and China', in *Chinese Women Organizing*, eds. Hsiung, Jaschok, Milwertz and Chan, Berg: New York.

An Oral History of Wang Xingjuan

An interview by Guo Ting, CDB Deputy Editor[21]
Translated by Hsieh Li, Ella Wong and Yuan Yang, and reviewed by Vanessa Zhang

Wang Xingjuan, born in 1930, began her career in reporting and editing. In 1988, she retired and began to devote her attention and energy toward women's empowerment. She set-up the Women's Studies Institute of the China Academy of Management Science, an NGO aimed at study social problems which women face. In 1992, under Wang's leadership, the organization opened China's first women's hotline, and has since opened various other hotlines with focuses on elderly, legal counselling, domestic violence and other issues. In 1995, they organized the NGO conference of the World Forum on Women's Issues. In 1996, the Institute left the China Academy of Management Science and registered with Industry and Commerce as the Beijing Maple Women's Psychological Counseling Center, henceforth, focusing both on research and practical activities. They launched a social work model focused on intervening in local communities to solve family issues in Tianjin. The new model is now actively used across China's provinces and cities, and to date 82-year-old Wang remains active in women's empowerment.

Interview date: July 30, 2012

The road to women's studies

I have always been working on cultural issues. In 1949, before even graduating from university, I went to Nanjing to join the liberation of the city. After the liberation of the city by the Third Field Army there was a shortage of political cadres in Nanjing, so I left the University of Nanking and joined the Nanjing Xinhua Daily as a junior reporter and started my career as a journalist. Two years later, I transferred to the Beijing-based China Youth Daily. After the cultural revolution, I joined Beijing Publishing House, where I compiled books regarding current political theory.

My interest in women's rights was triggered by a study of teenage girls. In 1984, Guangdong Publishing House invited me and my old friend Lou Jingbo, to write a book named "necessary reading for teenage girls". It was well received by parents and there were long queues in Guangzhou Xinhua bookstores for the book. I realized then that there were no other books tackling this topic, so in 1986 I, along with two friends, co-published a volume named Modern Women with the Sichuan People's Publishing House. This 20-book volume covers all aspects of life: marriage, family, work, studies, dressing, etc.; and it proved to be a success, winning several book awards. We even had to reprint various editions. In 1985 the All-China Women's Federation wanted to start a magazine named "Marriage and Family", and I was invited to serve as a deputy editor to bring in editing expertise. The chief editor was a secretary from the Secretariat Department of the China Women's Federation in charge of the Marriage and Family Research Society. Her role was mostly nominal, so most of the work was done by me and another jurist. We had to publish every week, so we took turns being in charge of the final product on a fortnightly basis. This experience proved transformative in shifting my focus from not just young women but also marriage and family.

Back in the eighties, women issues were intricately linked to social development. After the disbandment of the Gang of Four, the state began to reform, to open up, and the reform of the economic and political

[21] This article was first published offline in China Development Brief no. 55 (Fall 2012). It is available online in English here and Chinese here.

system became both an opportunity and a challenge to women. National transition from the planned economy to a market economy meant that we had to follow the rules of the market. During the Mao era, five people ate portions meant for three; and five people did the work that three could do. We were not wealthy, but neither were we unemployed or hungry. After the implementation of a market economy, there was a focus on efficiency. Therefore, factories had to let go of the surplus of employees and in 1988 the State Council passed a pilot system in 13 provinces to optimize labor – that was when we first heard of the word 'laid-off workers". Since women were often in disadvantaged positions, 60 to 70 percent of laid-off workers were women. That generation grew up in the post-49 China, and received an education that inculcated them with the belief that active workforce participation is an important facet of women's liberation. It was hard to accept that they were now newly unemployed. Their loss of economic status also affected their social status and their position in the family. While working for the "Marriage and Family" magazine, I was asked many such questions. Why did women find it harder to find jobs despite a growing economy? Why did social development come with the sacrifice of a generation of women? They kept asking me: where is our way out? I couldn't answer these questions.

"60 to 70 percent of laid-off workers were women"

For that entire year, all the issues of the All China Women's Federation official publication "Women of China" discussed the future of women after the events of 1988, which was meant to tackle exactly these questions. In 1988, the world of women's rights also faced another social problem: that of participation in politics. At that time the government put into practice a reform of the electoral system, from party committees, government, CPPCCs to People's Congresses switching from the former single-candidate elections to multi-candidate ones. Before, there were five people for five positions and all you had to do was trace a circle. Now for five positions they give you seven names among which you have to choose five. With this reform, a lot of female candidates were eliminated and in many provinces in city, there was not even one female to be found in any of the four governing bodies (Party, government, People's Congress, and CPPCC). Since before elections it was the custom to praise each candidate's accomplishment, men were always seen as the ones with the richest experiences, therefore everybody chose male candidates. Women were destined to do cultural, educational and healthcare jobs, which anyone could undertake.

That year, "Women of China" also published a series of debates regarding women's participation in politics. The core of the discussion was to know if the decline of women's participation was due to a lack of skills, or discrimination. These two major problems were ostentatious in 1988, but not a single organization tackled them. Within the All-China Women's Federation only the Chinese Research Society of Marriage and Family existed. I thought that since I had already resigned from my job, had time on my hands and was interested in researching women's issues, I should establish a non-governmental women's research organization, to study contemporary issues, and help women seek a brighter future.

Therefore, in the February of 1988, I convened a meeting of ten to twenty women working on women's issues such as Xie Lihua, Tan Shen, and Liu Bohong at my house, to explore the possibility of building a of non-governmental women's research organization. It was extremely well received. We brainstormed for an entire day, and for lunch I treated everyone to noodles. The meeting gave birth to China's first non-governmental women organization, and we affectionately remember this meeting as the "noodle conference".

From research organization to women's hotline

In October 1988, the Women's Center was established. It was affiliated to the Chinese Academy of Management Science (hereafter referred to as the "Academy"), which was also a people's organization. Because of Chen Yun's networks, and under the leadership of the State Scientific and Technological Commission, the Academy managed to be affiliated to the State Council under the State Commission for Economic Reform. At that time we held activities as a secondary unit of the Academy. We had an independent bank account, and were able to register as a non-profit public service organization with the help of the Dongcheng district Scientific Commission.

Since we were a grassroots organization we did not receive government funding, so we had raise funds independently. Of the 20,000 yuan in start-ups costs needed for setting up the women's center, half were my contribution, and a few friends helped with the other half. We applied to the Soros Foundation for funds and they granted us 5000 yuan to carry out a survey on female employment rates. These are all the resources we had in the early stages of our enterprise.

When the State Council passed a pilot system in 13 provinces to optimize labor, we selected cities such as Shantou, Hangzhou, Shenyang and others to carry out our interviews with laid-off women in order to understand better their current situation and feelings. Through this study we realized that if women did not improve their working skills and establish a mentality of financial independence, they would not remain competitive and their employment situation would get worse. At that time many initiatives such as "laid-off steam buns" and laundry cooperatives started to appear, exemplifying the fact that women had left the industrial production system to be sent back to housework and small street vending.

"Of the 20,000 yuan in start-ups costs needed for setting up the women's center, half were of my contribution, and a few friends helped with the other half."

Despite understanding the problem and having a solution, we still needed to get more attention and publicity. Women's issues were relatively ignored by the public at the time, it's not like Deng Fei's "free lunch" program which managed to instantly get government attention and quickly resolve the issue. At that time even the Women's Federation did not care about the issue of laid-offs women workers. Once, a Ford Foundation project officer asked me, "I'm being frank here, but do you think your research can save women? Do you think this kind of research is useful?" I was taken aback and realized I had not thought about that. I began to calculate how many periodicals we had sent the research to, how many women would be able to read it, and among those who read it, how many could be influenced by it and realized that there were not enough.

Therefore I began to wonder how to combine research and public service. I realized that we could not be too academic in our writing and studies. We had to find a channel by which we could allow our research to serve women, let them understand that society could not regress to the period before the reforms and opening up, that there would never be a communal system again, that society would never be as protective of women as it was before. You have to keep up with the times; you have to stand up for yourself; to find your new place in society.

We were a grassroots organization, we didn't have money and we couldn't help employ women or provide them with the finances to maintain their lives. We could, however, nudge and urge them to be more self-reliant and realistic. So how did we achieve this? I thought that we could create a hotline, which only requires a room, a telephone, and a dedicated group of volunteers to pick up the phone. We could achieve significant outputs with minimal inputs.

I had an American friend whose Chinese name was Jiang Lin. She said that she knew a small foundation in the States, The Global Fund for Women, and asked if I wanted to apply for a grant. I agreed and told her we wanted to open a women's hotline. She helped me write the application. In 1992 our project was accepted and we received a $10,000 grant, half of which we could use immediately. At that time the Women's Centre did not have a bank account permitted to receive foreign currencies, so I opened a personal account to receive the grant money. The foundation was in-turn mainly sponsored by the Ford Foundation, and each grant was very small, $10,000 USD to $20,000 USD, specially designed to help start-ups, such as those without foreign bank accounts.

After receiving the money, I went to Beijing Normal University and Peking University's departments of psychology to convince their party branch to help spread the word that we were recruiting volunteers. The first batch recruited more than 50 volunteers, and on September 2nd, 1992, we managed to open China's first women's hotline. At that time, some people said that Chinese women were not in the habit of using telephones, and there was no way our hotline could gain traction. But against their predictions, the hotline was immediately a great success, the phone rang all day long, even overseas Chinese phoned in! Perhaps because of its novelty value, many media outlets published stories about it. The Xinhua News Agency

mentioned it in a new segment and it went on the 7 o'clock news on TV, which helped us gain overnight publicity. In the past it was different from now, today there are hundreds of hotlines, the Maple Women Hotline is no longer a scarce resource. Because we were the earliest psychological counseling hotline, we soon needed to open more lines, so we opened one line after the other, until we had 67 in total.

"Our Women's Research Institute was granted the honor of being among the first batch of China's non-governmental women's organizations to be recognized by the UN Economic and Social Council"

In terms of volunteer training, we required volunteers to have studied some psychology, possess technical skills, and have knowledge of gender concepts. Then it was not even known as "gender" - that term was only brought up before the convening of the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women. Then we called it "consciousness of women", or "female consciousness", and emphasized that the hotline's main aim was to urge women to be independent and self-conscious. In the second of two women's hotline training handbooks, we discussed gender issues, and all are supervisors had attended trainings on the concept of gender. By 2001, all our training material for volunteers had a special section on the concept of gender.

Crisis at the World Conference on Women

The Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) was held in China in 1995. The FWCW played an important role in promoting the development of the women's movement in China. Typically at UN meetings, one part is a formal conference hosted by the UN which governments from around the world participate in; the other part is various non-governmental forums held by civil society organizations from around the world. The UN grants observer status to a few well-known NGOs; these NGOs can apply to speak at the conference of governments to express the views of the NGOs. Our Women's Research Institute was granted this honor - the first batch of China's non-governmental women's organizations to be recognized by the UN Economic and Social Council and allowed to send two observers to attend the governments' meeting.

This was a distinguished gathering of the women of the world; over a hundred countries sent delegations to attend the meeting. The Chinese leaders at the time, Jiang Zemin and Chen Muhua, personally attended the conference. The governments' meeting was held in Beijing proper; the non-governmental forum was held in Huairou County [on the outskirts of Beijing].

A total of more than 50 Chinese non-governmental forums participated in the Huairou activities. Most of the non-governmental forum organizers at the FWCW meeting were not real NGOs; they all had a government agency behind them. For instance, behind the National Association of Women Legal Workers was the Ministry of Justice; behind the Association of Women Entrepreneurs was the Ministry of Commerce. Only the forum organized by the Institute had no ministries or commissions behind it.

The NGO forum organized by the Institute was called "Women's Groups and Social Assistance." We faced a series of setbacks securing approval for this forum because we proposed to assist vulnerable groups and one topic was victims of domestic violence. At that time, some in the leadership of the ACWF did not recognize the existence of domestic violence. They claimed that being beaten was an exception, that the status of women in China was very high, so there was no domestic violence. So after I reported this topic, one of the leaders, without naming me, criticized me during a meeting, saying: "Some people are trying to stir up trouble, claiming that we have domestic violence." I sat there feeling so uncomfortable that every sentence seemed to be directed at me.

So how was the topic approved in the end? During preparations for the FWCW, the government issued the first "Outline for the Development of Chinese Women," which referred to preventing domestic violence. The outline was legalistic, the government acknowledged the problem; how could the ACWF deny it? The ACWF gave permission for the Women's Research Institute's forum to include a discussion on domestic violence, and made the Association of Women Judges organize a forum specifically focusing on domestic violence. Another reason was that in 1990, the ACWF and the National Bureau of Statistics conducted a nationwide survey on the status of

women which found that 30% of women suffered from domestic violence. The data was there and could not be ignored.

The FWCW's NGO Forum in Huairou lasted two weeks. Our forum was only two-and-a-half hours long, everyone spoke very concisely. They only gave us a small room but there were so many people, even the corridor outside was full with people standing. It was quite impressive. It doesn't rain much in Beijing in late August and early September, but that year it rained constantly. It was cold and wet. A lot of people attending our forum got sick. But worse than that, there was a storm of controversy.

The FWCW, saw an important influx of foreign journalists in China. The state issued an internal notice forbidding casual meetings with reporters and banning foreigners from going to organizations to interview people without approval. Because the Academy of Management was a non-governmental organization which had cut ties with the Economic Reform Commission after 1990, the notice never reached me. We received a number of visitors, many through the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) who we worked with. A UNDP leader called to say that a group of reporters wanted to do interviews, so I told them to come. A lot of reporters came and after interviewing me they did not show me the articles before they were publishing abroad. I don't know whether or not they included negative reports on China. I didn't say a single word against society or the country. Whether or not the Western media misrepresented my position, creating confusion, I still do not know. But it attracted the attention of the Ministry of State Security.

Particularly important was the fact that the U.S. women's delegation was headed by then first lady Hillary Clinton. After her arrival in China, she asked to visit the Institute to see the women's hotline. This ignited a storm. It just so happened to coincide with the crisis over the Taiwan Straits; China-US relations were extremely tense. When she visited China that time, not only did national leaders not meet her, but even the President of the All China Women's Federation, Chen Muhua, did not see her; newspapers did not report on her at all. In this political environment, Hillary proposing to visit the women's hotline alarmed senior ranks.

The White House called the Institute, said they wanted to come to assess the security environment and Hillary Clinton wanted to visit the women's hotline. This phone call alarmed me. I said, I'm afraid this has to go through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The other side hung up. I immediately reported the news to the organizing committee of the NGO Forum.

"Our forum was only two-and-a-half hours long, everyone spoke very concisely. They only gave us a small room but there were so many people, even the corridor outside was full with people standing"

But the catastrophe had already begun. The deputy director of the Institute was summoned to Zhongnanhai twice and asked what kind of organization the Institute was. What kind of person is Wang Xingjuan? Why does Hillary want to see her? The Academy of Management, which the Institute was under, was also interrogated. The calls from the Ministry of State Security were incessant, and even the Academy of Management was criticized.

The NGO Forum Organizing Committee of the ACWF had decided that some organizations could receive foreign NGOs as guests, and it was best if they provided a meal. The Institute was given permission to host and the Ford Foundation funded part of the reception costs. We planned the reception and booked a meal at the Capital Hotel. But the Beijing Municipal Security Bureau told us we weren't permitted to go ahead with the reception. I said that this had been decided by the NGO forum organizing committee. They replied that it didn't matter who had decided. There was nothing I could do. I agreed to cancel the event. They also said I could not meet Hillary Clinton or attend the reception at the U.S. Embassy. In fact, during the FWCW, it wasn't just Hillary – other countries' women leaders and first ladies also wanted to visit the Institute. But the Security Bureau said I couldn't meet any of them and had to stay in Huairou and not return to Beijing.

The next day as soon as I arrived in Huairou, the cell phone rang. The phone didn't even belong to the Institute, it was lent to us by a volunteer. The phone call was from one of the staff at the Institute who told

me to hurry back because the Security Bureau wanted to see me. I had no choice but to rush back. This time, the Security Bureau gave us permission to let foreigners visit the women's hotline. But if, during a visit, someone shouted any slogans, we would have to bear all the political responsibility. I agreed. I trusted that our foreign friends would not do such thing.

"For the hotline to survive, I had to go to the suburbs and register as a commercial organization. The Women's Research Institute was renamed the Beijing Maple Women's Psychological Counseling Center. I was the first person from an NGO to register as a commercial organization."

On September 5th, more than 40 Chinese and foreign representatives visited our hotline in the Di'anmen Junior High School. We introduced the women's hotline, answered questions, and then dined together. The event went smoothly from start to finish, nothing happened.

After the FWCW, I came under heavy pressure. The Di'anmen Junior High School asked us to move, but there was nowhere where we could afford the rent. The Academy of Management Science broke off our affiliation. This meant we couldn't use their name anymore. The Dongcheng District Science and Technology Commission didn't want to be responsible for us, so we lost our legal identity as a non-profit. For the hotline to survive, for the organization to have the protection of the law, I had to go to the outer suburbs and register as a commercial organization. It was the end of November 1996, the flowers had withered and the trees were bare. Only the red leaves remained. I thought, we want to be like autumn leaves; the colder it gets, the darker the color. So the Women's Research Institute was renamed the Beijing Maple Women's Psychological Counseling Center. I was the first person from an NGO to register as a commercial organization.

At the time, a lot of people told me that even if you devote your entire life to revolution, you might still fail in the end. It's not worth dying for a political issue. You should just close the hotline, go home and write your book. I had considered that before, but when I sat in front of the telephone, listening to women eager to pour their heart out, I could not make that decision. I felt deeply that although it was only a small women's hotline, women needed it for their grief, to give them support. I decided that as long as the government did not stop me, I would keep it going. They would need a reason to shut us down but I never said or did anything against the country, and never revealed any state secrets. After retirement, I never went into the party journal room - people of my level are allowed to see certain party publications. Since they couldn't find a reason to stop me, I was going to keep on doing it. I've been educated by the Party for years. There are limits when you meet foreign reporters. I know what you can and cannot talk about.

I had a word to describe that period of time at Maple: precarious. It could have come to an end at any time. But I always believed the cause of the controversy was because NGOs were a new phenomenon in our country. I founded the first non-governmental women's organization in China, a lot of people did not understand it; it was likely to produce doubt and denial. As long as the government truly understood that everything we did was beneficial to society, there would be no misunderstanding. So I adopted a plan to introduce our work to various organizations. My hard work eventually paid off. On October 17, 1997, the director of the Petition Office of the Beijing Municipal Political and Legal Affairs Commission, Zhang Junqun, met me and said, I'm meeting you today on behalf of the leadership. What you have done for the public good is beneficial to social stability and unity. The Party supports you, the government supports you, you can rest assured and do your work with confidence. He also said that with Reform and Opening Up, there's nothing wrong with using foreign investment to carry out public welfare work.

After this conversation, the FWCW controversy basically came to an end and we had a more peaceful environment to do our work. But the repercussions of the controversy continue more than 10 years later. We still sometimes encounter feelings of distrust towards Maple. Most noticeably, Maple has been running for 24 years working for the benefit of society and women, and has received affirmation from many sectors of the community as well as a lot of awards. But we're still not able to register as an NGO and have a legal identity. I believe this is because of the controversy.

Looking back at how it played out, when Hillary Clinton wanted to visit, I think it wasn't the Institute or even me that she wanted to see but the Chinese women's hotline. She is a feminist who has always been concerned about women's development, had heard about the Chinese women's hotline and wanted to see it. In 1995 she wasn't able to but in 1996, Sino-US relations eased and President Bill Clinton paid an official visit to China. Hillary came along too and visited the Shanghai Women Cadre School's Wei Er Fu Women and Children's Hotline. She finally got her wish.

We are still flourishing, and I think that we are like maple leaves: the heavier the frost, the stronger our color, the bigger our obstacles, the greater our spirit. After this event, I called us "Red Maple" (红枫).

Involving communities in domestic problems — the birth of the "Half -Sky Homeland" model of women's equality

After we had more or less settled the problems brought about by the FWCW, Red Maple went on to do a great deal of ground-breaking work. The most important project we pioneered was to establish a model of social organizing for women: "Half-sky Homeland".

While answering the hotline, I discovered a new problem: many women were telling me that after their rights had been violated, they had nowhere to complain to. In the past, when their husbands had been violent, they would report the issue to their own work unit or their husband's work unit, and the unit would look into the matter, and give some advice. Now, their work units didn't want to have anything to do with the problem; and when the women turned to the neighbor committees, even they would just try to make excuses for not getting involved.

Why was this happening? I felt this was a problem worthy of further investigation, therefore I organized a group to look into over four hundred individual cases of domestic violence that we had received through the hotline in the past three years. We conducted in-depth research by analyzing the data, and discovered that the changes in the way society was managed had brought about these new problems.

Before China's Reform and Opening Up, our work units took on the role of social organizations. The work unit took care of all the matters of its workers' lives from birth to death, from allocating housing to providing childcare. After the reforms, work units were stripped of their social roles, and these roles were given to the local neighbor committees. The problem was, these committees were not aware of the effects of the social reforms, and had not taken their new duties into account. This is what led to the phenomenon of abused women not being listened to on either front, by their work units or by the local committees.

"The director of the Petition Office of the Beijing Municipal Political and Legal Affairs Commission, met me and said, the Party supports you, you can rest assured and do your work with confidence."

We compiled and published the results of our research as a book: "Who looks after domestic issues in local communities?" On the basis of our study, we designed a model of social work for women, Half-sky Homeland. Taking the problem of domestic violence as its starting point, this model reflected our people-oriented approach. Using the principles of gender equality as its foundation, the model's basic aim was to safeguard women's rights and raise the position of women in the household. Finally, the model brought psychological and legal help to the community by setting up a hotline for counseling and another for legal advice.

This project gained the financial support of the German Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Ford Foundation. I originally wanted to launch this project in Beijing, but the Beijing Municipal Women's Federation said that the project financing and planning could be handed over to them to be carried out by their experts, without the help of Red Maple. This was clearly not appropriate, and our funders did not agree to the plan either. As a result, I sought to launch the project in Tianjin. At that time, the chair of the Tianjin Women's Federation was a lady called Wang Zhiqiu, whom I had known from the early stages of the establishment of the Women's Research Institute. Then, the Institute had just started up a women's leadership training program, based on research done into women's political participation, and was proving

hugely popular. Zhiqiu had asked me to train the local female cadres in Tianjin. In those days, the Institute was operating from a tiny, six-meter-square office in a primary school. When we received her, we could only sit in the doorway - there was no space for us to even sit in the room together.

As a result of this interaction, I contacted her again and told her: "I have a project with a strong principle underpinning it: to promote a people-oriented, women-focused outlook. I want to use all our efforts to train people in having this outlook, to reinforce it again and again in changing the thinking of local government, female cadres, and residents alike. On the basis of this consensus, we can establish a support network for combatting domestic violence. Do you support this idea?" In those days, society tried to tell abused women: "Family is everything; for the sake of your children, just bear things a little." But my method was different: I was an advocate for gender equality, I wanted to raise the position of women in the household, to raise women's awareness of themselves as free agents, in order to end domestic violence.

Zhiqiu answered firmly: "I accept." So from 2001 to 2005, Red Maple worked with the Tianjin Municipal Women's Federation to launch the experimental "Community Intervention in Domestic Problems" project in Hongshun Lane Street, Hebei District, to promote the Half-sky Homeland model we had designed. After this project had been launched, we put our main focus on gender equality training for local government officials, local police, female cadres, neighborhood committees, and residents themselves. We ran three consecutive training sessions for the Hebei district court judges. At each training session, the court president or vice president would come with their team. Once, a female vice president came. The first time she came, she disagreed openly and didn't take in our principles. But she came a second time, bringing with her all the female judges of her court. This way, the trained local cadres built a common belief, recognizing the importance of establishing gender equality and of combatting domestic violence. So when abused women filed domestic violence cases in court, the court would stand on their side; when they went to the police, officers would educate and restrain the abuser. The community-built multi-agency support network successfully fulfilled its function of protecting women's rights.

