

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS:
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: CHINA

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Chen Mingxia, born in 1948, is a researcher at the Institute for Legal Research of the China Academy of Social Sciences. Active in promoting women's legal rights, Professor Chen was one of the leaders who initiated an anti-domestic violence project which eventually developed into the first large scale women's NGO in China, Stop Domestic Violence. Until recently, she headed this first national women's network. She has also played an important role in gender training programs for legal scholars nationwide.

Shi Tong: Professor Chen, thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview. First I would like to ask you to talk about your understanding of feminism: *nuquan zhuyi* or *nuxing zhuyi*.¹

Chen Mingxia: This is a very interesting topic. I personally do not think that *nuquan zhuyi* and *nuxing zhuyi* have any essential differences. I feel that as for me, I am more willing to use the term *nuquan zhuyi*. Possibly this is because I am involved with the law. I believe that *nuquan zhuyi* strives for rights for women. Moreover striving for rights for women does not imply that women must take away men's rights, but instead women should strive for rights that they ought to have. In the past women were stripped of their rights. So as feminists, women must get up, and strive for their own rights. Through the women's movement and through all kinds of activities women should fight for and obtain the rights that they should have; and sometimes the campaign has to be done from the top down. To put it in my simple and direct way, I feel that *nuquan zhuyi* is a kind of set of ideas or practices that aim to struggle for rights that women deserve. You may call it an ideology, a movement, or a set of theories. I believe that it is a process, consisting of theory and practice. This is what I feel that *nuquan zhuyi* is. However there are many different kinds of feminism. This is because of different national histories and conditions, different social contexts in which feminism emerges, and differences in terms of group and class. I do not want to spend too much time talking about these differences here; we are all familiar with this. People who are involved with feminism, both those that invoke *nuxing zhuyi* and *nuquan zhuyi*, are all very clear about this and they understand this sort of situation. So I do not want to talk too much about this issue. This is my view.

Shi Tong: Then do you consider yourself a feminist (*nuquan zhuyizhe*)?

Chen Mingxia: Yes! I think I am a feminist. I do not avoid this question.

Shi Tong: How have your background when you were growing up, the path of your life and your work experiences influenced your understanding of feminism? What were some of the earliest things that caused you to think about feminism?

Chen Mingxia: Well, I feel that if I am going to talk about this, there are a lot of things that had an impact on me. I was born into a very feudal family.² For instance in my

¹ There are two terms that can be translated as "feminism." *Nuxing zhuyi* is literally "female-ism" or "feminine-ism." This translation emerged in the early twentieth century but reemerged in the 1980s. Some believe that this term has less political but more biological connotations than *nuquan zhuyi*. *Nuquan zhuyi* is literally "woman- rights-ism" Since *quan* can mean both rights and power, the term can be interpreted as the "ism" of women's power and rights. In history, the Chinese Communist Party has defined *nuquan zhuyi* as bourgeois, because of the potential conflicts between gender struggles and class struggles. In contemporary China, this term is primarily used to refer to Western feminism and often conveys a negative image of a men-hating woman hungry for power. For this reason, many Chinese feminists avoid calling themselves *nuquan zhuyi zhe*. See Ping-chun Hsiung, Maria Jaschok, et.al, eds. *Chinese Women Organizing* (2001) and Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment* (1999) for detailed historical reviews.

grandfather and my great uncle's families, basically girls were not permitted to attend school. I have heard my older sisters and mother tell this story about the time when my older sisters went to school. Prior to liberation, before 1949, students had to wear school uniforms. Therefore, if my grandfather came to visit Beijing from our hometown, my mother would take out the Chinese dress that girls traditionally wore and wait in front of the main entrance to the house. So when my sisters returned home from school, they could change their clothes before entering the house. We were born into this kind of family. If we had guests come to visit, we followed a very strict etiquette. When guests came we were not allowed to be around. If we poked our head in – wham! We would be slapped and forced to go away. Although I was born and grew up in this kind of family, my mother was a person who always strove to excel. In her view, all girls should be educated and should be independent. In traditional society originally women did not have names, but my father chose a name for her. Therefore she was a woman who had her own name and she felt that women must be independent. She encouraged my oldest sister to study medicine, and this sister became a doctor. My second oldest sister became a teacher and my older sister had already started to get involved in underground activities for the Communist Party; she joined an organization associated with the Party. She liked the fine arts and she wanted to study fine arts. However at that time this was not permitted; actually studying fine arts was firmly opposed. But, in the end, she overcame the obstacles and studied art. Why do I bring up this example? Despite the fact that we were born into a feudal family, because our mother was very independent and strong, she also wanted us all to be independent and strong. Therefore in this sense, the idea that a woman should be independent and have self-awareness emerged in me when I was very young. But in terms of approaching feminism, or embracing feminism – either *nuquan zhuyi* or *nuxing zhuyi* – and being engaged in these kinds of activities, I think there are many factors that have led me to this. For instance, from the time when I was young I participated in a lot of social activities. I had the idea that women should be independent. Later I studied the law and I have been engaged in matters involving marriage and family law, which gave me opportunities to know many women and research the changes and some issues regarding the family. Therefore I feel that these also have had some relation to my acceptance of feminism.