"We put our main focus on gender equality training for local government officials, local police, female cadres, neighborhood committees, and residents themselves"

After 2005, this support network model continued to spread to other communities, where it was very successful. Households became more harmonious, and a new atmosphere emerged in the community. 80% of all household and neighborly conflicts were solved within the local community; everybody felt they were responsible actors within the community, and that community matters were their matters too. The Tianjin municipal government paid particular important attention to our model, and at the end of 2007, convened a city-wide general assembly, demanding that in three to five years' time, Half-sky Homeland be established in every one of the city's three thousand localities. By early 2012, the city achieved full coverage of the program, and started to advance it into the suburbs. In Tianjin, Half-sky Homeland became known as "the new cornerstone of harmony in Tianjin". Chairlady Peng Peiyun of the Third Plenum of the China Women's Federation, as well as Gu Xiulian, and Chen Zhili, all highly praise Half-sky Homeland. They believed it is an excellent showcase model for the China Women's Federation, worthy of promotion across the country.

In the wake of our success, a dozen local women's federations across the country wanted to learn from the model of Half-sky Homeland, but did not contact me - rather, they went directly to Tianjin to learn from the original model. In the meantime, the Tianjin Women's Federation had changed leadership: Zhiqiu had stepped down, and a new Chairperson was in place. They used the power of local experts to implement the training. This model now belongs to Tianjin, and has nothing to do with me. From my point of view as a grassroots organization leader, when I think of the fruitful results of my efforts to advance ground-breaking gender equality principles in China, to integrate them into a localized model of community organization, to benefit over ten million Tianjin citizens with such great success, and to promote the building of a harmonious society in Tianjin, I know my work has not been in vain - and I feel an incomparable sense of pride and honor.

Red Maple's successor

When I set up the Women's Research Institute, I was already 58 years old, and retired. Because of this, from the time I founded the Institute, I started looking for someone who could work with me and become my successor. However, 24 years later, I'm still looking. Over these years, we've changed staff many times: directors, deputy directors, assistant directors… Some have been kind-hearted and public-minded, but did not have the necessary expertise.

Because the Institute was set up as an institution intended for research, its leader needs to have strong research abilities and theoretical awareness in order to design new projects, and refine them into executable, sustainable and marketable brand-names. After the Institute was renamed the Red Maple Women's Counseling Center, its purpose became more focused. A leader must not only have research ability, but also have expertise in psychological counseling. If you did not understand psychology, it was very difficult for you to become a strong core leader of the organization.

Do not look down upon civil society organizations; although they exist at the margins of society, are often not taken seriously, and provide basic working conditions, it is not a simple matter to lead one effectively. First of all, such a leader must be highly sensitive to public interest, have a strong will, not care about personal gain and loss, and be prepared to endure both isolation and resentment. In addition, such a leader must be able to deploy a diverse range of tactics, in order to overcome challenges, and to bring together an empowered team of people. Not only must one be at the forefront of one's academic field, but also have the ability to fundraise the organization's expenditures.

"To advocate for equality between men and women, different people can use different forms of expression; the feminist movement needs a diverse range of actions and a variety of voices."

Speaking of fundraising: finding funds is really a life-and-death issue for a civil society organization. Each year, large numbers of such organizations are born and then die out. A major reason they die out is because they have not found sufficient funding to sustain their activities. A very famous public interest figure once advised me: "Looking for an all-rounded competent and upstanding leader is very difficult. It's better to find someone who can understand business operations to help you fundraise. Civil society organizations should also follow the example of corporate organizations in running their affairs. Red Maple has funding, how can you still worry about not finding enough professionals to come and work for you?"

"From the time I founded the Institute, I started looking for someone who could work with me and become my successor. 24 years later, I'm still looking."

I thought that the advice made sense, so I tried employing some entrepreneurs and executives from the corporate world as directors of Red Maple. But the result was not satisfactory. From the moment we took on corporate figures as leaders, Red Maple suffered year after year of financial deficits. The reason was very complex: it had to do with our different philosophies. Although people with business backgrounds did come to Red Maple to serve the public interest, their hearts were really set on making profits. In order to make profit, they may have ventured away from the public interest ethos of Red Maple, and distorted our path. In addition, it was not easy for business people to change roles when entering the public interest sector. Whether consciously or unconsciously, people who have worked in the corporate world for a long time display particularly corporate characteristics when interacting with others, and such characteristics can often leave a bad impression when faced with the compassionate personalities of public interest sector people. The result is a lot of effort with very little success: not only did Red Maple receive less funding, but its image was also damaged. It's difficult - it seems that my successors at Red Maple will have to be both highly able and also have the public interest at heart. It should

not be one person, but a small team, a collective leadership who can display collective intelligence.

China's contemporary feminist movement

The feminist movement is an umbrella movement: the movement in other countries has many factions. Some are more extreme than others. For example, radical feminism states that the family is the main tool of women's oppression, and that men achieve control over women through sexual oppression. Because of this, some organizations have developed into lesbian organizations. My political approach is relatively mild: I advocate for gender equality, an equal partnership of cooperation between men and women.

Some contemporary Chinese feminists take political actions, such as occupying men's toilets, or displaying bloodstained wedding dresses on the street, so that everybody can see the shocking depiction of an abused bride, thus rousing the public's attention. I think that there is nothing wrong with doing this. To advocate for equality between men and women, different people can use different forms of expression; the feminist movement needs a diverse range of actions and a variety of voices. In South Korea, I have seen similar actions, such as women performing street art with an anti-domestic-violence message. These kinds of actions are very media-friendly, and newspapers rush to report on them; this in turn can exert an influence on society. Red Maple has recently set up a "Speak Out Against Domestic Violence" campaigns in five major cities, using a form of psychological drama to persuade women suffering from domestic violence to be brave enough to speak out and seek the support of the community. Domestic violence will not end of its own accord; only with the support and help of the community can we eliminate violence.

I believe that the fight against domestic violence is a common cause for the whole of society and all civil society women's organizations. But our voices are still too weak; anti-domestic violence organizations should cooperate, each doing what they are best at. Red Maple has done a lot of research on domestic violence, which is our specialty. To oppose domestic violence, you need to answer many questions, such as: Why do battered women not leave home? Why would a man hit a woman? Can an abusive man change his ways, and lower his fists? These questions should be approached through the lens of theory; we should learn from the research of other countries, setting out from the viewpoint of our own country's circumstances. Some organizations, by contrast, are more adept at organizing events. All these organizations should work together, dividing up their functions according to their specialties, to form a comprehensive system of social support against domestic violence, in order to effectively help abused women.

Domestic Violence: The Mainstream Topic after the 1995 Conference

by Dong Yige, Former program officer for the Anti-Domestic Violence Network[1]
Translated by Samantha Moritz

Today, the term "domestic violence" has become a normal part of most Chinese peoples' vocabulary. However, at the time of the 1995 World Conference on Women, the concept of "domestic violence" was just beginning to be talked about in China. Local participants who attended the conference were completely unfamiliar with the idea, and could not find a suitable Chinese word to accurately translate the English concept. In other words, in China at the time the phenomenon of "beating one's wife" had not been widely recognized, and the social consensus surrounding anti-domestic violence issues was non-existent. So did this concept become universally known in China and how did corresponding social movements gain such considerable achievements in little more than a decade? Some answers can be found in the strategy developed by the international feminist movement in the last twenty years of the twentieth century as well as in the strategic choices Chinese feminists made within a unique national and social relations framework.

"Opposing domestic violence" is one of the manifestations of the "Violence Against Women" movement (known below as VAW[2]). The emphasis put on the question of VAW by international women's rights movements can be traced back to the mid-1980s. The concept was first brought up at the 1985 World Conference on Women in Nairobi, but at the time it was only broadly mentioned, as the discussion focused on trafficking of women. In the following 10 years, this concept began to enter the mainstream discourse of international women's movements, and its influence became increasingly strong. By 1993, CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women) incorporated VAW in its content, marking the concept's mainstreaming.

"Opposing VAW" was used as the framework of the women's movement, which had two points of strategic significance. First, violence against women is a cross-regional, cross-governmental, and cross-cultural universal phenomenon, and under the command of this subject women with different experiences can unite together to issue unified demands. Secondly, the discourse of "opposing violence against women" in addition to criticising violence in the public sphere (such as war, trafficking, and sexual harassment in the workplace), also can be used as a powerful critique of the private sphere (family) where women have suffered injustice. This particular point has gained prominence in the "anti-domestic violence" discourse". This gives women's right's movements a good weapon of discourse to criticise the modern capitalist dichotomy of "the public vs. the private sphere", an issue which is at the theoretical core of Western feminism.

Looking back at 1995, according to Chinese women's movement activists who had only recently heard of "domestic violence" and "opposing violence against women" at the time, using the concept of "domestic violence" to lead the movement also had a third point of strategic significance: the criticism of patriarchy emanating from the private realm could "individualize" the societal problem of women's rights, thereby depoliticizing the highly political issue of "rights". In light of China's specific national conditions, this discourse was more conducive to winning support for

[1] This article was first published offline in China Development Brief No 61 (Fall 2014). It is available online in English here.

[2] See Kaufman, Joan. 2012. "The Global Women's Movement and Chinese Women's Rights." Journal of Contemporary China 21 (76) (July): 585–602.

the development of grassroots activities. After this a string of grassroots movements focusing on "opposing VAW" and "opposing domestic violence" flourished in China, confirming the rationality of this strategy.

In 1994, the Changsha city Women's Federation became China's first Women's Federation to advocate for anti-domestic violence legislation at the provincial level; in 1995 the Peking University Women's Legal Studies and Service Center began representing domestic violence cases; and in the same year Hebei's Qianxi county began a pilot program to establish a women's legal center, to publicize the anti-domestic violence effort, and to coordinate with the local police department to intervene in domestic violence cases.

In 1997 the Ford Foundation's five Asia-based offices organized a regional conference around the theme "The opposition of domestic violence as a public health problem" in India. A number of Chinese organizations and individuals participated in the conference, including "Rural Women", "The Maple Women's Hotline", the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' (CASS) law department and other organizations. At the meeting, representatives from India, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia presented their experiences working against domestic violence in each of their respective countries, including multi-sectoral institutional cooperation to establish domestic violence centers. After the meeting, Chinese participants began to plan and prepare to carry out similar work in China.

Meanwhile, the All-China Women's Federation also began to carry out anti-domestic violence work throughout the country. But at the time, the Women's Federation did not have the same monopoly over administrative and economic resources it had before. Through the accumulating power of the civil sector, the emerging issue of "domestic violence" began to surge forward.

In 1999, a group of experts and scholars in Beijing formed the "Anti-Domestic Violence Network" (ADVN), the convener was none other than the CASS Law department professor Chen Mingxia, who attended the India conference. This new network combined the power of existing gender equality organizations, incorporating previously established civil organizations (including "Maple Women", "Rural Women", the Peking University Women Legal and Research Center and others), the Academy of Social Sciences, University-level academic research centers, and the Beijing Women's Federation into the network. However, at the beginning stages of its development this network organization was very lose. It received project funding support from international development agencies such as the Ford Foundation, Oxfam Netherlands, the Swedish International Development Agency and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

"The criticism of patriarchy emanating from the private realm could 'individualize' the societal problem of women's rights, thereby depoliticizing the highly political issue of 'rights'"

In 2002, experts from the "anti-domestic violence network" participated in the production of the television series broadcast on CCTV, "Don't talk to strangers". It met strong reactions from the public, and perpetrator figure, "An Jiahe", played by Feng Yuanzheng, was described as having had "a deep impact on people's hearts". This is a highly successful example of a social movement influencing popular culture. Since then, "domestic violence" has officially entered the public discourse, and the recognition of "domestic violence" has moved from beyond the realm of scholars and movement leaders to become subject in popular culture. Conversely, this has strengthened the breakthroughs of women's NGOs focusing on anti-domestic violence and has brought pressure and impetus for anti-domestic violence to enter the legislative and public spheres.

The Rise and Fall of the Anti-Domestic Violence Network

by Dong Yige, Former program officer for the Anti-Domestic Violence Network[1]
Translated by Jane Luksich and Sandy Xu

On May 18th, 2014, the country's only NGO that specially advocated against domestic violence, the Anti-Domestic Violence Network (ADVN) / Beijing Fanbao[2] announced to the world that their fourteen years of work had finally come to an end[3]. At the time, the State Council had already included domestic violence legislation in the working plan for 2014. Currently, the proposed legislation has already been sent to the State Council for recommendation[4] – anti-domestic violence work has been brought to the foreground in China, becoming more recognized than ever.

The confusing thing to the outside world is that the ADVN is viewed as a senior member of the gender equality NGO community and as a widely influential organization, therefore the fact that they decide to call and end to their work when new legislation is just around the corner seems odd. Obviously, if the legislation is enacted smoothly, the future of anti-domestic violence work looks very promising. On the contrary, if the anti-domestic violence work needs crusading advocates to implement the enacted legislation or follow up on the work, why would this organization not do everything in its' power to transform itself, coordinate the reforms, but instead resign when they are most needed?

Taking this one step further, ADVN had 71 group members that covered the country's 28 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions (including 37 women's federations' rights protection departments at all levels, as well as 24 separate hotlines for anti-domestic violence help, women's shelters, assorted legal services centers, and other grassroots NGO institutions); more than a hundred members active in the fields of law, psychology, social work, journalism communications, NGOs and other fields. Why would they abandon their mission while gender equality related issues have never attracted as much attention as they are doing today?

The emergence and development of the Anti-Domestic Violence Network

[1] This article was first published offline in China Development Brief No 61 (Fall 2014). It is available online in English here.

[2] Since the characters for anti-violence 反暴 fǎn bào could not be used for registration, the ADVN registered with the characters 帆葆 fān bǎo, in order to keep a similar pronunciation.

[3] The closure notice that they published, read as follows: "To my colleagues from the Anti-Domestic Violence Network and all of my friends, The Anti-Domestic Violence Network/Beijing Fanbao is regarded as the most influential domestic organization for anti domestic violence work. Anti-domestic violence national legislation has been included in the working plan of the national legislative institution in 2014; more and more localities and organizations are implementing capacity building projects involving different departments to improve intervention capabilities and response patterns. We are basically finished with our organization's stated mission. Therefore, the Anti-Domestic Violence Network / Beijing Fanbao board of directors meeting has convened on May 13, 2014, and resolved that our work is finished. Anti-Domestic Violence Network/Beijing Fanbao Board of Directors, 18th, 2014."

[4] see http://www.chinanews.com/fz/2014/06-03/6236166.shtml

After the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, the fight against violence against women in general and the fight against domestic violence in particular became Chinese feminists' leading cause. (This historical motivation has already been discussed in previous writings[5]). In 1999, led by Professor Chen Mingxia [陈明侠] of the Institute of Law of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a group of experts and scholars founded the ADVN in Beijing. Previously, extremely active women's rights NGOs already existed in Beijing. The ADVN used the existing organizations and experts as a foundation, using the network to bring all of them together. This meant that previously existing gender equality organizations could share resources, and a common response to "domestic violence" could be discussed. Its structure was comparatively relaxed and when it applied for funding from the Ford Foundation, Oxfam Netherlands, the Swedish International Cooperation Development Agency, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, and other organizations, it did it as as "teams of experts" or through individual network members. Among these organizations, the Ford Foundation's was the greatest supporter because of part of its program officers' specific interest in the fight against violence against women. The foundation also played a key role in coordinating and lobbying for other sources of funding.

In 2000, the ADVN was affiliated under the China Law Society (中国法学会), and in the project agreement signed with the donors, the network stressed this affiliation, in order to show the degree of trust and authority their organization held within Chinese society. But from the organization's management point of view, the ADVN was always committed to promoting NGOs and professionalization. The Network rented office space from the Legal Society, while staffing and operation costs were categorically independent (but subject to a certain annual management fee from the legal society). At the donors' request, the Network underwent an external professional audit every year.

The Network's first phase (2000-2003) came with a project called "Countermeasures Studies and Interventions in the Fight Against Domestic Violence". This was carried out under the auspices of the "Project Management Committee". In 2003, after the project's first phase, the ADVN's management model changed from the "Project Management Committee" to the more universally used method by international NGOs, of the "Board + Implementation Body" model. The board was composed of women studies experts and feminist movement activists that met once every three months to listen to the ADVN's quarterly work reports and made decisions on the major discussion issues and strategic planning. The implementation body's daily management and strategic planning was separate, set up with one director and a few full-time project officers responsible for specific aspects of the project[6].

In 2005, the ADVN carried out their first strategic planning meeting to determine the organization's vision of the future, mission goals, operations management, and defined their work for the five years ahead. In the same year, they repeatedly participated in NGO development training courses run by Winrock International, attending courses covering areas such as financial affairs, team cooperation, board capacity building, and others. The development of the Network's board was later seen as a success story to be shared.

"By 2009, the network counted 71 group members' covering the entire nation's 28 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions"

In 2009, the ADVN carried out their second strategic planning session, reaffirming their organization's mission and management structure. By that time, the network had taken part in all kinds of advocacy and training projects, and counted 71 group members' covering the entire nation's 28 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions (including 37 women's federations' rights protection departments at all levels, as well as 24 separate hotlines for anti-domestic violence help, women's shelters, assorted

[5] see Zhang, Lu. "Transnational Feminisms in Translation: The Making of a Women's Anti-Domestic Violence Movement in China, Chapter 5."[J].Doctoral Dissertation, University of Ohio State, 2008.

[6] 网络的力量：反家暴网络十周年.[R].中国法学会反对家庭暴力网络/研究中心,2010.

legal services centers, and other grassroots NGO institutions), with over a hundred members active in the fields of law, psychology, social work, journalism and communications, NGOs and other individual members of the network-based community organizing. In their ten year anniversary publication, the vice president of the China Law Society, the vice chairperson of the All-China Women's Federation, the Ford Foundation and other donors all wrote earnest commemorative words and expressed their satisfaction for the network's ten years work and best wishes for the future.

With these kinds of resources, as well as both internal and external approval for the work the ADVN carried out, why did the board decide to shut it down?

A dual Identity and three types of difficulties

As a former project officer for the ADVN and a current observer of China's feminist movement, I feel that the ADVN evolved into an organization with one foot in the political system and the other in the NGO world and failed because of this dual identity. This identity had a positive impact during the organization's developmental process, but in the end suppressed the Network's ability to adapt to changes of social development.

Firstly, this dual identity allowed the ADVN to rely on support inside the system to carry out its NGO work, but the system's indecision in bringing change led it to lose legitimacy, causing all the projects to face difficulties.

"ADVN's strategy emphasized seeking approval within the system, in order to reduce risk and secure authoritativeness and legitimacy for the work carried out"

Secondly, because of Chinese social norms, relying on members from the system's elite to establish the implementation body of the organization, and using the decision-making processes common to international NGOs led to "decision making without responsibilities", causing many staff to leave.

Third, dual identity is reflected in the ADVN's financing and working model. It relied on international funding in the long run, and carried out anti-domestic violence advocacy by cooperating with government-related organizations and departments. When the pattern of international funding, the development of Chinese civil society and the public welfare sector started to change, this model began to become problematic.

(1) Identity, Authority, and the Dilemma of Legitimacy

For a long time the Anti Domestic Violence Network did not have an independent Industry and Commerce registration, instead it always relied on its connection to the semi-official China Law Society, making it a "civil society organization with a foot in the political system". These kind of organizations were common in China at the time, therefore the ADVN can be considered a good example of this trend. This tactic had serious advantages, as the China Law Society is associated with 25 other mass organizations such as the Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the Chinese Writers Association, among others. Placed directly under the State Council's leadership, the China Law Society's president is often a retired leader of the Supreme People's Court or of the Supreme People's Procuratorate. In the Chinese context, such organization is nearly a government body, but to the international foundations, the China Law Society appeared at least nominally as a mass organization and its governmental ties were trivial compared to the Women's Federation's. On the other hand, by relying on the name of the China Law Society, the ADVN's projects were carried out smoothly, especially within the public security, prosecution and legal departments. Therefore, from 2000 to 2010, the ADVN always stayed on god terms with the China Law Society. However at the end of 2010, due to revisions in the country's foreign exchange management policy passed the year before, the China Law Society became unable to accept donations from foreign sources. The ADVN had no other choice than to cut ties with it and register with Industry and Commerce as "Beijng Fanbao".

This shows that the ADVN's particular tactics emphasized seeking approval within the system, in order to reduce risk and secure authoritativeness and legitimacy for the work carried out. However, due to China's current transitional period, the changes in and of the political and economic system, as well as the system's inherent unpredictability, even the most

conservative risk taking strategies cannot guarantee a stable future. That is how China's strict disruption between foreign exchange and NGO management in 2009 led to the passive termination of the previously positive collaboration between the ADVN and the China Law Society. The Women's Legal Aid Center at the Peking University Law School also met with a similar bitter fate. The Center had been established in 1995 and had always possessed a good reputation and widespread societal influence among donors and NGOs alike. But due to the changes in policy in 2009, it was publicly revoked by Peking University.

Other women's organizations lost their affiliated identity within the system. Perhaps this was not always a fatal blow to their influence. For example, the Peking University's Women's Legal Aid Center (now registered as the Beijing Zhongze Women's Legal Consulting Services Center) continues to operate to this day, with a great deal of influence among women's NGOs. But the ADVN and the Center are different, as when the Network launched its policy items, it needed a high degree of collaboration from the Women's Federation departments as well as public security departments, prosecution and legal departments across the country. Therefore, the loss of its affiliation with the Law Society represented a much bigger issue than the loss of Peking University's support for the Center, since the ADVN's works was much more dependent on the country's political and administrative apparatus, while the Center's essential mission was to provide legal aid to women.

(2) Problems with methods of management

Since the founding of the ADVN, it was hoped that it would provide a new model for NGO management. Through the high level of separation between decision-making and implementation, organizations could overcome the common problem of having power concentrated in the hands of one person with other members following orders. Overall, the Anti-Domestic Violence Network's efforts in this regard have been very successful. The image the public has of the ADVN is that of the organization itself, rather than of one particular leader.

But this system of checks and balances also created some problems. Broadly speaking, the board had a tendency to be occupied with the successful completion of projects and their impact on society, while paying little attention to the overall health of the network—namely, the members responsible for implementing those projects. Therefore, the implementation body's interests were the first to be abandoned, particularly when the organization was under external pressure.

The ADVN's decision-making branch—the board—had become increasingly elitist. The vast majority of the board members were scholars from the country's most prestigious schools and from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences as well as senior leaders and experts in the women's movement. They worked mostly in the areas of law, media, and women's studies. As a gender equality organization that strived to advance progressive ideals, accruing top talent was not a problem in itself, as it provided valuable social capital. However, considering that most of these elite members came from within the system, had various sources of stable income, and high levels of education and social capital, NGO work tended to be merely an activity they did in their spare time. That is to say, the

"The success of the organization was not necessarily each board member's top priority nor a matter of life and death"

success of the organization was not necessarily each board member's top priority nor a matter of life and death. My intention is not to question their deep sense of responsibility or to cast doubt on their commitment to gender equality. They were indeed driven by strong convictions, but because of their position in the social system, they personal interest in having the ADVN strive was weak. The spirit of volunteerism of these elites certainly contributed greatly to gender equality and the faith in anti-domestic violence work as well as to the organization's work. However, no structural mechanism was put in place that ensured that all board members could always be available and ready to contribute the great amounts of passion and energy necessary to the ADVN's development.

Because of the board's inability to support the organization's development, promote its brand, and build its staff members' capacities, the ADVN had an extremely high staff turnover rate, especially compared to sister organizations and despite its excellent reputation within the women's movement and its abundance of resources. Moreover, its project funding as well as part of its own resources were sometimes

used to support scholarly research, but occasionally, the results would be published as the work of the scholars without mentioning the ADVN's role. Therefore, these publications could not be counted among its achievements. These malpractices all occurred in the Network's later stages, when the number of Chinese nonprofits exploded and the need for talent surged: it lost a great amount of talent at the implementation-level and had no way to attract and keep talented project officers.

(3) The Problem of Sustainable Funding and Projects

The ADVN received support from four international foundations since its founding. They provided substantial grants with three-year funding periods, giving stable and reliable support. This funder-recipient relationship on the one hand allowed the ADVN to operate on a large scale, conducting various training across regions and departments. On the other hand, it prevented the organization from seeking funding from other channels and prevented staff from developing their skills in this area.

"Is this the end of the NGO operating model that combines the social capital of domestic governmental bodies and the financial resources of international organizations?"

This problem was finally revealed because of the 2009 global financial crisis and domestic policy changes in that year. In 2009, the global financial crisis caused international foundations to significantly reduce their support for Chinese organizations (For example, the grants given by the Ford Foundation reportedly shrank to what they were in 1979.). The continued support of our projects had already been made more complicated when, for various reasons, policies restricting foreign donations to social organizations were tightened. The ADVN had no choice but to leave the China Law Society and seek independent Industry and Commerce registration.

At the same time, while the Chinese economy "leapt forward", various government and civil society organizations were getting more and more money, unlike in the funding- and talent-scarce 1990s. In these reversed circumstances, government bodies were less inclined to collaborate with the ADVN. Generally speaking, governmental organizations did not have meaningful motivation to seek collaboration and change with NGOs.

Additionally, some tense moments arose due to the fact that the ADVN's direction was shaped by the anti-violence theme of the international women's movement. However, its strategy allowed it to avoid highly politicized minefields. When receiving long-term assistance from international foundations, this was not a problem, since "anti-violence" was precisely what the funders were striving for. But when ADVN had to turn to Chinese society for funding, it was unclear how this topic would arouse the sympathies of domestic companies, whose gender consciousness was still extremely low. After all, because of China's unique history, topics such as "gender equality" and "feminism" suffer more defamation and misunderstanding than in the West. They lag far behind topics such as the "protection of the environment", "poverty alleviation", and "education" in getting support from domestic organizations. How to strategically speak to domestic funders — this is an area in which the ADVN lacked experience and expertise the most.

Having understood the challenges described above, it is not hard to see why the ADVN fell apart soon after the projects funded by international foundations ended and the organization left the China Law Society.

The legitimacy the organization had acquired inside the system was weakened, which meant that the continued translation of the social capital accumulated within the system into resources and action became difficult. The increasingly elitist board did not continue supporting the organization because its failure or success was unconnected with its own survival (a perfectly understandable choice). Because the organization was long directed by international funders, it did not develop the skills necessary for fundraising from domestic groups. After losing its attractiveness to funders, the organization also encountered difficulties sustaining partnerships with governmental organizations. Finally, it faced immense challenges in registering as a commercial organization independent of the China Law Society.

Conclusion: What does the future hold for anti-domestic violence organizations?

The birth and death of the ADVN are not mere blips in the record of Chinese social movements. The curtain has fallen on fourteen years of hard work, raising a serious question: Is this the end of the NGO operating model that, under a particular State-society relationship, combines the social capital of domestic governmental bodies and the financial resources of international organizations? How can the women's movement and similar social movements develop and be reborn in a new environment and a society that is rapidly changing? These are all extremely practical and important questions awaiting answers from the field.

Finally, having been a project officer of the ADVN, I am not writing this essay to criticize the remarkable record of this landmark women's NGO. Rather, having great sympathy and understanding of the aims of the organization, my goal is to investigate and bring up a few existing issues which have been difficult to discuss at other times. I also hope that these heartfelt and sincere words will be useful to the women's movement as a whole.

Becoming Public: Anti-Domestic Violence (ADV) Activism as a Public Event

by Stephanie Bräuer, Ph.D. Fellow at Duisburg-Essen University[1]

Domestic violence (DV) is a severe problem in the People's Republic of China (PRC) with occurrence rates varying between 24,7% and 54,6 % depending on the conducted study (All China Women's Federation, 全国妇联 2011: 4; Creasy et al. 2013). Since 1995 the problem slowly received more attention not only from the public but also from policymakers, and legal protection against DV slowly improved. Nonetheless China still has no specific DV law. In April 2013 the National People's Congress (NPC) finally stated that ADV-legislation would be part of a review of important laws in 2013 (制定反家暴法)[2], prompting ADV-activists to speculate that an ADV-law would soon become reality. Against the background of slow improvements in the ADV legislation the ADV-organizations invented new strategies to overcome the static status quo. The latest of these innovations is the emergence of public interest performance art advocacy (街头公益行为艺术)[3]. What are the benefits of this strategy for the mobilization process and why is it innovative?

This article is dedicated to the discussion of two cases of performance art advocacy conducted by ADV-activists: the Injured Bride's Event (受伤的新娘行动) and the activism accompanying Kim Lee's third court hearing[4]. Based on the description of these two cases I will show the main common features of both activities and how they represent common components of performance art advocacy, e.g. the strong reliance on professional ADV-organizations. Furthermore, I will discuss how these advocacy practices represent a useful addition to the tactical mobilization repertoire of established ADV-organizations.

The Injured Bride's event (受伤的新娘行动)

In 2012 three women in Western style wedding dresses with red marks symbolizing blood stains paraded through the Qianmen(前门) pedestrian street in Beijing holding signs calling for an acknowledgement that love and violence are under no circumstance

[1] This article was first published online in August 2014 here.

[2] C.f. working plan of the NPC: http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/xinwen/syxw/2013-04/27/content_1793635.htm, last accessed on Mai 4, 2014.

[3] Advocacy is understood in this article according to Heaney as performed by organizations and individuals that exist primarily to promote a common good that extends beyond the narrow economic or sectarian goal of organization's members and supporters or individuals (Heaney 2007). In that sense it refers not only to policy advocacy, but also to the setting of public agendas and hence the mobilization for public support.

[4] Kim Lee is a US-citizen married to the celebrity Li Yang famous for his Crazy English language training centers all over China. In the autumn of 2011 she publicized Li Yang's violent behavior towards her on her Weibo account. In the aftermath she filed for divorce in a Chinese court on grounds of domestic violence and applied for custody of their three daughters. The Beijing intermediary court granted the divorce, gave Kim full custody of their daughters, and decided that Li Yang had to pay alimony for their daughters in the summer of 2013. Both Kim Lee and Li Yang are perceived by the greater public as modern and open citizens living in urban developed centers. (Weibo: http://www.weibo.com/p/1005052254494161; Baidu: http://baike.baidu.com/subview/1205784/6889377.htm?fromId=1654201

connected. The Injured Bride's event was the first known occurrence of performance art advocacy used in the Chinese women's movement. Chinese ADV-activists had learnt about a similar activity conducted in Turkey in November 2011 (Wang 2012) and wanted to implement a variation of it in the PRC to raise awareness for DV.

To stress the symbolism, the Injured Bride's activism was conducted on Valentine's Day 2012. The day is widely perceived as special date (情人节) symbolizing the ideal of harmonious intimate relationships[5]. During the event DV was portrayed as symbolizing relationship's dark sides and therefore stood in sharp contrast to the idealized romantic image of love that is commonly propagated, especially on Valentine's Day. By using a topic relevant to every Chinese - love and marriage - and by contrasting the ideal of harmonious intimacy with its possible negative manifestation in the form of DV, the activists hoped to draw attention and create support against DV.

The activists chose the famous Qianmen pedestrian street as the location for their event. Qianmen is known as the last remnants of the business center of old Beijing and is today one of the top locations for tourists to visit. Therefore the area's footfall is high and such a performance has the potential to reach a substantial audience. Moreover, a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) organization conducted an activity promoting same-sex marriage on the same day at Qianmen. Having two taboo topics on display in such a public place was thought to increase media coverage and reduce potential risks of confrontation with authorities for the activists.

Activism accompanying the third hearing of Kim's divorce case

On the occasion of Kim Lee's third and final court hearing - regarding her divorce from her husband Li Yang due to violent abuse - a group of young activists supported her through dancing, singing, and the hand-over of 1000 supporters' signatures.

Kim Lee posted her court date on her Weibo[6] account only a week before the hearing. Some activists perceived this occasion as a great opportunity to raise public support not only for Kim but also for the fight against DV. Through the network of organization A[7] they contacted other potential actors.

On the day of the court hearing the activists lined up in a row wearing T-shirts that displayed the slogan "Zero Tolerance for Domestic Violence" (家庭暴力零容忍). Against the background of Kim's final court date the activists revitalized a signature campaign that had up to then only been moderately successful, widening its scope by publicizing it through organizations A and B. After Kim Lee's arrival at the court the activists handed her a banner which displayed 1,000 signatures and the activists' demands to the government.

"This strong emphasis on the activist's independence originated in their fear of reprisals against ADV-organizations if they would be perceived as initiators of public disturbances."

Afterwards the activists performed a song that demanded the punishment of DV, a greater awareness for the issue, and for each individual to take greater responsibility for combatting DV. The performance

[5] At the same time Valentine's Day is also V Day. V Day was initiated by Eva Ensler and was inspired by the reactions to her play The Vagina Monologues and encourages creative activities to raise awareness to end violence against women.C.f. http://www.vday.org/home.

[6] Weibo is probably best characterized as the Chinese version of Twitter. To know about Kim's court date implies that the person need either to follow with Kim in Weibo or with somebody who shared her original post or commenting on it respectively. That means the person needs to be a member of her network.

[7] The organizations named in this article will all remain anonymous. The organizations will be referred to as organization A, B, C. Throughout the article these placeholders regard always the same organization. Organization A is a Beijing located NGO focusing on women' s rights issues using new media and has an increasing expertise in performance art advocacy. Organization B is a Beijing located NGO, as well, specialized in ADV legal advocacy. Organization C is also a Beijing based NGO specialized in human rights advocacy. Only in 2012 organization C started to regard women's rights issues.

took less than an hour, the hearing however stretched over several hours. Although they were not permitted onto the premises of the court, the activists waited until the hearing was concluded. Through this perseverance they aimed to show moral support for Kim and for the combat of DV in front of media representatives. The activists' main aim with this activism was to receive massive media attention that would mobilize greater public support for tackling the problem of DV.

Organizational support for both events

Both the Injured Bride's activism and the activism accompanying Kim's third court hearing were repeatedly framed as being initiated and carried out by independent volunteers with no affiliation to the established ADV-organizations. This strong emphasis on the activist's independence originated in their fear of reprisals against ADV-organizations if they would be perceived as initiators of public disturbances. The activists were afraid of complications regarding their organizations' registrations, limitation of their work freedom, and pressure against organizational members.

"The actors of both events were highly educated and were either attending university, or had work experience in related fields, such as law or media"

For both events, organization A, B and, C formed a dynamic but stable coalition. Regarding the organization and conduct of the Injured Bride's activism only organizations A and B were involved, providing different kinds of resources. Organization A learnt about the event in Turkey, formulated an event strategy and provided a space to prepare the activity. Organization A contacted people in its network to enact the Injured Brides and provided the three actors with additional support during the event. Organization B provided informative material that was distributed to bystanders during the activism. They also provided, when necessary, a small budget for travel and food expenses for the activists.

The activists supporting Kim during her court hearing were backed by all three organizations providing different kinds of resources. Organization A again opened up its network to find potential activists, and contributed their media resources and expertise in conducting performance art advocacy. Organization B provided, again, a small budget for expenses of the activists, media resources, and information material. Organization C provided accommodation, its network of women's rights experts, and a place to organize the event.

The activists most notable strategy to avoid creating the perception that the established ADV-organizations were coordinating the events, was to tell media and state authority representatives that they were attending the event as individual volunteers supporting the cause. Although the activists involved were not necessarily members of established ADV-organizations, they were all at least members of those organizations' networks. Moreover, if the activism was not initiated and coordinated by a specific organization in the first place, it was at least supported by the coalition built by organizations A, B, and C.

Participating activists

As mentioned before, both events rested not only on the visible actors, but also on a crowd of people belonging to one of the three ADV-organizations.

The actors of both events were highly educated and were either attending university, or had work experience in related fields, such as law or media. The actors were all female and between 20 and 25 years old. Furthermore, most activists stated that their involvement was not motivated by a personal DV experience but by their awareness of gender inequalities. They perceived their engagement as natural consequence of their citizen's consciousness, which was characterized for them by their willingness to go out on the street and stand up for their beliefs (to utilize their 'power to act' '行动力'). With this dedication they would differ from self-centered individuals in China, following the slogan 'the less trouble the better' (多一事不如少一事).

Media Representation

Performance art advocacy is a good strategy to receive media attention and the media coverage of both events was huge – especially in the social media arena. Media representatives – both in print and online media - were contacted before both events. Traditional print media

are reluctant to report on such events[8]. However online media was important for dissemination and several 'copy-cat' events sprung up across China, mimicking tactics employed during the Injured Brides[9].

Performance art advocacy as an invented tactic in the ADV-organization's mobilization against DV

Performance art advocacy centers on a live performance at public places for a public audience (CDB 2013). In that sense it differs largely from traditional advocacy tools such as lobbying behind closed doors. Performance art is an inclusive strategy, very well suited to receive broad media coverage and hence a great tool to raise public awareness and rally support for policy reforms. It is a cheap advocacy strategy based on creativity and individual dedication. Although activists in the events emphasize that they have no affiliations with established ADV-organizations, it is these organizations that provide the necessary resources to hold the events, such as accommodation, working space, expertise, financial funds, and networks.

The innovative aspect of this mobilization strategy is the conscious creation and usage of public disturbances. The activists initiate their advocacy events in public places, using topics that are traditionally perceived as 'private', 'family matters', or taboo. Both aspects are important for generating broad media coverage. Due to the ban for traditional media to broadly report on such events, new media has become one of the central dissemination tools for such activism.

Through its disturbing character, performance art advocacy is a useful addition to the ADV-organization's mobilization 'toolkit', because, unlike traditional advocacy strategies, they can create broad media coverage and therefore potentially mobilize more people.

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[8] According to one informant the department of propaganda issued a statement banning the large-scale reporting of such events, especially in traditional media.

[9] Articles on copy cats: c.f. http://www.un.org/zh/women/endviolence/16days.shtml, http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/16_days/en/.

Interview with Wang Wei of the Xi'an Domestic Workers' Union

by Han Hongmei, founder of the 'One Yuan Commune' (一元公社)[1]
Translated by Sophie Chadd and reviewed by Yuan Yang

It's an early weekend morning in 2013 in the ancient city of Xi'an, and although the Commercial Building seems to be lacking its usual hustle and bustle, one of its large rooms is actually packed with women. Aged between 30 and 50 years old, some talk loudly, and some discuss whispering while others sit silently on benches. This is the Xi'an Domestic Service Workers' Union (西安市家政工工会). Naturally, where there is a union, there is a President, and in this case it is Wang Wei, a 45-year-old, short-haired, nimble-tongued woman.Wang Wei currently has two identities: one as a home economics trainer at the Xi'an Federation of Trade Unions (西安市总工会), and the other as the President of the Xi'an Domestic Service Workers Union. During the day, she provides home economics training classes to jobseekers, and during weekends, she runs back and forth between the union's office and her fellow domestic workers to discuss trade union matters with them. From being a laid off state-owned enterprise worker to becoming the champion of a housekeeping competition in Xi'an and President of the Xi'an Workers Union, Wang Wei's life since she was laid off ten years ago has had 'thousands of twists and turns'.

State-owned enterprise female worker: I was laid off

In 1986, a not yet 20-year-old Wang Wei graduated from high school, and like many other state-owned enterprise workers' children, smoothly joined the Xi'an 3402 factory in the Lanzhou Military Logistics department (also known as the Xi'an Lishan Automobile Factory). Working within the Labor Service Company of the Lishan car seat factory, Wang Wei soon became a worker of the state owned enterprise, quickly envied by other people in that era.

Married with a daughter and a steady work routine, Wang Wei's life would have been fully laid out before her, if she had not been laid off: "I could've continued working there until I retired, with nothing changing." In 2002, after the factory changed management, and because the factory's performance was low, Wang Wei received notice that she was to be laid off. This news caused her great pain. "I never thought that after more than 10 years' work, the factory would suddenly not want me!" Just after being laid off, Wang Wei was not under too much pressure since her husband was still working, but two months later he was also laid off. This news made Wang Wei uneasy. "My daughter had just graduated from elementary school, and my husband and I were unemployed; how were we going to survive?" To make a living, Wang Wei went out every day and tried hard to get a job, but she found that she missed having 'proper work', and out of desperation tried her hand at domestic work.

The grassroots group: home of the domestic workers

[1] This article was first published offline in China Development Brief no 58 (Summer 2013). It is available online in English here and Chinese here.

Although she was able to work again, the change was a huge blow to her, she found it difficult to accept her new career. "Before, my life was bright, but now I wait upon other people." When she started her new work as a domestic worker, Wang Wei had still not come to terms with her new occupation, and would often cry while traveling back and forth every day from her home to her employer's house. She would cry biking to her employer's house, wipe her tears dry in preparation for four hours' work, and then cry all the way home. Not daring to let her family know, she would dry her tears and put on a smile before entering the house. "Often in the middle of the night, tears would involuntarily stream down my face," she said. It pained Wang Wei even more that her parents started to completely ignore her when they learned she became a domestic worker.

At this point, a teacher from the 'Xizhen House Keeping Company' (希珍家政公司) encouraged her to join Northwestern Polytechnic University's Women's Development and Rights Research Center (西北大学妇女发展与权益研究中心) and participate in their domestic workers' group activities. In 2003, the Northwestern Polytechnic University (NPU)'s Women's Development and Rights Research Centre held an event called "Empowering Marginalized Female Workers", which led to the creation of a 'grassroots group' for laid-off domestic workers. One of the group's goals was to train marginalized female workers, establish a grassroots organization of marginalized females workers, realize the female workers' right to unite and organize, fight for social resources, increase marginalized female workers' ability to adapt to the marketplace, their vocational skills, and their ability to carry out contractual negotiation with their employers.

A deeply depressed Wang Wei joined the group and through its many activities got to know many other struggling women like her. "There were some domestic workers whose situations were far worst than mine. They were all laid-off workers. During weekends, everyone got together, we had many topics in common which we would talk about and cry over - every time we met we spent time crying." When she recalls the activities of that year, Wang Wei remembers them as vividly as ever. It is thanks to their mutual sharing, support and companionship that Wang Wei and her sisters were able to get through the most difficult period of their lives. The 'grassroots group' is not only a medium for providing emotional support to the women, it also offers skills development, legal rights training, training to improve domestic workers' technical skills, as well as encouraging the understanding of domestic work's value and providing legal support to protect domestic workers' rights. "Like many of my other sisters, at the beginning I was unable to hold my head up high, but, through the 'grassroots group', we have come to understand that domestic work is a real profession." After several months, Wang Wei hadn't missed a single activity, she felt better and her service improved for her employer's satisfaction. Wang Wei had also become one of the most active members of the grassroots group.

The Domestic Workers' Union: their own organization

In the second half of 2004, the NPU project was coming to an end and its funding for the grassroots group's activities was running out. But the domestic workers were reluctant to disperse, and teachers from the NPU's women's center had long been planning to continue the grassroots group. This led to the idea of establishing the grassroots group as a domestic workers' union. With the help of the Xi'an Federation of Trade Unions' Re-employment Service Centre (再就业服务中心), the Domestic Workers Union that had been spontaneously founded by the domestic workers became formally established on the 23rd September, 2004. Wang Wei was the first to be elected as a committee member of the Domestic Workers' Union.

"At the beginning I was unable to hold my head up high, but, through the 'grassroots group', we have come to understand that domestic work is a real profession."

The Xi'an Federation of Trade Union's Re-employment Service Centre gave the Domestic Workers' Union a less than 10 square meters room for them to use as an office. The room usually functioned as both a staff canteen and a changing room, apart from Sundays when the domestic workers used it as an office. Wang Wei and her partners bought a bookcase, which was the sole property of the union at that time.

The trade union was operational, but developing its activities became difficult for its members. "We had to act on our own initiative even if we did not understand how, since many of the domestic sisters had expectations of us", says Wang Wei. "We all bought a copy of the 'Trade Union Law', and little by little we learned how to organize a trade union".

On her day off, Wang Wei makes arrangements for her child, and squeezes into the borrowed office with the other members to discuss the development of the trade union. Hard work pays off, and, driven by Wang Wei and seven other members, the union took shape. Although the union is small, it is a 'complete' body, not only with its own leadership, but also with a comprehensive system of regulations. Wang Wei believes the union is not only a place where domestic workers can share their feelings, but more importantly where they can rebuild their confidence and improve their abilities. "I came to the trade union and realized that in this profession, skills are particularly important, and improving one's skills means you can earn a higher income." At the union, Wang Wei attended training for the intermediate and advanced home economics qualifications, and she also enrolled in cookery classes, among others, where she learned to prepare large feasts and pastry dishes. Wang Wei said: "My life is intertwined with the union - if I had not come to the union, how would I have learnt these things?" Through the union, Wang Wei not only improved her skills, but also participated in housekeeping competitions where she was crowned the "Xi'an domestic champion".

"Without money, how could I keep the union alive? I was so anxious that I could not sleep."

As she continued to be engaged in domestic service work, even her parents' attitudes gradually changed from exclusion to understanding. Many other domestic workers sisters, like Wang Wei, greatly benefitted from the domestic workers union. They participated in training and legal studies, and in times of difficulty could ask the government for help through the union. The union provided a great platform for domestic workers to help each other. Wang Wei says that the Xi'an Domestic Service Workers' Union "gave us an identity, it is our own organization."

Union president: the union banner cannot be lowered

In 2007, the union encountered a new problem: seven committee members who were among the founding fathers of the union, started to leave one after the other due to various pressures. "Domestic workers are a deeply underprivileged group; if we do a job slightly less well, there will be many complaints. As it is a self-run organization, committee members do not have any paid benefits, their work is all voluntary, and everyone is under great pressure". The work that the marginalized group carries out is extremely tough, and Wang Wei can barely conceal her emotion when remembering those years.

"Election time!"

To face this situation, the Domestic Workers' Union held a meeting and decided collectively that, even if they were a very young union (the union was founded a little more than two years before), they had to elect a new leader. "Although the reason we gave was that we wanted to train up younger members as the future backbone of the union, the reality was that we did not want the union to wither in our own hands," Wang Wei said, stating the real reason for the leadership change.
Over two hundred people attended the election, and members casted their votes in a secret ballot. Wang Wei, who was a committee member of the union, was unanimously elected as the second Chair of the Domestic Workers' Union for a second term, with only 2 abstained votes. "I was under great pressure, and my mind was in a muddle." Wang Wei had taken over the trade union at a difficult time.

The union had just over 300 members, but the union's money from membership fees was only 204 RMB. "Without money, how could I keep the union alive? I was so anxious that I could not sleep. But I knew how much the domestic workers needed this group: if one day it did not exist, there would be nowhere for them to share their woes." Wang Wei knew that "the union banner could not be lowered". As a result, she went to work as usual, and then to the union on weekends to organize events, recruit members, contact resources and look for support. Wang Wei said: "As long as I could think of a way to do it, at any opportunity I would look for donations. I even approached the small street-vendors selling rice noodles on the streets of Xi'an." Through Wang Wei's hard work and with the support of scholars from the NPU, the Xi'an

Domestic Workers' Union finally overcame their most difficult period."2009 saw an improvement in trade union development, and due to increasingly good work, the number of members paying membership fees also increased, the group was able to attract far more people, and that year, the union increased in size to over eight hundred members," Wang Wei proudly recalls.

The Domestic Workers Union: maintain our development and maintain our stand

In October 2011, with the support of the Beijing Cultural Development Center for Rural Women (北京农家女文化发展中心), the Xi'an Domestic Workers' Union finally got their own office, and the sisters had a stable location for their activities. The union started with 162 members and today counts over 1,500. Although the Union was well established, Wang Wei still felt uneasy. The huge growth of the trade union brought new issues, and many of these issues had to do with a work-related accident of one of the union members.

Yan Yali, one of the oldest members of the union, was a widowed single parent and relied on the income she made from domestic service work to provide for her child and parents. Unable to bear the mocking she received as a housekeeper, she went to work in a laundry mill at a military hospital. Not long after she started work, she had an accident while operating machinery and severed four fingers of her right hand from the middle joint. After being treated at that hospital, the injured area gradually became infected and the infection spread down her fingers. The limited facilities and low standards of the military hospital meant that she risked of having her hand amputated if she continued receiving treatment there. But, if she transferred to another hospital, the military hospital would refuse to pay the medical expenses. The trade union actively assisted her family at negotiations with the hospital. Eventually the military hospital let her transfer to another hospital and agreed to pay a certain amount of the medical expenses in order to save her right hand. "This incident had a huge impact on me. In order to transfer Yan to the other hospital for treatment as soon as possible, we made a lot of compromises, and Yan had to bear most of the medical expenses herself, which was really heartbreaking," said Wang Wei. Yan Yali's accident made Wang Wei realize how particularly vulnerable domestic workers are, as there are no specific laws to protect their rights.

Furthermore, as the workers' union is self-organized, they face problems such as a lack of funding, lack of staffing, and are limited in their capacity to bargain and make agreements. "Trade unions should develop a greater role in people's lives, but to do this they need to develop the necessary skills which requires resources". To Wang Wei, this is a major contradiction: in the current environment, to have more funding could mean a loss of independence. But, if the union relied on the collection of membership fees, they would be able to operate independently, and be in a position to safeguard and give a voice to the rights and interests of domestic workers.

Wang Wei is also aware that a fully functioning, self-organized union of workers is very difficult to achieve. "It is highly possible that one day the union might not have an office, and the volunteer staff might not come to work, in which case the union would collapse." Having been Chair of the Union for the past few years, Wang Wei has these worries from time to time. The 55-year-old retired laid-off worker Liu Guoli used to be a member of the domestic workers' union, and she was also the only member who came to do union work every day. "Much of the work of the trade union fell to Liu, who is now retired and has a pension. She's not concerned about income, but if she didn't do the union work, who else would? Everyone has their own lives to look after too." In order to maintain the independent operation of the union, Wang Wei rejected the funding that was at her fingertips.

"Yan Yali's accident made Wang Wei realize how particularly vulnerable domestic workers are, as there are no specific laws to protect their rights."

She now faces three major problems: firstly, finding a way to fundraise and finance the union's operations; secondly, the difficulty of carrying out projects due to the lack of staffing and particular skills within the union; and thirdly, finding a way to raise public awareness, increase the influence of the union, reach out to a larger number of domestic workers, and let them know of the importance of unionizing. "To

successfully run the domestic workers' group, we must solve these three difficulties". Wang Wei has experienced great ups-and-downs in her own life, and although the development of the domestic workers' union brings her great pressure, she still feels confident about its future. "This is our own organization, and we will rely on our own strength to make it good!"

Domestic Workers Set Out Rules For Their Employers

by Han Hongmei, founder of the 'One Yuan Commune' (一元公社)[1]
Translated by Qi Zhang and reviewed by Adam Moorman

On the eve of the International Women's Day in 2013, a middle-aged woman, holding a card that read "I give the employers my set of rules," called on society to pay closer attention to the living conditions and labor rights of domestic-service workers. The release of this picture on micro-blogs allowed the "subversive image" of domestic workers, who received scant attention beforehand, to enter the public field of vision for the first time. Surprised netizens exclaimed that "the nannies are rebelling against heaven."

Domestic workers are extremely marginalized in society. Nobody listens to what they say, their job is unstable, and there is rarely anyone who represents them or speaks on their behalf. Furthermore, the rights of this marginalized group are not a focus of public concern, much less a subject for extensive discussions that might lead to the formulation of relevant policies.

Therefore, in the current social climate, it is very difficult for marginalized groups' demands for their rights to be taken seriously by the public and the mass media. Over recent months, I have organized and participated in a series of domestic workers' rights advocacy activities. In the following article, I analyze how these advocacy activities work, using a case study of this year's advocacy activity on the eve of the International Women's Day— "domestic workers give rules to employers collectively."

The beginning of the story: the Topic comes from social groups

Being different from the successive performance-art-advocacy activities by feminists in 2012, "domestic workers collectively set out rules for their employers" is not entirely independently planned and executed by feminists, but closely related with the Sina Weibo account @家政工那些事, operated by the Media Monitor for Women Network (妇女传媒监测网络). It can be said that the idea of giving rules to employers actually stems from the daily work of the Dissemination Project for domestic workers. This is what I learned first: the topics this marginalized group advocates for must be closely linked with its demands and members of this group identify these demands through their daily work.

In August 2012, the Media Monitor for Women Network initiated the Dissemination Project for Domestic Workers. Via the Sina Weibo account @家政工那些事, they collected reports covering domestic workers and tweeted the workers' daily stories to reveal their real situation and rights demands in order to eliminate society's discrimination against them. Since its establishment, this Sina Weibo account has been the only public microblog dealing with rights demands through the distinctive perspective of marginalized domestic workers.

As a social platform for domestic workers, the main task of @家政工那些事 is to gather and release stories of domestic workers. But how can this best be

[1] This article was first published offline in China Development Brief no 58 (Summer 2013). It is available online in English here and Chinese here.

achieved? The task is far from easy. In our society, few people care about domestic workers, or want to listen to their stories. Moreover, very few domestic workers use microblogs so Weibo is not the platform for them to speak out. Rather, it is usually their employers that are Weibo-savvy. So how can we show domestic workers' wisdom, humor, and vitality from their stories? During months of effort, the Media Monitor for Women Network focused on the vividness and interest of the workers' stories, gradually forming a characteristic style of communicating and cultivating many die-hard fans.

Domestic workers' community organizations in Xi'an and Jinan stated during their exchanges that they needed to build their capability to be heard. They added that the Media Monitor for Women Network is experienced with advertising and advocating, and that advocacy projects and domestic workers' communities have to interact with each other to help @家政工那些事 gather stories. As a result, on December 30, 2012, Lü Pin, the representative of the Media Monitor for Women Network, and I (then editor of @家政工那些事) were invited by the Shandong Jinan Jicheng Commune (山东济南积成社) to run a storytelling workshop for domestic workers, which theme was "respect for domestic workers".

In this workshop, domestic workers showed deep feelings about "respect". They shared their stories of respect and disrespect from employers, and discussed how these experiences related to their overall rights demands. Under the broad theme of respect, six other sub-themes were developed, which included daily language, behavior and attitude; the right to food and rest; and financial responsibility, among others. In total, more than 30 independent stories related to respect in one way or another emerged. In just two hours, this semi-structured interview approach to story-sharing helped domestic workers tell and record their stories in a layered, logical way. In this way, we managed to dig out rich source material which clearly outlined the domestic workers' demands.

These demands all came from deep inside their hearts. As they were working, they yearned for respect from both their employers and society; however, prejudices towards them stemming both from traditional culture and current social reality gave them a deep feeling of discrimination. They put forward more than 20 demands and appeals, including "do not call me nanny"; "guarantee meals and rest time"; and "do not test me using money". These demands and appeals were again brought up during later workshops in Xi'an and Beijing. Only by advocating demands that stem from marginalized groups' real thoughts can the support of groups in other regions be obtained.

Good ideas: breaking mainstream perceptions of marginalized groups

During the aforementioned workshops, domestic workers showed their multi-faceted hopes. Some said that in order to make respect a reality, both employers and domestic workers had to work hard. During the discussions, many realized that in the current relations they had with their employers, the way things should be done was always dictated by the employer. Further, domestic service companies set working standards and restrictions to regulate domestic workers, but never to restrict employers.

"The employers always tell us what to do, but they cannot expect us to do whatever they want. Being a domestic worker is a profession; I haven't sold myself to the employer"

"They can't just ask us domestic workers to follow the rules without making any demands on employers!" said Ms. Liu, who has done hourly-paid domestic work in Jinan for many years. She added that "The employers always tell us what to do, but they cannot expect us to do whatever they want. Being a domestic worker is a profession; I haven't sold myself to the employer" Her thoughts echoed those of many quickly gaining everyone's agreement and convincing them that domestic workers should also make their own demands. As a result, the idea of "domestic workers collectively set out rules for their employers " was born.

Domestic workers are weak and extremely marginalized, and almost nobody cares about them. In the mainstream social consciousness, they appear as tragic and poor. Mass media reports about them tend to be from the perspectives of market demands and contribution to cities, viewing them as an object of

mainstream society, rather than an active part of it. It is rare to consider things from the standpoint of domestic workers as individuals or laborers who should enjoy their rights.

"'domestic workers collectively set out rules for their employers" is a bold design which subverts the domestic workers' traditional stereotype of being silent and submissive."

An advocacy activity must first attract public attention by being creative enough to break mainstream perceptions about marginalized groups; conventional slogans can hardly generate polemic and follow-up discussions. In order to clarify the power relationships between domestic workers and their employers, "domestic workers collectively set out rules for their employers" is a bold design which subverts the domestic workers' traditional stereotype of being silent and submissive.

Amplifying the Voice: the Power of Collective Action

To get issues related to marginalized into mass media, creative advocacy activities alone are not enough; strategy and innovation are also required. How can we make sure the voices of a few dozens domestic workers are noticed and heard? First, unity among social groups is vital, especially when advocating the rights of marginalized groups. In the advocacy activity of "domestic workers collectively set out rules for their employers", the strategy of using terms with universal meaning such as "collectivity" and "domestic workers from three regions" drew public attention to ask why domestic workers of various regions decided to unite to speak out, making it easier for mass media to focus on their specific demands.

After the storytelling workshop in Jinan, the Media Monitor for Women Network organized more in Xi'an and Beijing, in order to gather more information about domestic workers' demands and desires. Meanwhile, they also decided to unite with domestic workers' organizations in three different regions to launch the "domestic workers collectively set out rules for their employers" activity together to amplify its impact.

In this case, it is easy to discern two levels of alliance. The first level is among different domestic workers' communities and the second is among domestic workers' organizations in different regions. There must be interaction and support between and from the relevant communities while advocating for the marginalized groups; this will not only make their demands more reasonable but also help gain more public trust and improve the effectiveness of their demands. At the same time, the alliances between communities and organizations show the public that the demands of the domestic workers go beyond the limits of their own group, actually mirroring the demands of many others, increasing their universality.
In addition, the ability of marginalized groups to speak out remains weak, and they especially need NGOs to represent them. And safeguarding and advocating the rights of marginalized groups is just one of the missions of community organizations. Therefore, uniting influential social service organizations makes it easier for advocacy activities to reach the public, magnifying the demands of marginalized groups.

Reflecting on the effectiveness and risk of advocacy

"Domestic workers collectively set out rules for their employers" is an initial attempt by women's organizations and other rights advocates to put advocating for marginalized groups into practice. During this process, there have been many reflections and conclusions, most notably that community-based and advocacy organizations still need to further implement and explore how to speak out, disseminate, and advocate the issues concerning marginalized groups

By analyzing media coverage of the activity, one realizes that besides NGOs websites, nearly nobody reported on it. It was only reported on by the English version of the Global Times and by the Southern Metropolis Daily in their "Public Interest and Charity" section. This proves that it is still difficult for marginalized groups to gain the attention of mass media.

Judging from the weakness of the advocacy work carried out by community organizations so far, it is obvious that most of them remain focused on social services delivery and do not link their work with rights defense closely enough. They lack the ability to

mobilize domestic workers and even more, advocacy experience. However, there are still many organizations willing to speak out for marginalized groups and take part in common advocacy activities.

Therefore, advocacy-oriented and community organizations should maintain sound interaction as well as mutual support and cooperation so that they can identify appropriate advocacy topics through their work. Currently, advocacy-oriented organizations can provide support to service delivery organizations in the initial stages of their advocacy activities. But the topics they cover are limited, therefore it is essential that, in the long run, marginalized groups' organizations develop their own advocacy methods, take the initiative in representing themselves and develop their own capacities.

Marginalized groups' advocacy work has only just begun. Their agenda, strategy, and tactics must be tested constantly through ongoing practices. They may not receive recognition from the public and mass media as quickly as the feminists did but things are changing nevertheless. Domestic workers' consciousness of their rights and interests is strong; active alliance between community-based organizations and advocacy-oriented organizations are multiplying; and most importantly the space for advocacy, which in the past may have seemed limited, is constantly expanding. However, the real breakthrough does not lie in the environment surrounding activists, but rather in the hearts and minds of those who work in advocacy and social service organizations, because all fight for defending deserved rights.

An NGO Works With Companies to Prevent Sexual Harassment

by Fu Tao, Editor of CDB[1]
Translated by Eric Couillard and reviewed Adam Hirschberg

This article profiles path-breaking work on sexual harassment by China's oldest and best-known women's legal aid NGO: the Zhongze Women's Legal Aid Center, in collaboration with six Chinese companies. It shows how China, despite its apparent achievements in promoting gender equality, has a long way to go in creating a legal, institutional and cultural environment that is conducive to equal rights for women. For example, issues such as domestic violence and sexual harassment are only now receiving attention in China due to the work of grassroots NGOs like Zhongze and NGO networks that bring together activists, scholars and policymakers, such as the well-known Anti-Domestic Violence Network.

On April 27, 2011, the first NGO-supported mechanism for preventing sexual harassment in the workplace was established in six local companies. A forum to discuss this project was held by the Zhongze Women's Legal Counseling and Services Center together with academics, NGOs, international organizations, and media[2]. In developing a rubric for assessing employer responsibility in certain harassment cases, these six companies have gone beyond the legal requirements, taking the initiative in setting up prevention mechanisms, and becoming pioneers in the world of corporate social responsibility.

Sexual harassment in the workplace: an increasingly prominent issue

According to the 1996 International Crime Victims Survey conducted in over thirty countries, harassment directed at female employees is the most prevalent form of sexual harassment in the workplace. Nearly eight percent of all reported rape cases and ten percent of unsuccessful rape attempts have occurred in the workplace. One of the main forms of violence and discrimination towards women, sexual harassment in the workplace has become an increasingly prominent problem facing Chinese society today.

In 2009, Zhongze conducted a survey across Beijing, Guangzhou, Jiangsu, and Hebei with nine different participating companies and a sample of 2000 workers. They found that 23.9% of those surveyed had witnessed or heard of a sexual harassment case within their office, 19.8% said they had personally been victims of sexual harassment, and 5.3% admitted to having sexually harassed a coworker.

In the past few years, Zhongze has spearheaded the movement against workplace sexual harassment, working hard to protect the rights of women, while at the same time pushing for new legislation that would help to prevent future harassment cases. After new amendments to the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights" (妇女权

[1] This article was first published offline in China Development Brief no 50 (Summer 2011). It is available online in English here and Chinese here.

[2] Editor's Note: Zhongze is the new name of China's oldest independent women's legal aid NGO, formerly known as Beijing University Women's Legal Aid Center. Founded by Guo Jianmei in 1996, the Center was instructed by Beijing University to discontinue its long-standing affiliation with the university's law school. As a result, the Center had to register under a new name. It is now registered both as Zhongze, and as Qian Qian Law Firm. Zhongze also houses the Women's Watch China project.

益保障法, hereafter Women's Rights Law) were made in December 2005, highlighted by the addition of a clause outright forbidding sexual harassment, women's rights in China appeared to have taken a turn for the better.

However, according to scholars of gender equality, the revised "Women's Rights Law" still contains obvious flaws: it lacks a clear definition of sexual harassment, and fails to provide both a national-level employer-responsibility system, and fixed guidelines for punitive action in sexual harassment cases. Experts also claim that local governments' implementation of the law is inconsistent.

"Sichuan province's [implementation measure] has ruled that responsibility lies with the employer, based on the precedent set by two cases in Jintang County," says Zhongze's director Li Ying. Zhongze is in great need of support from this kind of pioneering judicial work at the local level, but the strategy adopted in Sichuan remains one of the few of its kind.

"Annie had been sexually harassed by her boss for months. When she finally reported his actions to the company, she was fired immediately"

The secretary-general of Zhongze Women's Watch (众泽妇女观察), Lin Lixia, has stated that in spite of these developments, many courts will not hear a case based on sexual harassment for two reasons: first and foremost, the "Women's Rights Law" is difficult to carry out because it lacks clearly defined punitive measures for handling harassment cases; secondly, the People's Supreme Court released a newly revised "Requirements for civil cases" which still states that sexual harassment in and of itself is not enough to constitute a case. As proponents of women's rights, NGOs like Zhongze feel that judicial channels are ineffective, and that waiting for the law to be perfected is a painfully slow process.

In March of 2009, the story of a young woman named Annie (a pseudonym), who sued her Japanese boss Hiroaki Yokoyama after he violated her on a trip to Guangzhou, took the country by storm. However, despite the public support for Annie's case, Hiroaki was only fined a paltry 3000 RMB. Due to the ambiguity of the law, the Japanese company was absolved of any responsibility in the case. Before filing her complaint, Annie had been sexually harassed by her boss for months. When she finally reported his actions to the company, she was fired immediately. Annie's "winning" case is an appalling example of the flawed legislation surrounding sexual harassment.

Zhongze's Li Ying stated that sexual harassment in the workplace is taking place constantly, and that the situation is getting worse. However, victims rarely win cases in court, and many of them lose their job in addition to the case. These violations of the victim's physical rights and dignity also constitute a violation of their right to labor and development.

Examples from abroad

In order to protect the dignity of employees, equal employment opportunity, and a peaceful workplace, sexual harassment prevention in the workplace is clearly needed. According to research on workplace harassment in Asian countries conducted by Zhongze's Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Team (职场性骚扰课题组), Japan initiated a law in 1986 to ensure gender equality in the workplace. This law was revised in 1999 and again in 2007. The Philippines stepped up to plate in 1995 with their first law against sexual harassment, and Taiwan came out with a similar law in 2005. Zhongze hopes that research on these related laws in other countries will lead to similar legislation in China.

Overseas, several major companies have already established employer responsibility as their policy and institutionalized its role in their corporate culture. One example is General Electric (GE), which lists sexual harassment prevention as one of their "Fourteen Integrity Policies". Their zero-tolerance approach has led to the rule becoming a deeply internalized aspect of its policy. GE's policies against sexual harassment are clear and detailed, with well-developed response mechanisms and reporting channels. The legal and human resources departments have also teamed up to launch training on the policy which covers all employees, clearly drawing the line for different responsibilities among the leadership and staff. The company training presents employees with a variety of hypothetical scenarios to assess. The clearly-defined guidelines for action and policy implementation, along with the realism of the training scenarios, has made

GE a leader in the corporate fight against workplace harassment. In addition, GE still encourages individuals to file complaints whenever appropriate.

According to GE Healthcare's chief legal advisor Zhu Xianglian (朱湘莲), the law is the bare minimum, and corporations should work to go above and beyond these requirements in improving the workplace environment. In taking a stand against workplace sexual harassment, GE has reaped tangible benefits; their efforts in the prevention of sexual harassment has helped the corporation boost its reputation while also maintaining its efficiency.

Since 2006, Zhongze has been holding corporate seminars, where they always invite GE to share their experiences, providing local corporations with a model to emulate. To date, six local companies have adopted similar strategies to GE, and have benefited greatly as a result.

Zeroing in on corporate dvocacy

On the international stage, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan started a global initiative that urged corporations to adopt anti-sexual harassment policies, and spurred advocacy for corporate social responsibility. By fulfilling international conventions and legal obligations, corporations are respecting the human rights of employees, contributing to the public welfare, and encouraging sustainable development. Annan's law has already become a method for controlling risk and loss, which is a fountainhead for corporate cohesion.

Zhongze's research shows that in recent years various countries and regions have formulated specialized laws against sexual harassment in the workplace, with the rules being different in each corporation; additionally, governments, and NGOs have released a series of proposals to prevent sexual harassment. Sexual harassment in the workplace is one of the largest barriers to gender equity, and its eradication would be a large step towards that goal.

Zhongze recently launched its Corporate Mechanisms to Prevent Workplace Sexual Harassment Project, with the ultimate goal of pushing for anti-sexual harassment legislation. The event has continually garnered support from the Ford Foundation, the International Labor Organization, and the UN Gender Task Force.

Beijing Aesthetic (北京唯美度) is one company which worked hand-in-hand with Zhongze to face the problem of sexual harassment. Before writing any rules about sexual harassment in their corporate handbook, both organizations conducted research on relevant laws in place. In addition to the mechanism for filing complaints, courts mandate that HR managers are to be held responsible for handling cases, and various department heads report issues to the leadership. When training new employees, HR's leadership stresses sexual harassment prevention as one of the most important aspects of training, juxtaposed against training for their normal work responsibilities. An international chain of cosmetic and beauty stores, Beijing Aesthetic has 3000 franchises in China. Sexual harassment prevention mechanisms, if effectively carried out, will act as a firewall protecting its female employees.

While Zhongze is currently pushing for more anti-sexual harassment legislation, they're also pushing corporations to go beyond ad hoc policies. In a sector lacking strong laws, selected companies are taking the lead in preventing sexual harassment, furthering corporate social responsibility with great courage and insight. Zhongze Women's Watch's Lin Lixia commented: "We think the program is very effective, and by promoting six companies to implement changes, they're providing a foundation for new laws in a situation where the current laws are insufficient."

"Just because there are no complaints doesn't mean that there is no sexual harassment."

Activating mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment

"Just because there are no complaints doesn't mean that there is no sexual harassment." The project manager of the China and Mongolia office of the International Labor Organization, Zhang Hongman, raised this point. In the April 2011 forum, one representative present mentioned that although new practices have been put into writing, many of them have yet to be put into practice. Upon hearing this,

Professor Rong Weiyi, an expert on gender at China's Public Security University, immediately brought up the example of women's shelters: "In order to combat domestic violence, a lot of localities have opened up battered women's shelters, but the shelters are empty. Very few women actually use them." Rong Weiyi stresses the importance of the complaint system, as well as maintaining a system for follow up and evaluation. Since these rules for filing a complaint haven't been in place very long, the jury is still out on their effectiveness. Because of this, Lin Lixia and Zhongze have emphasized they plan to monitor these pilot companies and follow up on their progress.

In the future, Zhongze hopes to work with more major corporations around the world, as well as with trade associations, enterprise federations, and employer federations, in order to expand their influence. In addition, Zhongze will closely monitor sexual harassment prevention training. "This is perhaps the most important aspect of preventing sexual harassment," Lin Lixia said.

As an NGO that advocates on behalf of gender equality and the protection of women's rights, Zhongze is beginning to see results after years of work. Guo Jianmei, director of Zhongze, stated that aside from needing to come up with strategies, the fight against workplace sexual harassment depends on how much space society is willing to give to NGOs. Despite much high-sounding speech, the value of NGOs has been marginalized, and Zhongze itself is facing the challenge of finding space and resources, while trying to come up with effective strategies to fight inequality.

The China Women's Network against AIDS: Between Donors and the Grassroots

By Andrew Wells-Dang[1]

This article provides a fascinating, in-depth study of the Women's Network against AIDS - China (WNAC). WNAC has 21 organisational members, although most of these can be better characterised as peer support groups rather than NGOs. It is also a relatively new network, having formed in July 2009 on the basis of a web-based network of individuals that had existed for several years previously. From these organic, virtual roots, the network has transformed into a national body with a significant degree of formal organisation, at least on paper. In a sector already containing multiple and sometimes competing networks of people living with HIV (PLWH), some observers hoped that WNAC could become a less contentious, more inclusive network than other existing groups. In the network's short history to date, it faces many challenges in its development, and it is too soon to draw conclusions about its success or sustainability.

In May 2010, a fundraising dinner took place at Shanghai's world-class art museum to commemorate the 27th annual International AIDS Candlelight Memorial Day. Three groups were selected as beneficiaries: the Shanghai Red Cross Society, a Hong Kong-based foundation, and a newly-formed network of HIV-positive women's support groups, the Women's Network against AIDS - China (Nǚxìng kàng'ài wǎnglùo – Zhōngguó). When the network's secretary general took the podium, she said, "Because of this virus in our blood, we sought each other out, talked among ourselves and formed small groups. Finally, we connected into a network… [As] Chinese women affected by AIDS, we are facing the disease while still pursuing life" (WNAC 2010: 4). From its share of donated proceeds of the event, the Women's Network (WNAC) received 40,000 yuan (approximately £4,000), a substantial contribution to the network's budget.

Less than a month after the successful fundraising dinner in Shanghai, the network closed its Beijing coordination office, citing rising rents and the end of grant funding from its major donor, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Although a new UNAIDS grant is reportedly in process, it had not yet been approved as of August 2010 (C69). The network secretariat decided to "temporarily withdraw the Beijing office until the next phase of the project and then consider whether the application is successful before re-establishing the office" (WNAC 2010: 1). After less than a year of formal operations, the Women's Network's future lay in the balance.

The politics of HIV[2] have been contentious in many settings. Due to the most frequent means of transmission of the virus, through sexual contact and drug use, as well as its high morbidity, people living with HIV (PLWH) are subject to extreme social stigma and discrimination. Organisations, networks and

[1] This article was first published offline in China Development Brief 48 (Winter 2010). It is available online in English here and Chinese here.

[2] In keeping with current international practice, this chapter refers to the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and people living with HIV (PLWH). This usage is preferred by most advocates over referring to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, a disease that affects people in late stages of HIV infection). In Chinese, the word AIDS (àizībìng) is commonly used, and some international programmes continue to use AIDS or "HIV/AIDS" in their titles.

support groups representing PLWH thus face additional legal, political and social challenges compared to other civil society actors. In part to overcome stigma, HIV advocates have adopted relatively contentious strategies to draw public and official awareness to their situation. China has been no exception to this global pattern: since the first case of HIV was discovered in 1985, activists have been arrested for exposing a major blood transfusion contamination scandal (C7, Gnep 2009), held protests (C37, Young and Mian 2008), and in several cases left the country based on perceived threats to their personal safety (Wong 2010, Thurber 2009).

"More than 500 community groups and organisations, are now involved in China's AIDS response"

Chinese government policy towards HIV has, however, opened considerably since the attempted cover-ups of the Henan blood scandal and other public health crises such as the SARS epidemic in 2003, which formed a key turning point (C52, Hu Jia 2007, Micollier 2009)[3]. Government services to PLWH and cooperation with social and community groups began around 2000, leading to policy and attitudinal changes within the state (C76). The "four frees, one care" policy, offering free HIV testing, counselling, and anti-retroviral therapy, was announced at the end of 2003 (Kaufman et al 2006). Comprehensive regulations on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment were promulgated in 2006, banning discrimination against PLWH (Xinhuanet 2006). The Chinese government has increasingly recognised the role of civil society in HIV prevention and treatment, while still selectively restricting groups' operations (Meng Lin 2009b, Thompson and Jia 2010). International donors speak highly of the Ministry of Health's commitment to accepting civil society roles and find them a relatively open-minded and progressive branch of the government (C69). As a result, while HIV issues are still contentious, the level of political restriction or "sensitivity" has decreased in the last five years, with an emerging balance between public health and right-based approaches (C37).

In the early years of the 21st century, large-scale international funding for HIV prevention, care and treatment began to flow into China. The largest donor is the Global Fund against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GF), which has contributed over US $500 million to HIV programmes since 2001 (Ministry of Health 2010: 58); other major donors have been the Clinton, Ford and Gates Foundations, as well as USAID, DFID and other bilateral government funders. Most of these grants are channelled through the Ministry of Health and other Chinese government agencies; only one percent of GF funding is contributed directly to grassroots organisations (C52). The scale of GF support to China has led to some international criticism, given China's economic resources and greater HIV prevalence in many poorer countries (Chow 2010), although the amount contributed per capita remains relatively low[4].

HIV support groups, previously under-funded and isolated at the margins of Chinese society, found themselves almost overnight at the centre of international efforts to increase civil society involvement in reducing the spread of the disease. More than 500 community groups and organisations, including GONGOs, are now involved in China's AIDS response (Ministry of Health 2010: 62), including some registered NGOs and many unregistered support groups and networks (C37). Few of these groups, however, represent women affected by HIV[5]. According to official statistics, women make up 30.5% of China's estimated 740,000 PLWH (Ministry of Health 2010: 5). But they have historically been under-represented in HIV policy and programmes (Bu and Liu 2010, UNAIDS 2006). The latest edition of the annual China HIV/AIDS NGO Directory now runs to over 300 pages, but includes

[3] A similar transformation took place during the same time period in Vietnam, where HIV had previously been labelled as a "social evil" (Government of Vietnam 2004).

[4] Editor's Note: In May of this year, the GF suspended nearly $300 million in funding to China due to mismanagement of funds and restrictions on participation by civil society organizations. Then in late August, it decided to restore funding but at reduced levels.

[5] "Affected" by HIV is a broad term that can include people living with HIV (PLWH) as well as those with a HIV-positive family member. In China, different from most international usage, PLWH commonly refer to themselves as "infected" (gǎnrǎnzhě "the infected ones"). I use PLWH in recognition of the limits of designating people by an acronym for an "illness identity" (He XP 2006: 19).

only a handful of women's support groups (CHAIN 2010). And of 357 small groups who voted in the 2009 elections for the GF's Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM), only five were women's support groups, plus 13 groups representing (female or male) sex workers (C76).

As the Women's Network against AIDS was forming in early 2009, the group's first media release described their rationale in this way:

"*The number of women affected and infected by AIDS is rising rapidly. Although women have always played an important role in the process of the struggle against AIDS, on some occasions women's voices have been weak or even nonexistent. HIV-positive women in many locations have already become aware of the need to form small groups to participate in serving the community and protecting their own rights. At the same time, women have sensed that their own capacity is not sufficient, their access to information is not smooth, and they lack autonomy and the right to speak. Thus, it is necessary to form a working network to develop collaboration.* (China Development Brief 2009)"

Although WNAC does not have a long history or record of policy advocacy, I selected it as a counterpoint to other case studies to illuminate gendered aspects of civil society networks, show how a nationwide virtual HIV network has formed, and to explore both empowering and disempowering aspects of donor funding.

HIV and Women's Networks in China

The Women's Network against AIDS formed in the midst of a complex web of overlapping and in some cases competing field of civil society actors. Networks of HIV support groups first emerged after 2001 due to the conditions of government policy openings, international funding, and expanding access to the Internet and other communications technologies. Groups that formed early, were located in major cities, and were led by charismatic, well-connected individuals had built-in advantages[6]. Several previously established groups used their existing connections with government and donors to build national networks of peer groups, particularly those representing gay men (MSM)[7]. Unusually, funding was also channelled to unregistered groups, with tacit government approval (C69).

"Cooperation among HIV activists is also widely perceived to be lower than in other sectors of Chinese civil society"

Cooperation among HIV activists is also widely perceived to be lower than in other sectors of Chinese civil society (C26, C29, C68). The increased availability of funding fostered increased competition to obtain it. As one long-term donor describes, "Everyone wants to be king of the mountain" (C52). Added to great geographic diversity, HIV groups and networks also segmented into vertical sub-sectors representing different affected groups, many of whom have little contact with each other even if living in the same city or county (C69). MSM and PLWH generally are the largest sub-sectors, along with drug users, sex workers, youth/students and women (C50). The 2010 China HIV/AIDS NGO Directory lists 80 PLWH support groups and an additional 116 MSM groups[8]. These groups have formed two large networks under the leadership of competing Beijing coordinating NGOs, the Aizhixing Institute ("Love-Knowledge-Action") and Ark of Love (Ài zhī fāngzhōu); as a WNAC member put it, "AIDS groups in China have two heads" (C55).

The China National Network of AIDS CBOs (CNNAC) is "the biggest network for Chinese grassroots NGOs", with 133 members as of December 2008 (CNNAC 2008). In addition to workshops, training, and some work on legal aid, the

[6] International experience was also helpful, but not essential. Many network leaders, including WNAC, do not speak foreign languages.

[7] The neutral term "men who have sex with men" (MSM) is commonly used in international health and also in China, where many MSM do not self-identify as gay. The prevailing Chinese slang used by MSM to describe themselves is (tóngzhì, "comrade"), with the full political irony of the term intended (Young and Mian 2007).

[8] The directory is produced by the China HIV/AIDS Information Network (CHAIN) together with the China Centre for Disease Control's HIV programme. In its organisational brochure, CHAIN describes itself as a "platform for information exchange and open discussion" that was co-founded by three GONGOs in 2002. It operates a website and circulates printed information about HIV, but is not a "real" membership network (C37).

network has set up a community fund that provides small-scale financial support to between 30-40 members (C50). During 2008-09, CNNAC was coordinated by Zhejiang LGBT Guide Net (CNNAC 2008), but Aizhixing still refers to it as "our network" (C50). The network is largely comprised of MSM support groups: at its annual conference in November 2009 in Tianjin, 90% of attendees were male, as were all seven main presenters[9]. Despite its limitations, one donor who does not fund CNNAC notes that this is "the best functioning [HIV] network in China" (C69). The departure of Aizhixing's director to the US in May 2010 has weakened CNNAC's standing, but also given it an opportunity to restructure its operations.

"The CCM elections were the first independent national elections of any kind in China organised by non-members of the Communist Party."

The second major PLWH network, the China Alliance of People Living with HIV/AIDS (CAP+) was founded in 2006 and is coordinated by Ark of Love with support from the Ford Foundation. From an initial 24 members, the network has now expanded to 109, although these do not all participate at the same level (C64). The network carries out a mix of activities, including advocacy, training and service delivery, but lacks a clear strategy (C69). Its connections with the Ministry of Health and other government agencies are more balanced than CNNAC's; those members who express an interest in research and advocacy are able to take part. Since the membership is so geographically diverse, some CAP+ activities take place at the regional level rather than nationally (C64).

A third cluster of HIV networks, with closer links to CAP+ than CNNAC, has formed in south-western China through the coordination of AIDS Care China, an NGO based in Nanning, Guangxi province. These sub-sectoral, regional networks focus mainly on service delivery and community support to PLWH, rather than policy advocacy (International HIV/AIDS Alliance 2010a, Robertson 2007). For instance, AIDS Care supports a Self-Help Network of Women Living with HIV/AIDS that has 850 members and serves 1400 women in four provinces (Ministry of Health 2010: 53). Other networks in this high-prevalence area are funded by a variety of other donors: for instance, a network of drug users groups exists in the Red River or Honghe area of Yunnan near the Vietnamese border, with support from the Open Society Institute and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance (C50).

A Chinese academic survey concludes, however, that HIV NGO networks are "still in the early stages of development": their advocacy work mainly aims to improve awareness among PLWH, but is under-funded and lacks technical capacity for larger-scale interventions (Han JL et al 2009: 40).

The most significant civil society effort to improve coordination and networking has taken place around elections to the Global Fund CCM (Gnep 2009). In December 2006, 110 HIV grassroots organisations met in Wuhan together with observers from more than 50 INGOs to strategise for increased civil society participation in the CCM. After "extremely heated debate and intensive deliberation," the participants approved a procedure for election of the NGO representative to the CCM, two alternates, and an NGO working committee allocated by sub-sector within the HIV community, rather than geographically (Jia Ping 2009: 4). This was to ensure that all important stakeholders had a voice in the CCM process, and shows that networking was already taking place at this time. There were initially 11 NGO committee members, of which one seat was reserved for "female organizations" and another open to any PLWH (13-14). This process has significance beyond the HIV field: these were the first independent national elections of any kind in China organised by non-members of the Communist Party. As a result, "the CCM represents a rare instance in which government officials sit as equals with civil society on a decision-making body" (Thompson and Jia 2010).

Formation of the Women's Network against AIDS

Silent weeds, inconspicuous flowers
We bloom freely and fly with wind
For the dream of a new settlement and growth
We go through trials and hardships with no fear to death
Showing the power of life

[9] I was invited to observe this conference by Aizhixing's director.

We knit a red scarf with the stories of HIV/AIDS
With the soft hands of women
Knitting a wall against AIDS for the world[10].

In the early years of China's HIV epidemic, stigma and fear kept most HIV-positive women "in the closet" about their status, although in many cases they were eventually "exposed" (bàolù) by neighbours or even health staff (He XP 2006: 70). Many women (and men) made the unwelcome choice to move away from their homes and families for the anonymity and access to treatment of major cities. For those who were unable or unwilling to do this, their immediate need was to find someone – anyone – to talk to who would understand and offer support (C75). At first, communication took place by long-distance telephone. The spread of the Internet, however, offered new possibilities for connection through instant message boards and chat rooms. In these virtual spaces, people could share their experiences with HIV without telling their real name or identity, even their location. They could also talk to people while revealing nothing at all about their HIV status. Many PLWH went on to develop personal websites and blogs as tools for organising (He XP 2006: 94). This was precisely what led to the formation of the Dandelion Network (Púgōngyīng), a virtual predecessor to the Women's Network against AIDS.

"In May 2006, I was losing my mind on receiving a HIV-positive report. Without enough explanation and care from doctors, I had no choice but to search for information and help via the internet. I met many friends who were suffering and struggling against the disease. They helped me solve my initial problems and gave me important advice when I was facing therapy options. Then, when I could finally face my HIV status calmly, my first thought was doing something for the patients with same experience as me who were struggling for care and support and try my best to help them.

I began to write treatment notes on Sina Blog with the hope that my experience and thoughts could encourage HIV-positive people to fight bravely against the disease. As more accessed, more people made consultations to me. In order to promote the communication between women positives, I created a QQ group[11] in February 2007 named "Dandelion". Dandelion is a soft but strong plant that spreads her seeds with love around at her season. It is a flower full of maternity and life energy with endless love.

"The use of message boards such as QQ was essential to building links among women in different provinces. There is no way to overstate the importance of the Internet"

Many people think QQ groups childish, but this web-based chatting tool successfully meets the needs of people located in different geographic areas and provides the requirement of privacy. The members can communicate freely at anytime, from anywhere, as long as the internet is available.

Based on the QQ group, some active members, Julie, Ai Zhu, Zhou Lin, Lei Lei and me decided to set up the Dandelion Network of Women Living with HIV/AIDS in March 2007. We hoped, through the internet, to unite more women to help our friends in difficulties and to raise our unified voice. It's an open organization that has no office space and staff, but with several core members and more than 100 volunteers and members that join or quit at their will". (He TT 2009)

The use of message boards such as QQ was essential to building links among women in different provinces. Prior to the Internet, such links would have been impossible; as a Hong Kong-based activist says, "there is no way to overstate the importance of the Internet" (C7). The QQ message board used by the Dandelion network is a domestic Chinese service, thus less liable to blockage than services by foreign providers such as Google. In all, restrictions on the Internet are an occasional annoyance to HIV activists, but do not effectively deter them from

[10] This poem was written for the Dandelion Network of Women Living with HIV by the director of a real estate company in Guangdong province (He TT 2009).

[11] QQ is a popular Chinese message board, similar to Yahoo or Windows Messenger. At least two other HIV networks, CNNAC and the Chi Heng Foundation's coalition for AIDS services, also use QQ for web meetings (CNNAC 2008; C7).

communication[12].

The Dandelion activists and other women's support groups also used existing publications and channels of communication provided by other HIV networks to raise the profile of women's issues. For instance, the November 2008 issue of "Our Voice" , published by Ark of Love, contains articles entitled "A person who comes out of the shadows" and "Infected women: stand up and come out!", the latter by the future WNAC secretary general, and profiles two women's support groups, Half the Sky and the Guiyang Garden of Health and Care, which later became WNAC founding members. As more voices, stories and experiences of PLWH have appeared in public, Chinese society has become more tolerant towards people affected by HIV. These stories not only change images and social assumptions, but have also led to effective and powerful social organising (He XP 2006: 121-2). In this case, women being open about their HIV status and reaching out to others through Internet and social networks formed the preconditions for establishment of WNAC.

"In February 2009, 12 delegates from groups of HIV-infected and affected women in eight provinces met in Beijing to hold the first organisational meeting of the Women's Network against AIDS"

In February 2009, 12 delegates from groups of HIV-infected and affected women in eight provinces met in Beijing to hold the first organisational meeting of the Women's Network against AIDS (China Development Brief 2009). According to materials shared by the WNAC secretariat, the goals of this first meeting were to share experiences and explore network strategy. This was followed by group interviews to evaluate needs and existing capacities within the network. A second preparatory meeting followed to discuss formation of a strategic plan and draft network by-laws. After six months of preparation, the official launch of the network occurred on 9 July in Beijing (C55).

Network membership and structure

The Women's Network against AIDS has 21 initial organisational members from 11 Chinese provinces and cities (Douban 2009). The membership, strategies and activity plans of the network have been well organised and documented for distribution among members as well as to the network's external donor, UNAIDS, which began support in the preparatory phase of the network. As a result, WNAC has a more formal structure than many other civil society networks with a longer history. WNAC's reported budget in 2009 was 200,000 yuan (£20,000), all of which came from UNAIDS (CHAIN 2009: 304).

Most WNAC member organisations are local groups of women living with HIV; several also include women whose family members are affected by HIV, or carry out other activities. For instance, Bitter Grass in Kunming includes HIV-positive women, children and female sex workers among its members, the only group in China to do so (C55, C75). Silk Road Posthouse, in Harbin, conducts activities for MSM, youth, migrant workers and other at-risk groups, and has received three small grants totalling 15,000 yuan (£1,500) from the Global Fund (CHAIN 2009: 297). Shenyang Firefly, also in the northeast, has received 35,000 yuan in two GF grants as well as small projects with the Liaoning provincial Red Cross, the Hong Kong AIDS Foundation, and other donors to conduct a wide variety of activities for HIV positive women and men (CHAIN 2009: 62). The largest member in terms of project funding is Ningming Light of the Lotus City, a peer support group in a Guangxi town near the Vietnamese border, which has an annual budget of 150,000 yuan and projects with Family Health International and Action Aid (CHAIN 2009: 49), reflecting the greater involvement of INGOs in south-western China than other regions. One WNAC member is a traditional development NGO, not a HIV support group: the Liangshan Institute, which implements projects for drug addicts, sex workers and PLWH with support from a GONGO and the Global Fund (CHAIN 2009: 273).

The table below lists the members of the WNAC:

[12] For instance, Aizhixing's website has been blocked by authorities on several occasions in the past, but not in 2010 despite the director's public departure from China. One Yunnan-based NGO network's website was blocked in 2010 on the grounds that the network is not registered; the network waited a short while, then re-opened the website using a .info domain name that is registered outside China (C61).

Chinese name	English translation	Location (province)
1. 蒲公英女性网络	Dandelion Network for Women Living with HIV/AIDS*	Virtual network (Beijing/Guangxi)
2. 河南金色阳光	Henan Golden Sunshine Children Support/ Care Association*	Henan
3. 郑州祥宇	Zhengzhou Auspicious Home	Henan
4. 商丘腊梅花	Shangqiu Winter Plum Flowers	Henan
5. 登封阳光女性家园	Henan Dengfeng Home of Joyful Women*	Henan
6. 新乡爱心协会	Xinxiang Loving Hearts Federation	Henan
7. 巩义康乐家园	Gongyi Happy Home	Henan
8. 凉山社会性别与艾滋病防治研究会	Liangshan Institute for Gender and AIDS Prevention*	Sichuan
9. 临汾绿色港湾“手牵手”	Linfen Green Harbour “Hand In Hand”	Shanxi
10.河北永清“半边天”	Hebei Yongqing “Half the Sky”	Hebei
11.中山阳光公社	Zhongshan Sunshine Commune	Guangdong
12.柳州雨后阳光	Liuzhou Sunshine After Rain	Guangxi
13.宁明荷城之光	Ningming Light of the Lotus City*	Guangxi
14.贵阳健康关爱苑	Guiyang Garden of Health and Care*	Guizhou
15.南明滋心小组	Nanming Bursting Hearts Small Group	Fujian
16.浙江互助会-网络支持	Zhejiang Mutual Help Society and Support Network	Zhejiang
17.上海美丽人生-依依茉莉	Shanghai Beautiful Lives- Supple Jasmine	Shanghai
18.苦草工作室	Bitter Grass Studio*	Yunnan
19.七台河爱心家园	Qitaihe Loving Hearts Home	Heilongjiang
20.丝路驿站	Silk Road Posthouse*	Heilongjiang
21.沈阳萤火虫	Shenyang Firefly*	Liaoning

In all, at least nine of the 21 organisational members have received some external funding and are listed in a national directory of HIV/AIDS groups. Regardless of this, 18 of the 21 members are unregistered, either because they have been unable to register as NGOs or have not made any attempt. The organisational members represent between 50 and 200 participants each, a total of over 2,000 women nationwide (C55). No membership fees or dues are charged, as most members would be unable to pay and are themselves looking for funding. The network supports its members through training and organising meetings and workshops, but does not distribute any financial support (C55), in contrast to CNAC and CAP+ that have channelled sub-grants to members.

"WNAC has made particularly effective use of literary and art as media for awareness raising and mobilisation."

Organisations listed in the 2009-10 China HIV/AIDS NGO Directory

WNAC began its formal existence in 2009 with three staff: a secretary general, an administrative officer and an assistant, based in a small apartment in an industrial area of Beijing, near a hospital that provided the first HIV treatment in the city and still houses several other HIV-related organisations (C55, C71). The secretary general, an HIV-positive woman, was the founder of the Dandelion network; the HIV status of the other two staff (one female, one male) is unknown to me. According to materials provided by the secretary general, the network operates through a hub-and-spokes structure, with the secretariat at the centre and members at the periphery. This may reflect some network communication paths, but in reality some members have closer links to the secretariat than others, particularly Golden Sunshine and Shanghai Beautiful Lives. With nearly one-third of WNAC members coming from Henan, Golden Sunshine plays a regional coordinating role in the province that has intensified in 2010 with the formation of a provincial women's network that it coordinates (Yuan WL 2010). Outside of Henan, most other provinces are only represented by a single organisation, with a fairly wide national spread, but sparse coverage in the high-prevalence provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi where the AIDS Care-organised network is active. There is also no membership group based in Beijing, yet the secretary general felt it important to have the network coordination office there in order to interact with donors and other HIV organisations (C55).

Soon after its formal establishment, WNAC developed a strategic plan, objectives and activities covering the period 2009-2012. In 2009, the network aimed to focus on "establishment and expansion," consisting of participation in local meetings and conferences, development of partnerships, writing for media and internet, and establishing a national office in Beijing. From 2010-12, a three-year strategy includes four objectives:

1) Establish mechanisms for women's leadership and organisational capacity.

2) Develop organisation to implement cooperative projects for HIV-affected women.

3) WNAC extends its organisation and sustains its external development.

4) Advocate for gender-sensitive AIDS policies and measures.

Advocacy strategies

As a newly-formed network, WNAC does not yet have an extensive record of advocacy activities. However, WNAC members have conducted local advocacy in their respective provinces, in some cases contributing to national-level discussions about HIV-AIDS policies affecting women. Of the advocacy strategies described in chapter 4, WNAC uses primarily community advocacy, aiming to involve more HIV-positive women and support groups in their activities. Media is also a part of the network's advocacy strategy, both mainstream media and HIV sector newsletters and publications. WNAC has made particularly effective use of literary and art as media for awareness raising and mobilisation. The weaker part of the women's network's advocacy to date has been in linking to policy: network leaders have taken part in some policy discussions and expressed their opinions, but since its members are relatively disadvantaged and far from the centres of power, the network has few strong connections with policy-makers.

In practice, network members have been engaged in advocacy efforts for several years since the formation of the Dandelion network. In 2008, Dandelion members started collectively knitting a "Red Scarf" to symbolise the lives of HIV-positive women. The scarf was sent by post from province to province, and women in each location displayed it, added to it and sent in on (C55)[13]. The Dandelion network's founder describes this as "just like [the Olympic] torch relay" that was occurring at the same time. Knitting the scarf, she continued, "was our new attempt to check whether we, who were united by internet, could come to a collective action" (He TT 2009). The scarf campaign received support from Mangrove, a PLWH support group in Beijing, together with ActionAid China. A Chinese-American filmmaker who is active in HIV circles produced a documentary that was shown along with the completed red scarf at Beijing's main avant-garde art centre to commemorate the 2008 World AIDS Day. The exhibit later moved to Shanghai and was shown again in Beijing in 2010 as part of a series entitled "The Secret Language of Women" (Yuanfen 2010). Not only was the scarf a powerful symbol of women's lives and hopes, it was a key mobilising activity for WNAC.

In 2009, after WNAC's launch, members collected personal stories from around China and published these in an illustrated book, "Writing the Life", written collectively by women living with HIV, their families and community social workers. The book was released in a public event at a Beijing hotel in November, once again timed to coincide with World AIDS Day. As WNAC's press release described, "Using a delicate and beautiful writing style, together with photos, the book records the true stories of women living with HIV and their courage and fortitude, as well as their struggles for a fair and equal life and their work to increase understanding among society."

In 2010, the WNAC secretary general was selected as one of 14 people on the steering committee of the China Red Ribbon Forum, a government-civil society dialogue group on human rights[14]. "As a person living with HIV, and long speaking openly about it despite the stigma that continues to prevail, I am very encouraged by this forum and proud to be on its Interim Steering Committee," she said at the inaugural meeting. "For the first time in China, we representatives from civil society – those most affected by HIV – have a real opportunity to discuss key issues on human rights and HIV with the government, and have an impact on policies and laws that affect, and will affect, millions" (UNAIDS 2010).

Up to now, WNAC members have "little to no contact with government", including the Ministry of Health (C55). "China's current HIV policies say little about women," the secretary general complains. "In the HIV law, it states that HIV-positive women have a right to have children, for instance, but other laws contradict this. There are no regulations or implementation guidelines to allow this" (C55). In press interviews, WNAC members have spoken about issues such as access to subsidised treatment and second-line antiviral medication, and called for improved communication and cooperation between authorities and civil society to form "a united front against HIV/AIDS" (She Le 2009). In the secretary general's view, the government has not been too willing to talk directly with civil society networks; instead, HIV groups often advocate through intermediaries. For instance, WNAC has had some contact with the China Foundation for Prevention of STD and AIDS, a major GONGO with no particular focus on women. At the 2009 international HIV-AIDS conference in Bali, the GONGO's representative reportedly presented WNAC activities as their own; rather than act offended, the Women's Network secretary took this as an opportunity to ask for support from the

"In 2010, the WNAC secretary general was selected as one of 14 people on the steering committee of the China Red Ribbon Forum, a government-civil society dialogue group on human rights"

[13] Although WNAC members did not mention the connection, this is similar to the original AIDS Quilt in the USA, which was a highly effective awareness-raising and advocacy tool in the 1980s. Red is a universal colour used by HIV movements and has no political meaning within China.

[14] The Red Ribbon Forum has no connection to the Red Scarf campaign described earlier.

foundation. However, it has not yet provided any specific help (C55).

Other HIV networks have stronger links to government, while still preserving some degree of independence. The coordinator of the CAP+ network says, "With government relations, we've always had some difficulties, and also always had some cooperation. There are legal and internal government issues. Every grassroots organization has to deal with these issues – we're all the same in this way. The difference is in how we deal with it. We don't have particularly close cooperation with the government, but also no particular opposition. We stay focused on issues of concern to PLHIV. We don't get involved in broader political issues around civil society, democracy and so on". (C64)

"We stay focused on issues of concern to PLHIV. We don't get involved in broader political issues around civil society, democracy and so on"

The Women's Network has demonstrated that it is able to carry out collective campaigns and projects for public awareness and mobilise the media. Without stronger government links, however, it is difficult to see how the network will have any major impact on HIV policy using either an embedded or an inside-outside strategy. The idea of advocacy through an international donor dodges rather than answers the question. A more promising alternative would be to build on the network's existing strengths in community and media advocacy, seeking to add members and change local awareness about issues faced by women living with HIV. The uses of art, poetry and story-telling offer powerfully engaging opportunities to reach ordinary Chinese; in that sense, the set of activities in the strategic plan might be fully appropriate, if concrete objectives were clarified that could meet both members' capacities and the donor's expectations.

The mixed role of donor funding

In August of 2010, UNAIDS confirmed that they had received a new proposal from WNAC and were still "designing" the next phase of funding for the network.

"UNAIDS has supported the women's network for two years now[15]. Our initial support was for development of institutional governance structures, set up in a consultative way. The network's work last year [2009] focused on advocacy. Advocacy on HIV among civil society is not well organised. The field is dominated by MSM and PLWH groups, while the women's voices, sex workers and IDUs [intravenous drug users] are very low. UNAIDS' strategy is to strengthen these groups and help them form networks. Networks are our entry point". (C69)

According to UNAIDS staff, their funding strategy is to support networks among HIV-affected groups who are not yet included in formal structures. Seeing "limited gender analysis and responsiveness" in existing HIV programming, UNAIDS seeks to "empower women by providing specific support to CBOs [community-based organisations] and increasing the participation of women's networks, leaders, and women living with HIV" (Aye 2010). Although UNAIDS has its own core funding, it also acts as an intermediary donor; its network funding in this case originates from the Gates Foundation (C37). In addition to WNAC, UNAIDS support in 2009 also went to CAP+, a separate sex worker forum, a Yunnan drug users' network, and the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (C69).

UNAIDS funding is provided one year at a time (C69); the initial grant to WNAC during its preparatory phase was for only six months (C55). Although year-on-year funding is not unusual in the HIV sector[16], the grant duration sends a contradictory message to UNAIDS' stated desire to support the long-term growth of networks. Especially for a new network, short-term core funding may produce high levels of stress and uncertainty and send inadvertent messages that the grantee cannot be trusted, or that the donor is overly controlling. In UNAIDS' view, the short funding cycle

[15] By my count, UNAIDS support actually extended for 18 months (January 2009-June 2010).

[16] The US government's PEPFAR programme (President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief) also provides funds on a renewable annual basis. In Vietnam, the only PEPFAR priority country in Asia, USAID has also set up a women's network of local support groups (Asia Catalyst 2009: 13).

encourages grantees to develop strategic plans and carry out "evidence-based advocacy" (C69).

UNAIDS has encouraged WNAC to link with other Chinese organisations outside the HIV sector. In 2009, UNAIDS introduced WNAC to a Shanghai-based social enterprise group, CSR Pioneers (Gōngyì Táng, literally "charity hall"). UNAIDS hoped that CSR Pioneers would assist WNAC in organisational development, capacity building and fundraising, while WNAC would introduce principles of gender sensitivity and stigma reduction (Douban 2009). A partnership between the two groups was established on paper, but has not resulted in any shared activities to date, and there is no mention of WNAC on CSR's website or vice versa. UNAIDS also has plans to build an "intimate partnership" between WNAC and the All China Women's Federation, with similar expected mutual benefits (Aye 2010: 19). UNAIDS hopes to increase participation of women in networks, including the ACWF, and "use them as agents of change in promoting rights of women" (C70). While such a partnership could build on the ACWF's "dual role" and close links to authorities (Howell 2004b: 62-5, Wainwright 2005), it is difficult to picture how such a partnership might operate given the extreme incongruities between a fledgling civil society network and a massive GONGO with millions of national members.

UNAIDS' strategy and support for WNAC are well intentioned. Yet the donor's focus on "capacity building" and national-level advocacy may not match the needs of network members or solve their real problems (C37). The network secretariat seems to spend the majority of its time preparing reports and documents for the donor, and close contact to donors was the primary reason for setting up the Beijing office in the first place. In terms of ground-level results and support for women living with HIV, however, the network arguably provided more before it became formalised and received any donor support.

Regardless of the positive or negative aspects of a single donor's role, it is generally unwise and undesirable for any organisation or network to depend on only one source of funds (Fowler 1997: 150-1). Yet many newly-formed groups have little choice in the matter. WNAC's secretary general admits the situation is "not ideal" and is searching for other sources, but finds domestic resources hard to come by (C55). The problem is particularly acute for a national network in a country as large as China, whose members are by definition disadvantaged and relatively poor. Without external funding, members have few resources of their own to draw on to sustain the network's operations. As noted above, WNAC aims to raise funds through social enterprise, producing and selling handicrafts and books, so that "we can stand on two feet" (C55). Reflecting the dominance of business management approaches among Chinese NGOs and the increasing role of domestic corporate foundations (C15, C23), income generation from social enterprise is a legitimate strategy for many local organisations. But it is unusual

"UNAIDS hopes to increase participation of women in networks, including the ACWF, and "use them as agents of change in promoting rights of women"

and probably impractical for a national network with organisational members who are themselves seeking operational funds. More realistically, WNAC members might engage in a variety of income-generating activities and contribute a portion of the proceeds to the network. No mechanism for such revenue sharing exists yet within the network.

At present, WNAC faces many of the challenges of a "donor-created network", and that is indeed how some other actors in the HIV sector perceive it (C50, C52, C76). The network did not begin this way, and it still retains many characteristics of its informal, virtual origins as a lifeline among HIV-positive women. With donor interest and funding, the network transformed quickly, perhaps too quickly, from a virtual social network into a formal organisational network before strong horizontal ties could be formed among members in different locations around China. From the donor's perspective, the network is a "quite slow process… within a few years they will be some of the key voices, [but] now they are still fairly quiet compared to other leaders [in the HIV field]" (C69).

Political implications

The development of HIV networks in China follows a worldwide pattern observed by the United Nations that "organisations of people living with HIV are

initially created to provide mutual support and care, and evolve gradually to play wider and more varied roles in the epidemic response as their capacity and collective voice strengthen" (UNAIDS 2006: 212). A UN meeting in South Africa also recommended that there was "a pressing need to professionalize informal structures to enable them to function effectively and participate independently in high-powered organisations and forums." But UNAIDS also noted that "Discussions also revealed a tendency for networks to lose touch with the grass roots as they engage with the wider world" (213). How can Chinese networks maintain this balance?

UNAIDS' ultimate stated goal is to create a single nationwide HIV network co-functioning as the CCM (C69). Such a national association could have numerous benefits: enabling strategic alliances with the state, strengthening member networks and adding legitimacy (Howell 2004b: 13-4). This objective managed to unite the entire spectrum of Chinese HIV networks as never before, but in opposition to UNAIDS' proposal. As one activist stated, a single network would be "a very bad idea" even if it were achievable. A single voice towards the government would be desirable, but any unified network would make authorities nervous, so they would attempt to control, manipulate or damage it (C50). If donors and government get together to control a sector, the space for networks to advocate independently could be greatly reduced: one HIV activist terms this his greatest concern (C37). In this view, multiple networks are beneficial as they amplify voices of civil society and allow for more people to occupy hub positions. Competition among networks, within limits, is a natural and healthy phenomenon and will lead to survival of the strongest groups (C37).

A centrifugal tendency is also present in the formation of provincial and local networks. The provincial women's network begun by WNAC members in Henan appears to have occurred spontaneously based on local needs, but could be viewed as duplicating or competing with the national network. The Henan network has received funding support from the US International Republican Institute, after UNAIDS reportedly intervened unsuccessfully to argue that the funds should be given to WNAC instead (C37). On the other hand, the existence of a network in Henan can be considered a major accomplishment, given that several years ago the province was noted for its division and lack of coordination among NGOs, PLWH and the local government (Young and Mian 2008). The Henan network is also integrated into the WNAC structure, which is not yet the case with the AIDS Care-initiated women's network in the southwest.

From a donor or international NGO standpoint, the experience of WNAC raises questions of how much support or involvement is desirable to help networks form. In a 2007 interview, the Red Scarf filmmaker criticised donor ambitions: "People at the moment feel a lot of the grassroots NGOs are too small, so people get them together in networks or pingtai ['platforms']. But this creates the opposite effect of what is intended: frictions, tensions, criticisms." A better approach would be "a wild flower effect: let them grow in their own way and in the end they cover the mountain" (Young and Mian, 2007). Yet the leadership qualities necessary to "cover the mountain" may not be the same as those involved in forming a small group. At present, many WNAC members are strong leaders of local support groups, but this does not automatically translate into an effective national network (C71). The mountain is also very spread out geographically and politically, so that a laissez-faire approach to organising may not result in full coverage.

"People at the moment feel grassroots NGOs are too small, so people get them together in networks or platforms. But this creates the opposite effect of what is intended: frictions, tensions, criticisms."

The common donor response to these dilemmas is to provide "technical skills" and "capacity-building training" to network members. But what skills do members really need? Many courses focus on project management, proposal writing, and other functional competencies that are necessary to work with donors but may take activists further from their own roots, and do not develop vision or leadership (C71). The broader question is what members want out of their participation in a network. In the case of WNAC, women became involved in local and online peer groups for counselling and social support. These groups then joined into a national network in order to reach a wider audience, engage in policy advocacy and attract donor funding – a mixed set of motivations

captured variously in poetry, testimonials and logframes.

In principle, gender considerations should be mainstreamed in all development projects, not separated into a sub-sector for women only. In a situation in which existing male-dominated PLWH networks are not willing to change, however, women's groups have little choice but to form their own network. This strategy could be better combined, though, with increased cooperation with other networks (C62). Once their voices are more equal with others, women's network members could then look at national collaboration in the long term (C69). This will require overcoming divisions and mistrust that exist between sub-groups and at the local level, as well as better coordination among donors. If these conditions are absent, the Women's Network against AIDS will continue to be caught between donor priorities and its members' needs.

A History of Lesbians Organizing in China

by Guo Yujie, Editor of "One-Way Street" and co-editor of les+ magazine[1]
Translated by Marisa Lum and reviewed by Holly Snape

This article represents an interesting change from CDB's normal fare. It has to do less with organizations providing services to a disadvantaged population or addressing environmental problems, and more to do with groups organizing around expression and identity, what we might call "identity politics" in the West. It is also unusual in that it is written by a participant in the movement. It shows that independent organizing in China is beginning to emerge around issues of expression and identity. In contrast to the sensitive issues of ethnic and religious identity, lesbian and gay organizing in China appears to be mildly tolerated by the government. This article shows how far lesbian organizing has come in China over a short period of time, with lesbians coming together in physical and virtual venues, holding salons and conferences and forming networks with domestic and international LGBT groups.

Female homosexuals -- also known as "female comrades[2]" and in English as "lesbians" -- have adopted the self professed name, "la la". This term refers to female-to-female sexual desire and activity. Although this sexual desire and activity has existed since China's ancient times, up until the twentieth century the majority of Chinese people have either never heard of this sexual phenomenon or have never seen a lesbian in public. In 1995, when the Fourth

Women's World Conference was held in Beijing, a Chinese volunteer was on duty in the China's Lesbian representative tent when a foreign representative asked her whether she knew a Chinese lesbian. She replied: "This phenomenon does not exist in China."

During the mid-1990s, groups that formed using the term "homosexual" were carefully watched and eventually banned. As a result, group leaders were forced to deal with these limitations and think up alternative ways to organize and unite the gay community. They wanted to create an encouraging environment that allowed everyone to feel comfortable in acknowledging their identity. At that time, several lesbians living in Beijing had already begun to arrange occasional meetings. In 1994, Susie, a bisexual English woman, began organizing parties at her house, inviting both her foreign and Chinese gay friends. In addition, Susie began to organize bar gatherings with gay activist, Wu Chunsheng.

When Shitou, a female artist, lived at the old Summer Palace in an artist village, a girl often came to visit her. Their relationship developed and eventually they moved in together. They never were more than friends, but Shitou felt as if the feeling between them was different from anything she had experienced before.
After the artist village was disbanded, Shitou met Susie through one of her organized events. The first time Shitou participated in one of these events, she was surprised at the sight of all the beautiful people in the room and was not quite sure how this could happen. After becoming a regular at Susie's gatherings, Shitou slowly became aware that this was a gay community. It made her think back to the friendship she shared with the girl in the old Summer Palace, a time in which she came across a girl that she liked. Shitou began to re-explore herself in a different way.

When everyone at the party would gather together they would explore other possibilities. Shitou decided

[1] This article was first published offline in China Development Brief 47 (Fall 2010). It is available online in English here and Chinese here.

[2] Editor's Note: Chinese gay and lesbians often refer to themselves using the revolutionary term for comrade (tongzhi).

to take part in a feminist group that encouraged lesbians to bring out their voice in feminist discussions. Susie, on the other hand, collaborated with an activist, He Xiaopei and looked for a bar to hold get-togethers. After a one-time celebratory event in June of 1996 to remember the Stonewall Event[3], "Half and Half" became Beijing's first gay bar. Xiaopei believes that the emergence of gay bars as venues to gather has been especially important in the organization of the gay community "As long as everyone comes out together, we will all be able to become visible living beings in our community. We must work together to become a group with a goal. "

"The first lesbian group was established in 1995 using the name 'Female Comrade.'"

In addition to gay bars, gay hotlines have also emerged. Private parties, bars, hotlines, and meetings have encouraged more lesbians to come out. Through these social networks, lesbians are able to get to know one another, and self-proclaim their identity, becoming participants in a movement.

The first lesbian group was established in 1995 using the name "Female Comrade." The group organized activities every week, including parties, dances, outings, and discussions. In 1998, a national conference was held at a temple in the western suburbs of Beijing by homosexuals from around the world. In October of the same year, more than 30 lesbians gathered together at an underground bar in Haidian District for a lesbian conference. They shared their life experiences with one another, and discussed the logistics of opening a hotline, creating a national network, and publishing journals geared toward the lesbian community. Soon after, the "Beijing Sister" group was formed. They published their first lesbian publication, "Sky" and opened the first lesbian hotline. Later, due to conflicts within the group, their "Beijing Lesbian Culture Festival" was canceled, and in 2001, the Beijing Sister group broke up.

Building a network

In the late 90's, the internet became an important medium to help gays connect and create a network. They began with chat rooms, websites, and moved on to discussion forums. The young gay community was especially proactive, creating a large cyber network community.

At the end of 1999,Dongdong, a native of Suzhou, began learning how to create web pages. Among her many web pages, was one in which she recorded her relationship with her girlfriend. She posted poems, conversations and descriptions related to the feelings of love. Over time, she found that the site was her most popular webpage. Someone commented saying that they had also experienced something similar to what Dongdong was going through when she was younger, thereby encouraging Dongdong to continue with her work.

In 2000, Dongdong's page became an official website called, "Late Autumn Cabin." "Late Autumn Cabin" quickly became one of the first most popular lesbian websites. Webmaster, Dongdong's taste for literature, allowed her to organically gather young lesbians involved in the literary scene.
At about the same time, toward the end of 1999, Xiangqi, a native of a small town in Southern China met her future girlfriend in a QQ chat room. Xiangqi wanted to be closer to her girlfriend, so she resigned from her job and the two started their life together. Inspired by her friends, Xiangqi started a website called "Us Two," telling the story of her and her girlfriend. The growth of website followers encouraged Xiangqi to open a larger forum-based website.

In 2002, Xiangqi transformed her personal webpage into a discussion forum, called "A Place of Blooming Flowers." "A Place of Blooming Flowers" and "Late Autumn Cabin," became two of the most popular lesbian websites in China during the first decade of the 21st century.

Sam and Gogo met through the "Late Autumn Cabin" forum. At the time, both had girlfriends and were living under the constraints of feeling as if they had no future. The internet and bars were the main meeting places for lesbians, many of whom were under psychological pressure, knowing that their girlfriends would one day want to get married. The mindset that one does not have a future is prevalent in both reality

[3] Editor's Note: The "Stonewall Riots" occurred in June of 1969 in the United States. It was a symbolic event in the history of gay rights, inspiring gay community activism in the U.S, and other parts of the world.

and virtual communities. Girls who live by the principle of carpe diem are unable to build a new life for themselves[4].

Sam and Gogo began to talk about what they could do besides drinking, eating and singing. Gogo, a graphic designer, said she wanted to start a lesbian magazine that was young and trendy. She wanted it to be different from the current, darker and more depressing writing. Sam agreed and encouraged her to do it. In December 2005, the lesbian magazine, "Les +" was published. It gave a new generation of young people a chance to voice their opinions.

A community rooted from the bottom-up

The cancellation of the 2001 Beijing Lesbian Cultural Festival and the breakup of the Beijing Sister group could have led to the silencing of China's lesbian movement. But with the subsequent rise of the internet and the emergence of lesbian voices, new lesbian organizations emerged.

In 2004, Xian, a native Beijinger returned to Beijing from the United States. While studying in the U.S, Xian became acquainted with several gay activists, and was moved by their cause. She believed that the gay movement opened up new possibilities in her life. After her return to China in 2004, Xian began to explore Beijing's lesbian community. She first consulted a few senior members of the gay movement about both the gay and lesbian movement in Beiing. Xian found they did not have any experience to offer about the lesbian movement. In addition, the lesbian community was not a cohesive one and lacked money. The senior members gave Xian a warning: do not form a community, it is too hard.

Unlike previous participants in the lesbian movement, Xian had experiences in NGO work and had studied the theory behind movements like this. Xian applied these theories to the gay movement and formed a sound strategy. In her view, there were two ways to conduct a movement: from the bottom up, to start from the masses to form a community or from top down, to work with lawmakers and experts, working to change policies. Xian chose the former because "social movements are not decided by an individual or small number of people with power. The charm in social movements is that everyone has the responsibility to work toward social progress. In fact, this way of thinking is precisely the idea behind popular grassroots movements. I never felt compelled to become a leader of a movement. My goal is to inspire others to get involved in the movement."

Xian went to bars, contacted community activists, and became acquainted with people who were active in the community. In 2004, Xian and a member of a lesbian organization, Anke collaborated and came up with "La La Salon Beijing," a weekly discussion meeting held on the weekends at a public venue. Slowly, more people were willing to publicly acknowledge their identity, and expressed interest in participating in gay-related activities.

In 2005, Xian convened a number of volunteers to set up a working group. In addition to founding the Beijing chapter, Xian also began establishing contacts outside of Beijing. She eventually founded a national network. Among the active lesbian organizations, some were associated with gay organizations, while others were started by lesbians themselves. Most lesbian organizations depended on bars and websites to survive. In the summer of 2005, local group leaders and activists held a meeting in Beijing. Nearly 40 people participated, 20 of them from abroad.

"Unlike previous participants in the lesbian movement, Xian had experiences in NGO work and had studied the theory behind movements like this."

At that time, Xiangqi, the founder of the "Us Two" and "A Place for Blooming Flowers" websites, who lived in Shanghai, also attended the meeting. After she returned to Shanghai, what started as a small discussion group with a few friends became a working group on female love. She said: "At the time, I did not know what to do. I just wanted to gather everyone together, and later open a salon, open a hotline, have gatherings, travel." Salons were the group's most important type of activity, discussion topics included video and legal issues discussions. They met on an

[4] Editor's Note: The pressure for gays and lesbians to enter into heterosexual marriages is strong in China where parents want their children to carry on the family line.

average of once a month. Over time, the female love group became Shanghai's first and most important lesbian working group.

In 2005, in Chengdu, a lesbian named Yushi and several other volunteers established Chengdu's LES Love Working Group. At that time, Yushi had her own bar named "Moon Love Flower." In 2004, inspired by her girlfriend being forced into marriage by her family, Yushi wrote a post on the online forum, Tianyu, called "Yushi Do Not Cry." Soon after, Yushi's bar became famous. The next year, Phoenix's television program, "Date with Lu Yu" wanted to make a lesbian broadcast, and found Yushi. After an intense ideological struggle, Yushi decided to tell their story. After the program aired in February 2006, Yushi's bar became one of the few openly gay lesbians in China.
The Moon Love Flower bar was not as easy to maintain as Yushi had imagined. The environment was more complex and required better management skills. At the same time, Yushi thought, Is it possible that my ideal life is this bar? She slowly came to realize that she wanted to found an organization. The bar was just a basis for establishing a living to support herself, and also a possible communication platform.

"In July 2007, the Chinese lesbian movement reached a milestone: the first lesbian camp in Zhuhai began."

After the establishment of the Chengdu LES Love working group, Yushi and others began to organize salons and parties, eventually becoming Sichuan's most important lesbian organization.

La La Camp – the lesbian movement's Whampoa Military Academy

Beginning in 2003, with the Chinese government's focus on the issue of AIDS prevention, and the entry of AIDS prevention funding from international organizations, gay volunteer groups were also being established throughout China. Most of these groups received the support of the local Center for Disease Control[5]. The CDC's backing allowed these groups to legally carry out AIDS prevention and publicity work, and also to receive financial support. However, many groups were limited to AIDS work and few were able to do much in the area of gay rights, culture, discrimination and community building work, which led to frequent disagreements on the scope of the project and use of resources.

In many areas, lesbian organizations existed alongside gay organizations, but had a difficult time surviving. Independent lesbian organizations faced the challenges of limited finances and personnel. On the other hand, without large amounts of funding and the support of the government, lesbian organizations were able to be independent and self-reliant.

At the 2005 Beijing conference, Xian invited Taiwan and Hong Kong senior gay activist, Wang Ping/ Connie. They both found that Taiwan and Hong Kong's LGBT movement was far ahead of the mainland. In Taiwan and Hong Kong, they were already working to change the law and establish a dialogue with the government. Inter-regional cooperation is necessary and important in shaping a movement's direction, and in 2006, Xian and Wang Ping decided that they would begin a training camp for lesbian volunteers the following summer, providing the Hong Kong, Taiwanese and Chinese lesbian volunteer community with comprehensive training. In July 2007, the Chinese lesbian movement reached a milestone: the first lesbian camp in Zhuhai began.

Over four days and three nights, the camp's participants discussed each of their region's experiences in the movement, along with other topics such as: gay identity, family experiences, the intersex spectrum and the gay movement, the function of art and organizations, media skills, law, campaign methods, human resource strategies for regional connection, regional policies and many other topics. Every afternoon, at the end of classes, there would be 15 minutes left for open discussion. They wanted to give those who wanted to turn their personal story into a case study the opportunity to receive funding. Each person was required to explain their story in a few short statements.

The volunteers that participated in the camp were organizers of the gay rights movement in their region. Volunteers from each region could share the problems

[5] Editor's Note: The Chinese Center of Disease Control was significantly strengthened after the SARS crisis of 2003. At the local level, the CDC works closely with the local Health Bureau.

and experiences from their region. It was the first time organizers from mainland China experienced an environment with such diverse sexual orientations.

Xu Kuan and Joanne, a transsexual from Taiwan stood in front of the group and told their stories, proving that it is important for things that exist to be heard and seen. This reminded lesbians that they should maintain more of an open attitude towards others and with oneself. There are subtle complexities in the gay rights movement, for example the individuals involved, especially those who were from a heterosexual background, that were outside their comfort zone. A senior lesbian volunteer, Xiaopei said: "The participants at the Zhuhai lesbian camp were so passionate in moving the gay movement forward I became "homophobic"; now I want to do work that involves transgender groups in order to diversify the community." After the lesbian camp came to a close, a special closing ceremony was held. Certificates were presented by former participants in the camp, almost as if they were passing the torch of the gay rights movement.

When Les+ 's editor, Sam received her certificate, she said "I hope that this conference will be just like the First Congress of the Communist Party of China: a starting point for something great". There was an uproar of laughter. The conference was able to have a huge affect on the movement itself. Something as small as this that can have a huge affect down the road. In the same year, small lesbian organizations were also established in Nanning, Guangxi, Guangzhou, Guangdong, and Anshan, Liaoning.

Following the establishment of the Zhuhai LaLa lesbian camp, in 2008 and 2009, the LaLa volunteer training camp continued on, inspiring people in the community. Volunteers continued to support the development of small organizations. "No man is an island. Everyone is like a small piece of earth, connected to the land." The passing down of certificates was symbolic. The camp was similar to a networking activity allowing lesbian volunteers from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and North America to connect with one another, extending the ever growing network.

"A little piece of earth can form a continent"

A Zhuhai camper, Xiao S. from Nanning, Guangxi, began to like girls in her adolescent years. She enjoyed the limelight. During the flag-raising ceremony at school, others sang the national anthem quietly, while Xiao S sang out loud, belting out the lyrics in a loudly manner. Some believed that she had the personality of an activist.

In 2007, after news of Camp Zhuhai was released, Xiao S. at the time did not have any organizational experience, but she wrote to the organizing committee

"Participants at the lesbian camp were so passionate in moving the gay movement forward I became 'homophobic'; now I want to do work that involves transgender groups in order to diversify the community."

saying that she was a student who had no work experience, but was very interested in getting involved. She said if the committee did not have any funding to help her, she would be willing to use her own money to go to Camp Zhuhai.

Xian said Xiao S's letter left a deep impression on her. Although it was childish on the surface, it was also very ambitious, so the organizing committee funded Xiao S. to go to Zhuhai. Xiao S. recalled that time in her life saying, "every day I was really excited. I was interested in taking every course. I remember Wang Ping, a native of Taiwan, who made a short travel video. A screenshot showcased the raising of a rainbow flag in front of a government building. It was so inspiring that I was in tears." After returning to Nanning, Xiao S. formed her own group called the Guangxi Lace (a lesbian homonym) Association. Shw wanted to form a network, connecting all Guangxi lesbians.

She was active on QQ and posted on BBS. She thought that Les + was very useful, so she decided to make her own electronic magazine called the "Good Life," in which the character "好" or 'good' was broken up into two characters '女' and '子', meaning woman. In January, the electronic magazine was used as a media outlet, contacting and gathering together all lesbians in Nanning. The e-magazine layout was meticulous. There was different background music, personal stories, knowledge on sex, and also art

included on each page. The majority of the e-magazine content was less about the lesbian community, and more on the topic of leisure and young people.

"First there is imitation, then there is innovation." This was Xiao S's work ethic. Over the past few years, she has grown into a confident organizer. Inspired by events in Beijing, Guangxi Lace Association organized their own events including: basketball tournaments, obstacle courses and other sports activities. On the same day as international anti-terrorism day, the association called upon Guangxi lesbians to protest against China's policy forbidding homosexuals to donate blood on the day of blood donations. In 2010, on the same day of anti-terrorism, the Lace organization organized a cycling activity to promote pride throughout the university. Xiao S. said that once there were more than a dozen people who participated in the activities and over 30 people who came to the dinner. It appeared that meals were most popular, so they organized a "sushi day" once every month. Everyone would gather in the activity room, cook, eat, and talk. It became known as the "Eating Association." At the end of 2009, I followed the Chinese queer tour group to Nanning to meet Xiao S. I asked her: "Compared to 2007, do you think you have changed?" She replied, "I think I've grown up." I asked, "Is your passion still there?" She said, "Of course, this is something that will never change. "

Conclusion

In recent years, lesbian groups have displayed a different development trend, but are growing quickly.
In Beijing, Common Language has developed into a national organization, and supports the growth of small groups in different localities. Common Language has changed strategies, moving from community development to more public education, and even policy advocacy. Les + magazine has been released in more than 20 provinces, more than 50 cities, and has organized many influential queer cultural activities. In 2010, the lesbian play, "Huan You She" was established as the symbol of the "vanguard of queer culture." Lesbian Beijing native, Sharon still continues to develop the community's building features. Common Language, Aibai network, Les + and other organizations founded the LGBT Center in Beijing. This was a new platform and also a new co-development model for collaboration between gay and lesbian organizations.

Shanghai Female Love Working Group published the "Speaking of their love--- Shanghai's lesbian oral history." The book led to the enthusiasm for work in gathering the lesbian oral history for a particular region. In the southwest, the Chengdu's Love Working Group was able to join the Yunnan lesbian community. In Guizhou, Qian Yan Working Group held their first older lesbian oral story telling camp in Kunming.

Throughout China, the lesbian movement is on the rise. There are still many things that need to be done, and things that can be done. Hong Kong and Taiwanese volunteers expressed that their experience of hardship, has not yet been experienced in the mainland. They surmise it is because the mainland has just started their movement, and are still passionate and excited. Xian and Hong Kong classmate, You Jing said, "You can not always talk about hardship. You should tell us that there is a happy ending!" You Jing said: "This is a happy ending. Our friends in the mainland will bring us the happy ending that we've been waiting for".

A Day on the Women's Rights March

by Guo Ting, Deputy Editor of CDB[1]
Translated by Sandy Xu

Xiao Meili, 24, of the Feminist Youth Action Group (青年女权行动派), began Meili's Women's Rights March from Beijing on September 15, 2013. She and her fellow marchers walked along the National Highway 107, passing through Hebei, Henan, Hubei, and Hunan to Guangzhou. According to Meili, participating in the march was a means of expanding women's freedom and opening the space for women to thrive. Along the way, the marchers promoted gender equality and advocated for reform for the handling of sexual assault cases. She sent letters of suggestion to county and city governments, education bureaus, and public security bureaus, asking them to make government information available to the public. She also carried out advocacy activities to engage the public and the authorities on gender related issues. I joined her for a day in October 2013, and participated in this women's rights march as a fellow marcher.

A divided city

The arrival of high-speed rail has greatly transformed China. I arrive in Hebi, Henan by high-speed train at 9:30 a.m. on October 23. Standing at the magnificent new station, in front of an imposing plaza, I cannot help but feeling deeply moved. The train ride from Beijing to Hebi took a speedy two and a half hours. Covering the same distance, Xiao Meili and her comrades have already been walking for 38 days.

I am to meet Meili at the post office near the old train station. While urban growth has spurred the development of high-speed rail, it has led to the neglect of the old Hebi train station. The plaza in front of it is unexpectedly lifeless. There are just a few travelers scattered about in the waiting room, while rickshaws come by in twos and threes to drum up customers. The hustle and bustle of days past are only dimly evident through the peeling oil paint on the signboards of the surrounding restaurants, which are, for the most part, already out of business.

Next to the post office – which I now see is no longer in operation – I find Meili carrying some documents and looking travel-worn. She is more tanned and thinner than when I last saw her the previous summer, when we organized a workshop for women living with HIV. The abandonment of the post office is just one of the many inconveniences encountered on the Women's Rights March. Maps simply have not been able to keep up with China's rapid urban development, which means that Meili and her friends often end up on unexpected and pointless detours.

After the failed attempt to mail her documents, Meili decided to return to the hotel with her companion Fang Xiaoxiong to straighten out their luggage and find an alternative post office on the road. They are staying at a typical family-run inn with old-fashioned decor and narrow staircases. When there are customers, the residence is an inn; when there are no customers, it is simply the owner's home. I chat with the thirty-something owner. It is her first time encountering the term "feminism." "I support women's rights," she says, "The moment I heard about it, I decided I supported it!" The day before, she was chatting with somebody online, who said that her way of speaking was "aggressive" and "un-ladylike." To this she responds, "Why do I have to speak like a lady? Exactly how are women supposed to speak?"

During this conversation, Xiao Meili and Fang

[1] This article was first published online in 2014 here.

Xiaoxiong come downstairs. They appear before me armed with masks covering their faces, hats covering their ears, bodies covered with jackets, feet shod with athletic shoes, and carrying massive backpacks. Their were ten marchers in the very beginning but this number has waxed and waned. The past few days, Meili counted among her followers only just Fang Xiaoxiong, an animation director from Beijing who had already walked with her for almost a month and lost 12 kg.

The post office had moved to a luxurious European-style building on the two-way, eight lane Qibin Avenue. To ensure that the requests for government information disclosure are received by the government, Meili and her partners either deliver the messages directly to the relevant departments or send a registered letter. When they see the "Women's Rights March" sign on Meili and Xiaoxiong's backs the post office employees' attitude is cold and indifferent to their mission while the women laborers chatting outside provide a stark contrast: they follow them and warmly invite them for refreshments in their homes.

"Meili plans to march for six months, walking between 15 and 30 kilometers a day."

Sitting at the table, long out of practice of writing characters, I begin the task Meili has assigned me—filling out forms with addresses for the Hebi city government, education bureau, and public security bureau. Two letters for each department. One of the letters to be delivered to the government administration and education bureau is "Suggestions for establishing protocols to prevent and deal with sexual assault on campuses and preventing further harm". Another to be sent to the Public Security Bureau is "suggestions for responsibly and effectively investigating sexual assault cases and protecting victims, particularly protecting the privacy and dignity of minors." On the back of the letters, she has attached the signatures of 34 Hebi residents collected that morning.

Meili's journey into the dust storm

By the time we finish sending the letters, it is already noon. According to our map app, the next stop, Qi county, is 19.8 kilometers away. If we add in the distance to a hotel, we will have to travel over 20 kilometers. As it takes about an hour to walk 5 kilometers for the average person, a 20-kilometer journey should take about 4 or 5 hours. But this is not the case.

Meili plans to march for six months, walking between 15 and 30 kilometers a day. On the first day, she did not pace herself. On the second day, she was unable to move her legs. They now take ten to fifteen-minute breaks on the road for every one or two hours walked. Moreover, since this is a long journey, they have to carry all their stuff on their backs and therefore, cannot walk as fast as they would normally do. Previously, for a similar action protesting discrimination against people with hepatitis B, activist Lei Chuang walked from Shanghai to Beijing while dragging a suitcase behind him because he had a shoulder injury at the time. He was robbed at knifepoint. While it is safer and more convenient for Meili and her fellow marchers to carry backpacks, it does not make them faster. Therefore, they average only about 3 kilometers per hour.

We turn off of Qibin Avenue to the national highway 107, the main artery of the Women's Rights March. From Beijing to Guangzhou, it stretches over 2,200 kilometers. As we get on the highway, cargo truck after cargo truck zips past us, kicking up clouds of dust so thick they block the sun. Meili says, "If I were to do it all again, I would definitely, definitely, not choose National Highway 107. For those traveling on foot, the 107 is a hell-hole of dust. Even if you wear a mask, at the end of the day, the insides of your nostrils are still black." That said, all the roads of China's north are like this. A few days later, I was back home and washed the coat I wore during the march. A layer of black immediately surfaced on the water. Seeing this, my mother assumed it was the dye running from the cloth.

Another challenge of being on the road is finding restaurants and bathrooms. The marchers often cannot find places to eat. The day before, they were unable to eat until 3 in the afternoon. They occasionally come across small kiosks and vendors full of all kinds of counterfeit and low-quality wares such as Maijie sports

drinks, Yili milk, and Master Shuai instant noodles[2]. A few days ago, they ate 5 yuan noodles that ended up being fake. Not wanting to waste much, Meili managed to eat half a bowl, while Xiaoxiong had to spit out the bite she took.

Today they are lucky. Four or five kilometers outside of Hebi, they find a small restaurant that looks ok. Because all the support for the march comes from individual donations, Meili and Xiaoxiong often shared a plate of vegetables to save money. Today, however, I foot the bill and we eat to our heart's content—three dishes and a soup, altogether 60 yuan.

After our meal, they fall asleep at the table. I ask the owner of the restaurant for the bathroom. He points to a narrow alley not quite a meter wide, just enough room for one person to squat. This is one of the goals of the Women's Rights March: to look out for the discriminatory practices, both big and small, directed at women in public spaces in China. Meili points out that more thought needs to be put into the design of public facilities, such as increasing the number of bathrooms so that women do not have to wait in such long lines and adjusting the height of handrails in buses and subways so that women can use them more easily. But let us leave behind the topic of toilets and march forward. As before, the road and unchanging landscape stretches out before us with no end in sight. The omnipresent dust combines with the smoke from the burning fields, having just been reaped of the fall's barley harvest. There is nowhere to hide. It is even worse than the smog capital that is Beijing. I have never seen anything like it.

However, in Meili's eyes, the journey is not so monotonous. Amidst the trash along the highway, we occasionally spot cotton plants, which always puts Meili in high spirits. She takes pictures with her camera and plans to draw a picture. Later, she posts a sketch on her Weibo account [translator's note: @美丽的女权徒步, which means Meili's Women's Rights March] with the note, "Along National Highway 107, you often see small patches of cotton. Little sparrows often fly in groups from the willows into the cotton fields. I had never seen real cotton growing outside before. I didn't know the plant was so small; the cotton bolls are smaller than eggs. If it weren't for the dust making them filthy, they would be really cute."

Xiao Meili's real name is Xiao Yue. When I first met her in 2012, I asked her about the origin of her internet handle, Xiao Meili. She said that with this name, people can call her "mother"—"beautiful mother," but I call her "beautiful friend[3]." Therefore, Meili's Women's Rights March is also 'A Beautiful March for Women's Rights'. Lü Pin, one of the first marchers, said a name like Meili manifests women's bodily autonomy and sexual independence[4]. Due to her position within feminist circles, Lü Pin was given credit for the idea of the march. She was quick to correct them, explaining that the Women's Rights March was all Meili's idea.

"One of the goals of the Women's Rights March is to look out for discriminatory practices, both big and small, directed at women in public spaces in China."

Night falls just as the marchers reach the border of Qi county. They drag their heavy feet along as they dodge the various passenger buses and commercial trucks running red lights. Usually at this time, they still need to walk several more kilometers to find a place to stay in the county town, for reasons of both safety and convenience (mainly, locating a post office the next day). Most importantly, they need to be able to collect signatures the next morning. By the time they find accommodation near the bus station in town, it is already eight at night. After drinking some porridge, Xiaoxiong lies on the bed and immediately falls asleep. Meili says she will wake up in a bit. Surely enough, Xiaoxiong wakes up around ten and does chores with Meili: updating Weibo, washing clothes, and mending the holes in their pants.

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[2] Editor's note: These are all counterfeit products with names that either look or sound very similar to the originals: 脉劫 màijié wants to be mistaken for 脉动 màidòng, 依利 yīlì as 伊利 yīlì、and 康帅傅 kāng shuàifù as 康师傅 kāng shīfù

[3] Editor's note: Such terms of endearment are common in online communities.

[4] Editor's note: Lü Pin is a prominent feminist activist and head of the Beijing-based Media Monitor for Women Network, an NGO promoting gender equality in media and women's communication rights

County town public participation

It is eight o'clock in the morning on October 24th, a cold and windy day in Qi county. In the two hours before hurrying to the next stop, Zhengzhou, Meili, Xiaoxiong, and I attempt to drum up public participation in the town by collecting signatures from its residents. Meili's first target is a middle-aged woman eating breakfast with her son. She first talks to the woman about the frequency of sexual assaults on campuses this year and explains that she hopes the government can establish measures to prevent and address the situation. Then she asks the woman to sign her name on the back of the letter. This kind of campaigning, having to repeatedly give explanations and requests, is extremely difficult. The woman responds tersely, "This needs to be addressed by the central government. If they deal with it, I'll sign."

The original plan was to deliver the requests and letters of suggestion directly to the county and city governments along the way. Previously, when they arrived in Zhuozhou, Hebei, they attempted to get signatures on the letters of suggestion for the first time and they managed to get nine residents to sign. At the time, Lü Pin, wrote, "For the residents in the middle of their busy days, perhaps it was the first time that encountered the words 'women rights,' or the first time they had an opportunity for public participation. This kind of participation teases out the average person's fear, indifference, and pessimism, and emboldens them to assume and exhibit responsibility for their autonomy, allowing the prevention and handling of sexual assault to become local movements."

Lü Pin's observations are very sharp. Most people feel fear, indifference, or pessimism toward public participation. Meili says the elderly are almost never willing to sign their names. Having lived through the Cultural Revolution, they refuse to participate in any public events. There are also a great number of people who claim to be illiterate when they are asked to put pen to paper. But after persevering, there will inevitably be a breakthrough. To the people who make excuses, Meili says, tell me your name, I will write it for you. On this particular day, Meili does not give up on the Zhengzhou woman who wants to involve the central government. Meili turns to the woman's elementary-school aged son and begins talking to him instead, asking him about school. The mother is finally moved and agrees to sign. Her son also carefully adds his own name.

It is difficult work, but once you have the first name, you can get a second, and then a third. Meili explains, if she can change people even a tiny bit, the march will be worthwhile.

Afterword: how the feminist youth action group connects policy to the public

Xiao Meili's Women's Rights March will continue for six months. As one of several performance art-centered actions by young feminists in recent years, it has attracted the attention of the media and public at large. However, some are concerned that such actions do not actually result in changes at the level of policy. It is also hard so see how they can, in the short term, realistically address problems such as domestic violence and sexual harassment, two of the myriad of problems that currently affect Chinese women. At the end of November, I took this question to Guangzhou based Ke Qianting, associate professor of gender studies at Sun Yat-sen University. She believes that in order to effect change at both the political and personal level, the number of feminist activists must not only increase, but also involve the general public, establishment insiders, and social organizations.

"In order to effect change at both the political and personal level, the number of feminist activists must not only increase, but also involve the general public, establishment insiders, and social organizations."

Ke points out that although student feminist activists have staged advocacy actions in various parts of the country, their numbers are still very small compared to the rest of society. In order to spark more extensive change in society's values, increasing the numbers and diversity of the participants is needed. To make more noise and carry out more actions, the present Feminist Youth Action Group, [the women's rights group that Xiao Meili is a representative of] is not nearly enough.

But in today's China, if one wants to influence policy,

apart from skillfully using the media to exert pressure through public opinion, making information available to the public, and other such methods, what's more important is to be in contact with internal channels in order to influence members of bodies that have legislative power, such as the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference representatives. We must change their minds through advocacy, because among the government's current developmental priorities, topics concerning gender are not considered pressing or important. Although difficult, it is essential that more people persist in trying to establish interaction with the government within the framework of the system. Feminists commanding the relevant resources and skills should make this the focus of their work.

As for solving the difficulties that women face in their personal lives, more social organizations [Editor's note: the term 'social organization' (社会组织) is commonly used to refer to NGOs in China] should be established at the local level. Currently, the number of local governments contracting out social services is enormous. For example, many neighborhoods in Guangzhou have comprehensive family services centers that have annual budgets in the millions. Nevertheless, they are unable to solve the domestic violence problems in their respective localities. Responding to individual cases is not necessarily the goal of feminist advocacy groups, as they work with small staff and limited funding. They often have a budget of just a few tens of thousands of yuan; they can be considered successful if they manage to spark some public reflection, discussion, and participation. Individual cases can only be addressed by an organization serving the community, such as a comprehensive family services center working to promote family harmony. However the majority of them are not able to solve the problem of domestic violence because they do not reflect on deeply entrenched gender inequality; in such an environment where there is a lack of gender consciousness, it is difficult for effective working strategies and methods to appear. For this reason, local-level social organizations still need to repeatedly, without end, raise consciousness through gender-training so that gender is given due consideration within the thinking underlying organizations and social work. Only then can they properly respond to the needs of society.

Which Path should Marginalized Chinese Women's NGOs follow?

by Guo Ting, Deputy Editor of CDB[1]
Translated by Christine Clouser, Kelly McCarthy, and James Evers

In China there is a huge diversity of NGO types. This has come about due to processes within China's reform period, varying streams of international development aid, and differences in the social and political environment. Compared to the populations served by poverty alleviation and education programs, groups such as those living with HIV, sex workers, migrants, and homosexuals are severely stigmatized and discriminated against. Therefore it is very difficult for these communities to receive support from Chinese society and the government. This particular NGO field could appropriately be called "marginalized"

Because of the need for rights protection and service provision, many organizations emerged in the late 1990s, but these were mainly led by men. After 2000, due to a lack of organizational response, the problems that some groups of marginalized women, such as female sex workers, women living with HIV, and lesbians, faced became more and more obvious. They could not receive the support of the Women's Federation nor other women's organizations. In order to overcome these difficulties, many of these marginalized women formed organizations based around these communities and used diverse working methods to protect their rights and raise public and governmental awareness of their situation.

Women's HIV/AIDS organizations

Since the late 1990s, the continued support of international funds, as well as the longterm involvement and effort of prominent AIDS activists made HIV/AIDS one of the most influential fields for NGO work. However this field is dominated by services for MSM (Men who have Sex with Men), while organizations providing services to HIV-infected women are few and weak. According to a survey conducted by the National AIDS Resource Network in 2011, there were only 29 women AIDS organizations (and groups) in China. Most of these organizations have only a few part-time employees and some are exclusively composed of volunteers.

Xincai county's Ximei Mutual Help Home is a good example of the typical grassroots women AIDS organization found in Henan. Founder Liu Ximei met feminist Ye Haiyan during the 2011 "Tian Xi Case"[2] which pushed her to take the path to help those living with HIV. The Ximei Mutual Help Home hopes it can offer some relief and compensation for the women of Xincai living with HIV, as well as help them find a doctor and provide a temporary place to rest and have a social life. However, as with similar groups, the Ximei Mutual Help Home faces obstacles on all fronts, including funding, office space, work details, and staff. In many parts of Henan, many patients from rural areas go to the city to see a doctor, often saving money by not eating or drinking during their trip. In addition, because of the side-effects of bad medication, patients from rural areas are plagued with obvious visual markers (such as changes in body fat) and are therefore subjected to even more serious discrimination. Even though the Ximei Mutual Help Home only has three

[1] This article was first published online in 2014 here.

[2]Editor's Note: Tian Xi is a young man who was infected with HIV through blood transfusion as a child. He was arrested and jailed for a year in 2011.

to five steady volunteers and staff and is unable to disseminate AIDS prevention information, or provide job training, it still provides a shelter where patients can talk and support each other. However, the Home has already had to move four times within the county town during the last two years. The first time was because after a year the landlord refused to renew the expired lease. The second because after just 15 days, the landlord broke the contract and did not allow them to stay. Therefore, they had to move to yet another place for a few months, but because many patients kept coming and going, tensions with neighbors soon arose. Today, the group is renting a private house, but when I went to interview them in October of 2013, their lease was to expire in six months and the landlord had already made it clear he had no intention of renewing it. Prospective tenants were already coming to view the property.

When the organization was first established, Liu Ximei would often go to Zhengzhou and elsewhere to attend meetings and training sessions for AIDS organizations. After a few times, she believed that the training sessions weren't meeting her needs. The Mutual Help Home had an urgent need for guidance in becoming more organized and sustainable, whereas the training sessions were often teaching how to fight discrimination and protect privacy. When I visited, the Home had not yet obtained funding from foundations nor development agencies. They had to rely on online donations Ye Haiyan helped raise through her Weibo, and on the "hush money" obtained from the local government by patients on important days such as "World AIDS Day", to pay their rent[3].

"They had to rely on online donations Ye Haiyan helped raise through her Weibo, and on the "hush money" obtained from the local government by patients"

The Dengfeng Sunshine Home, which helps locals who were infected with HIV through blood transfusions secure definite compensation, is also based in Henan. Before being diagnosed with AIDS in 2005, Sunshine Home's founder, Wang Qiuyun, was an official in the local healthcare system. Furthermore, her husband is an intellectual. These elements constitute an important background to explain the development of this small grassroots NGO. Unlike many other people living with HIV who petition the government for compensation, the Dengfeng Sunshine Home calls on a few local hospitals for compensation. In order to obtain conclusive evidence, they run around and collect testimonies from people who donated/sold their blood at the time. Quickly after getting compensation for a case, they once again carry out discussion and analysis, and continue to put pressure on hospitals, until a large portion of the people who had become infected through blood transfusions are finally given compensation. A family whose three members were infected received up to 550,000 RMB in damages. Sunshine Home helped infected people to get compensation, and also managed to get them on the basic living allowance to lay down the foundations for future community activities. They split the costs for the mutual-aid and volunteer service project funds.

In Hebei province, north of the Yellow River, there are also small grassroots groups providing services to women living with HIV. In 2005, with the help of a Beijing AIDS NGO leader, Meng Lin, Ma Guihong, a former village shop owner, established the Yongqing Half the Sky Mutual Aid Group, in order to provide services to local people living with HIV and help them fight for compensation. Subsequently, in 2007 Ma Guihong and the Half the Sky Mutual Aid group promoted the implementation of the "Four Free, One Care" policy in Yongqing county. Then, in 2010, they promoted the introduction of the "Implementing Opinions Concerning the Improvement of Our Province's AIDS Community's Health Care and Aid Work" in Hebei (commonly referred to as Document 7) and advocated that it be implemented in Yongqing in 2012, so all the people who became infected selling/donating their blood would receive a one-time compensation of 70,000 RMB.

The successful promotion and implemention of the policy is due to both the specifics of the Hebei AIDS epidemic and to Ma Guihong's strategic work. Compared to Henan, there are a lot fewer people living with HIV in Hebei. According to 2013 statistics, Henan had a total of 59,380 cases of confirmed

[3] "Hush money" refers to a sum of money local governments give petitioning patients to make them stop demonstrating in front of their headquarters.

people living with HIV, while Hebei had only 4,010[4]. Therefore, pressure for compensation in Hebei is lower than in Henan. In addition, Yongqing is less than a hundred kilometers away from Beijing, and is linked to the capital by a direct bus line providing people living with HIV with an easy way to go there to put pressure on their local government. After Hebei province published the "Document no 7", Yongqing county kept postponing its implementation. Ma Guihong went to Beijing on "important dates" for two years in a row. As Ma Guihong puts it "each time we went, our attitude seemed extreme but our words did not break the law and our actions stayed on the brink of illegality. After a while, the government could not bear this pressure and started implementing document no 7 in January 2012".

In Ma Guihong's opinion, women living with HIV's rights work now have an advantage because women in this group look relatively weaker than men and thus will encounter less direct violence. Therefore, if their work is maintained over a long period of time, they can achieve results.

The issues that Half the Sky faces are very similar to those of other organizations. Rights petitioning is their major form of advocacy. Firstly, this makes it hard for these organizations to register. Secondly, these organizations lack both the funding and capacity to carry out other projects (currently their main source of funding are small grants from the China Alliance of PLWHA). Another problem is the lack of expertise among younger staff. Even though these organizations look energetic, Ma Guihong has already become a grandmother and there is still no one else to lead the Half Sky development team.

As small and weak grassroots groups, former influential women HIV NGOs also have to face a lack of new capable personnel and the slow haemorrhaging of their current personnel.

When I interviewed the head and only full-time staff member of the China Women's Network Against AIDS, Yuan Wenli, she lamented: "Why doesn't [the China Women's Network Against AIDS] have a second staff member? There used to be another staff member here I really was satisfied with, but now she has a well-paid and steady job. I asked her to come back many times, but she didn't. I hope that more young people will volunteer [in this sector]. Most of the volunteers are women in their 30's and 40's, some even in their 50's and 60's. I've seen some women in their 20's as well, but they have work and they're taking [antiretroviral] medicine. They try to hide the fact that they are HIV-positive. This way they don't face discrimination, so they do their thing and work. No matter how you try, you just can't get them to come help out. This is a big problem." Not only is it a problem that 20-somethings are hard to bring in to this sector, but the number of 30- and 40-year-old volunteers is dwindling. The founder of the China Women Network Against AIDS, He Tiantian (pseudonym) is an example of someone who left this field and went back to mainstream society. In 2011, she resigned as the head of the China Women Network Against AIDS and returned to her work as a high school teacher. Because of her heavy workload, she gradually moved away from her work with the network. Shanghai has only one women's HIV group, Yiyimoli. The director, Ms. Wang (pseudonym), after doing several years of HIV work, returned to her job as a hospital doctor, a job that could provide her a decent living in a city such as Shanghai where financial pressure is high.

Female sex worker organizations

Within the community of Chinese NGOs, there are only about 10 organizations that provide services for Female Sex Workers (FSW). The issues they are concerned with are marginal, and the community they serve often lacks knowledge and ability. Moreover, the mere survival of these organizations is very difficult.
Because prostitution is illegal, FSW organizations originated from HIV/AIDS intervention services. In 2007, Xiao Ai (pseudonym), who had been living and working in a city in northern China, came into contact with some HIV/AIDS organizations, and in the following year, she established an organization called Female Sex Workers' Home. When I visited in January 2014, the FSW Home was renting a two-bedroom apartment on the outskirts of the city for office space, and was registered with Industry and Commerce and operating in name as an organization for the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

[4] (enan statistics confirm 59,380 people living with HIV. The proportion of students is growing see http://henan.sina.com.cn/finance/y/2013-12-02/139-41833.html. The increase of people living with HIV in Hebei province for 2013 is more than three times higher than the 2012 increase see http://news.ifeng.com/gundong/detail_2013_12/02/31715963_0.shtml.

As a vulnerable and socially marginalized group, sex workers as a community itself is internally divided. Many of the staff and volunteers at the FSW Home worked as sex workers, but mostly as "middle and high income earners," for example, working in karaoke bars, bath houses, etc. However, after its establishment, the FSW Home primarily worked to help those in the lower side of the income spectrum, such as those who work in hair salons or roadside stores. The difficulties that the latter group faces are comparatively greater. Not only are they more likely to not use condoms and be exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, but they are also more likely to be victims of anti-prostitution campaigns and " custody and education" (shourong jiaoyu 收容教育). In order to address these problems, the FSW Home has launched a series of programs to encourage the use of condoms and promote the self-defense capabilities of low-income sex workers.

Because organizations like the FSW Home have staffs primarily composed of women, things such as outreach efforts are more easily accomplished. However, this also creates a development bottleneck. Since it is rare to have experienced, established organizations in this sector, in recent years, a number of foundations have been providing financial support to the FSW Home to help it conduct research projects, for example relating to the use of condoms, female sex workers living conditions, or the "custody and education" system. The purpose of conducting these research projects is to raise the ability of grassroots organizations. However, the FSW Home currently only has three full-time staff members and about ten volunteers. None of them are able to write these reports, and they must ask for help from women's rights experts. They are usually very busy and additionally are not able to present their own findings. This has become a source of repeated headaches for Xiao Ai. She has long hoped to have college students join her organization, help research, complete reports, and contribute to advocacy. Furthermore, since there are not many women's organizations in her city, if Xiao Ai wants to contact other organizations, her only option is to go to Beijing. Over the summer, Xiao Ai made the trip to Beijing several times to attend activities at a feminist school held during weekends. However, due to time and high cost of travel of the weekly round trip, she quickly gave this up.

Similarly to the FSW Home, another organization based in Kunming called Pingxing Busuan developed from a focus of providing services specifically to a single social group. It was also established in 2007, initially providing HIV/AIDS intervention services to MSM groups. Around 2011, there was a break in funding. The original director left the organization to work for the Department of Disease Control, leaving the two other members of the organization to maintain the basic cost of operations, which they did with their own personal funds. One of these members, Gaizi, now holds the director position. When Gaizi was a graduate student, she was a volunteer at Pingxing. This girl from Shandong fell in love with the climate of Yunnan and decided to stay. After working for over a year with a colleague named Liu Yifu, in 2012 Pingxing once again began receiving funding from Oxfam. The work of the organization also grew considerably, not only continuing to serve the MSM population, but also expanding to work with female sex workers, and gay and lesbian university students.

"Because Pingxing is an organization built upon the interests and ideals of its staff, rather than one which developed from a specific community, it has difficulties in focusing on its core programs and establishing an organizational identity"

Because Pingxing is an organization built upon the interests and ideals of its staff, rather than one which developed from a specific community, it has difficulties in focusing on its core programs and establishing an organizational identity. Even though there are only four full-time staff workers, the scope of Pingxing's work is actually very broad. Every month they hold 20 outreach programs for sex workers, 12 for women and 8 for men. They also research the living conditions of sex workers and current systems for HIV/AIDS testing. They moreover frequently go to universities and colleges in Kunming to host small activities for the gay and lesbian community. Furthermore, on special anniversary days, such as the "Anti-Domestic Violence Day," Pingxing holds some street demonstrations. This is a lot of work, which makes establishing a concrete identity difficult. Although it does a lot of work for women (including female sex workers, lesbians and heterosexual women), Pingxing has little contact with women's organizations. The majority of the national

events Gaizi attends are organized by MSM organizations. When talking with other organizations about Pingxing, I found that people's immediate reaction is that Pingxing is a MSM organization. On the other hand, when they have lot of work and are unable to raise enough funding, they are unwilling to delineate their work as HIV/AIDS prevention. Because of this, the organization is unable to get government funding. Currently, besides Oxfam, Pingxing does not have any other funding channels.

In addition to this organization, some other activists also work to promote the welfare and interests of the FSW community. Ye Haiyan (叶海燕) for example, founded Hongchen Wang (红尘网) in 2006 and began speaking out for the FSW community. In May 2013, Ye Haiyan, in response to the "Headmaster Hotel Case" that occurred in Hainan, held a sign that read "Get a Room with Me," criticizing the sexual assault on girls and suggesting that school headmasters turn to sex workers for services and not to their pupils. Her behavior sparked an online public response of people imitating her message and advocating for the protection of young girls and made Ye Haiyan an internet celebrity. Later, Ye Haiyan returned to live in her hometown and continues to work to improve the rights of sex workers.

When I interviewed Ye Haiyan during the spring of 2014, she was living in the outskirts of Wuhan. At the time she was planning to turn her house into a library, a space that was temporarily being used by herself and other volunteers as an office. Currently, she is working on a project that is related to sex workers, mainly to create a new media platform called Red Umbrella (红雨伞). This platform is used to spread information translated from overseas by volunteers and share it on social media outlets such as Weixin and Weibo. She hopes to have more dialogue and communication with related departments in order to receive their support and understanding in order to continue her work.

Lesbian organizations

Unlike women living with HIV or female sex workers, lesbians (also known as "Lala") are marginalized because their sexual orientation is different from the mainstream. This community is spread over every level of society, extending through every industry and every occupation. However, those who choose to participate in the gay rights movement are often individuals who are relatively independent both in finances and thinking. Because of this, in contrast to the two types of organizations previously mentioned, the backbone of lesbian groups is often mostly "elites" — most have received a good education and have had extensive exposure to Western theories. The development path of lesbian groups and new women's groups have similarities. In 2007 they began to hold "la-la camps." In 2009 they began using performance art as a means of public advocacy. Within the field, they have an electronic publication similar to 'Women's Voice' called the 'Queer Lala Times' (酷拉时报), which has raised many topics of discussion. Furthermore, in the early 2000s, they had already proposed a law to legalize same-sex marriage.

Currently, within the lesbian community, Common Language and the Chinese La-la Alliance are rather mature national organizations. Common Language was established in 2005. At that time, within the gay rights movement, MSM organizations had absolute speaking rights. Moreover, homosexual rights had no possibility to enter the women's rights strategy at the time which consisted in "relying on the system, launching projects in communities". The lesbian community was scattered among several small groups, which would meet in bars and online. Lesbians would meet in these places to communicate with each other and launch some literary activities. The founder of Common Language, Xu Bin, connected these groups, gradually forming a network. In 2007, with the help of people from gay rights movements in Hong Kong and Taiwan, Common Language launched its first "La-la" volunteer training camp, which discovered and cultivated activists from the lesbian community, "incubated" small organizations from many different places, and set up a network. By 2008, because of the need for a specific organization managing the camps, lesbians from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas came together to establish the Chinese La-la Alliance, the Secretariat of which coordinates annual La-la Camps. Common Language, however, has changed the direction of its work. In addition to continuing its support of the development of small organizations, it mainly works now to educating the public and advocating policy changes. This includes, for example, conducting advocacy trainings, participating in campus lectures, and holding public advocacy and demonstrations on special international days.

In recent years, Common Language has promoted more practical law and policy research, and advocacy.

They have for example advocated for the Ministry of Health to remove the rule banning lesbians from donating blood in 2012, or against a policy of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) that prevents material related to gays or lesbians from appearing on screen in 2013. They have worked with women's organizations to advocate for anti-domestic violence law, and hope this law will not limit the definition of a "household" to that of a married, heterosexual couple, but rather more broadly includes same-sex partners therefore protecting lesbians.

In addition to the national organizations, there presently also are smaller local lesbian organizations that have some influence. The issues they focus on are broader, and they are in the initial process of establishing their own "brand." Since 2012, Xi'an's RELAX student organization has been working with local companies to include a "pluralist sexuality" area in Xi'an's Sex Exhibition, displaying LGBT culture to the public and becoming the first official, formal event of its kind to occur on the Mainland. Girl Love, by contrast, is an organization based in Shanghai, which brings a flavor of the international metropolis into its programs. In March of 2014, Girl Love published the first "LGBT Anti-Workplace Discrimination Report," analyzing the different degree of tolerance towards LGBT of different businesses operating in the same city. The organization Qiyuan Yisheng's (奇缘一生) most famous project provides an exchange platform and legal services for "formal marriage" groups[5]. He Xiaopei, a sexuality expert who has been based in Shenyang for a long time, filmed a documentary titled "lifelong relationship" [The documentary and the organization have the same name] with Xiao Xiong, the founder of Qiyuan Yisheng, and her friends. The documentary was selected as a competitor for films festival in Amsterdam, Berlin, and other places. At the International Film Awards in Berlin in August 2014, they received an Honorable Mention Award.

In addition, there are several active "feminist la-la" groups among current lesbian organizations. The core volunteers of these groups are usually lesbians with a very strong feminist awareness. Although they do not have a specific "brand," their activities often demonstrate a strong critical mind and activist principles, forming the backbone of lesbian demonstrations and advocacy. However, there are also some lesbian groups which have remained at the level of having exchanges between volunteers and holding literary activities. On each international day related to women and LGBT rights, Common Language and the La-La Alliance give out small grants to smaller groups who organize small activities linked to the day's theme. But once the activity is over, these small groups usually continue "exchanging feelings" and have difficulties developing proper projects for sustainable organizational development.

"Currently funding for lesbian organizations comes from a small number of foreign foundations, and the funds are concentrated in mature organizations in big cities"

The reasons behind this phenomenon are related to an overall lack of resources of the Chinese lesbian movement, a lack of core members capable of delivering long-term sustainable services as well as clear direction for development in the field. The most fundamental reason is financial. Currently funding for lesbian organizations comes from a small number of foreign foundations, and the funds are concentrated in mature organizations in big cities. The funds available to directly support the development of local small groups are very limited. Foundations who fund them through Common Language or the Chinese Lala Alliance do it only for small-scale activities on international days. The issue of qualified personnel is also related to this lack of funding. Currently, this field does not lack qualified members, but lesbian organizations have difficulties retaining them. Many of the core volunteers participate as students, but, after graduation, most either go to study abroad or find a well-paid full-time job. Therefore, lesbian organizations can only rely on volunteers to carry out their work.

Another problem of the current lesbian movement is that it has issues answering the following questions: Where is the social base for its development? Is it female college students or people who understand queer theory? Is it all lesbians? What are these people

[5] In order to avoid pressure from society and for other reasons, gay men and lesbian women sometimes marry each other.

particular needs? If it's the former, maybe they need to "come out of the closet," hold "gay pride" demonstrations, or further explore academic theory. But if the hope is to have all lesbians be the base for policy and legal advocacy, then what are the needs of this huge community? Lü Pin has in the past put forward the idea that the feminist movement has both 'strategic' and 'practical' needs but that it first should respond to women's practical needs in order to broaden its support base. The lesbian movement is no different. The present work of the aforementioned group Qiyuan Yisheng on formal marriage in Shenyang, is a practical need of many lesbians. Another practical need, which is more likely to attraction attention and get more support, is same-sex marriage. For many lesbians who can find a comfortable space in mainstream society, the need for "coming out of the closet," "pride," and "exploring how sexual behavior and sexual orientation diversify mainstream society" (ie, one viewpoint of queer theory) is not so strong. Therefore, how to respond to the needs of this broad lesbian community and base its related legal and policy advocacy efforts on those needs is the next question that lesbian organizations must now consider.

Women's labor organizations

It was noted previously that that there are three categories of social groups whose marginalized status is related to gender issues. These are sexually transmitted diseases, sex work, and sexual inclination. Women in the labor force, however, are also marginalized because of their class status. The "worker" has historically occupied an honorable and respected position in China's political discourse, but in the wake of the reform and opening up era and the beginning of marketization, workers were being pushed further and further towards the vulnerable edges of society, largely as a consequence of their relatively low income. This background is a factor explaining the development of women's labor organizations and the fact that there are women of educated and privileged backgrounds who are interested in offering their services and leadership in the field of women's labor advocacy.

Looking at the political space they occupy and the flow of their resources, some women's labor NGOs in China cannot be considered as marginalized. This is the case for the many vocational training centers affiliated to local women's federations across the country such as the Shanghai Zhabei District Women Employment Promotion Center. In the NGO sector, Rural Women Knowing All and its subsidiaries Women Workers' Home, Rural Women's School and, in Guangdong, Green Shoots Village Women's Development Foundation, also provide women workers with vocational training and education. They have also undertaken projects to increase awareness of the realities of women migrant worker's lives' through media exposure while advocating for greater government attention to the problems faced by women workers. While these projects are implemented smoothly, other women labor organizations working in factories in Southern China face hardships. In 2012 and 2013, women worker organizations in Shenzhen were forced to move repeatedly and faced difficulties to survive.

Aside from the organizations' manager elite background and resources, the differences in the way women labor organizations work is due to the specifics of female migrant work. The bulk of women labor organizations in the north is composed of domestic and service workers scattered in private homes or businesses. On breaks or vacation periods, these organizations enter domestic workers communities, finding it relatively easy to integrate their daily lives and provide community services such as entertainment performances and children and women's education programs. The work of women labor organizations in the south is more focused on the conditions of young women working in factories. They work to establish community service centers that offer help with both work related issues and personal troubles faced by migrant women workers. Moreover, the fact that these organizations are self-developed makes them more easily work on labor-capital relations, carry out rights protection activities to obtain compensation for workers victim of occupational injuries, and other more antagonist issues.

In the wake of developments in women's rights advocacy and rights issues, there have been significant changes in domestic worker organizations in the north as well as in female worker organizations in the south. In terms of support from foundations, the Women's Media Monitoring Network began a domestic workers awareness project in 2012, "the domestic workers voices ", collecting the stories and testimonies of domestic workers and sending them to media channels to be broadcasted to a large audience. They also co-organized a number of domestic workers groups such as the Beijing Rural Women Workers, the Jinan

Community Based Social Integration Center, (济南积成社区社会服务中心) the Xi'an Domestic Workers Union (西安家政工工会) into advocacy activities calling for setting rules for employers. In recent years, documentary filmmaker and founder of the "One Yuan Commune" Han Hongmei has started paying attention to domestic workers and collaborated with them to film documentaries in the hope of bringing together former scattered and taciturn domestic workers so that they can make their voices heard.

In the south, despite the depressing environment for labor organizations, female worker organizations have also been influenced, mostly because gender equality issues are less sensitive than other labor issues such as collective bargaining and rights defense. Therefore, in recent years, female worker organizations and women's rights organizations have collaborated to carry out advocacy projects to improve gender equality. A good example is the Hand in Hand Friends of Laborers Activity Room (手牵手工友活动室), who has, since 2011, carried out themed advocacy demonstrations on the Internaitonal Women's Day including, "Male Workers Wear High Heels (男工友穿高跟鞋)", "100 Unhappy Female Workers (女工的100个不爽) " , and "Our Vagina's Story". 2013 also saw the initiation of extensive sexual harassment investigation by the Guangzhou Panyu Sunflower Center, which shared information and compiled reports that attracted media and public attention to problems of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Still, according to female worker organizations in the south, support from Chinese foundations is greatly needed in order to widen the available space for development.

"according to female worker organizations in the south, support from Chinese foundations is greatly needed in order to widen the available space for development"

Gender Issues in Marginalized Women's Organizations

Among the four types of women's organizations mentioned earlier, the primary goals of service and rights advocacy is far from being realized; the number of mature groups is still small, many organizations lack resources and long-term personnel, and most of them still lack sufficient political space. In addition to these problems, there are differences in the understanding and treatment of issues concerning gender equality between female worker organizations and the other women's groups detailed in the previous two sections of this article. The agendas and gender equality theory of lesbian organizations, female worker organizations and women's organizations often overlap, but women's AIDS groups and women sex workers groups do not have a great degree of contact with women's rights groups, and in their work they do not often touch upon the topic of gender equality issues.

This is first of all related to differences in the development and member constituency between organizations in different fields. In China, the activities of women's groups originated in intellectual circles and reached a pitch in fervor around the 1995 UN World Women Forum, which inspired intellectuals and female university students to form women's rights groups. At the time, these groups tended to be made up of educated and financially privileged members of society. Women's labor organizations in China, in both the north and south, have always maintained close links with an intellectual elite contingent of women activists, therefore contemporary domestic and labor workers organizations are the types of marginalized groups organizations where women's rights organizations (regardless of which specific group category) are the most present.

Also founded by intellectuals and female university students, LGBT organizations and second generation women organizations share similar working methods and have often cooperated on some issues in recent years, bringing about the common derision that "all feminists are lesbians", and that all feminist organizational leadership is to be found among a small coterie of 'feminist lesbians'. As Common Language founder Xu Bin points out, the fact that in 2005, LGBT organizations began to conduct feminist training sessions lead largely by lesbian members has much to do with the assumption that LGBT activists are always linked with feminist groups. Although these training sessions began with LGBT groups, the ideas being disseminated are more inclined towards civil rights awareness and promoting social advancement. Therefore the training aiming at embed LGBT organizations in their community also

served as a platform for emerging women's rights groups to establish themselves.

Women's AIDS groups and women sex workers' groups explain their establishment mainly by their need to help communities they serve survive and face illness, disability and discrimination. Therefore, the issue of gender equality is secondary, and when these organizations carry out activities to promote gender equality, it is often under the influence of their donors. For example, UNAIDS and UNWOMEN hope that the China Women Network Against AIDS they helped establish can build "close relationships" with the Women's Federation and other women's rights organizations[6]. However while on the one hand traditional women's groups are unlikely to work on these issues because they are constrained by their identities and proximity with the system; on the other hand members of marginalized women organizations, especially AIDS and sex workers groups, do not naturally possess a gender equality consciousness. Furthermore, their level of education makes it impossible for them to master the relevant theories in a few training sessions. They usually have a tendency to discuss and cooperate with male organizations operating in their field. Maybe entering these communities is a work that second generation women's groups can and need to do in the future.

[6] Andrew Wells-Dang, 'The China Women's Network against AIDS: Between Donors and the Grassroots', *China Development Brief* (see above)

"Who should I contact for information about education programs for the *children of migrant workers?*"

"Who can we *partner* with for a *project* on reproductive health in Guangzhou?"

"Which environmental NGOs are working on **water issues** in Yunnan?"

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China Development Brief's

Chinese NGO Directory

CDB's Chinese NGO Directory includes detailed profiles of more than 250 Chinese grassroots NGOs (non-government organizations) and a report landscaping the Chinese non-profit sector. The Directory, which distinguishes independent, non-profit NGOs from government-run or affiliated institutions, was compiled through a thorough, year-long process in order to develop the most comprehensive and authoritative listing of the longest-running, active, and influential Chinese grassroots NGOs. Covering more than 28 provinces and municipalities, the Directory includes NGOs working in areas such as environmental protection, public health, migrants and labor, gender, child welfare, law and rights, disabilities, education and more.

The accompanying report, written by Dr. Shawn Shieh and Amanda Brown-Inz, includes analysis and mapping of the NGO landscape in China regarding geographic and sectoral trends, organizational capacity, and funding. Together, these resources will provide the international community with critical insight into the Chinese NGO community, enabling the development of greater collaboration and resource flow.

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