Shi Tong: When did your feminist ideas first begin to emerge?

Chen Mingxia: I think this was probably a bit later. In the beginning, because I studied and practiced law, I thought that the law was fair and it was just. I felt that the law was the incarnation of justice. But, because I do marriage law – as I came to more deeply understand and research marriage law – I came to learn more about many disadvantaged groups. Especially after 1990, when our legal institute established a human rights research center, I was in charge of research activities regarding women's rights at the human rights research center. Since then I gradually embraced some feminist ideas, because I came to have a better understanding of women, and also a better understanding of the various aspects of society. Since 1990...well, since the end of the 80s, after the

² The official discourse and the Chinese public often use “feudal China” to refer to the pre-1949 era (before the People's Republic of China was established and a socialist system was created). People often use this word to describe a family where women are not respected or their rights are ignored.

implementation of the policy of reform and opening,³ many problems concerning women reappeared. At that time we conducted a lot of investigations, and the marriage law was revised and the Women's Law⁴ was drawn up. In this process, I started to pay more attention to the issues that women faced. In addition to this I worked on women's human rights. Therefore I started to study these kinds of issues.

Shi Tong: You mentioned a moment ago some topics that you are interested in, some activism that you have participated in. We know you have many substantial achievements. Would you say that your scholarly research and activities are feminist (in the category of *nuquan zhuyi* or *nuxing zhuyi*)?

Chen Mingxia: I think perhaps this was a process. In the very beginning, I looked at things mainly from the legal angle, and tried to protect women's rights, protect citizens' rights, and protect women's family rights. In the beginning I am afraid that this was the perspective that I looked at things. Or I looked at things from the point of view of human rights in general, which included women's rights. But I feel that there was a process from that stage to looking at things from the perspective of women's rights and women's human rights as well as doing gender analysis, which means using a feminist approach (that of *nuquan zhuyi*) to analyze problems and issues. There was a process.

I think that prior to 1995,⁵ I was unfamiliar with the concept of gender; I was not clear about it. After 1995 I came to know this word. What was this concept called gender? What was the gendered method of analysis? How does one have a gendered perspective? Only after the 1995 World Conference on Women that was convened in Huairou, Beijing did I start to know this kind of idea and this kind of view. But I probably did not truly embrace the concept of gender or this kind of approach until after I started working in our anti-domestic violence network – or the anti-domestic violence project. From the end of 1999 to 2000, when our project began to develop, I participated in our first gender training for the project. This project required that each person in charge of a part of the project had to have gender training. If we did not take this course we were not permitted to be in charge of the smaller projects within this anti-domestic violence project. So I was required to get this training. So only after this training did I begin to have a truly feminist perspective and feminist ideas.

³ Since the late 1970s, the Chinese government has adopted the policy of “reform and opening” to build more effective political and economic systems.

⁴ Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China: Adopted at the Third Session of the Fifth National People's Congress on September 10, 1980, and amended in accordance with Decision Regarding the Amendment (of Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China) passed at the 21st Session of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress on April 28, 2001. By Women's Law, Chen Mingxia is referring to the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women.

⁵ The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women and the NGO Forum on Women were held in Beijing in September 1995. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, representatives from 189 different countries agreed that inequalities between women and men have serious consequences for the well-being of all people. The conference declared a set of goals for progress of women in various areas including politics, health, and education.

Shi Tong: Do you think that in 1995 your scholarly research and activism had these two kinds of points of view, two different points of view?

Chen Mingxia: Yes, I think that there were certain differences. But I cannot say that they are two absolutely different approaches. I do not think anything is absolute. But I feel that only after the 1995 World Conference on Women did I begin to pay attention to using gender as a method of analysis. Only after becoming involved in our project did I truly use a gender approach to some issues. I think basically this is how this came about.

Shi Tong: What do you feel is the difference from using a gendered point of view to look at issues and the legalistic point of view that you held before?

Chen Mingxia: You are asking me what is the difference with the traditional legal point of view? I feel, well, of course there are differences. When I deal with the law, I can now use the method of gender analysis to analyze the law. That is why we established a Research Center for Gender and the Law. This gender and law research center was established because during the course of the many projects we had found that in the law there exist a lot of gender blind spots. The so-called concepts of “fairness” and “justice” actually apply to abstract humans. But, there are men and women. But the law takes man as the standard. The law made by men based on men’s standards governs the entire society. But the whole society is composed of men and women. I think that in the past I could not have had this kind of point of view. Yet, after this, I think that I had this kind of perspective. Our Center attempts to analyze some of the gender blind spots and flaws in the law from a gender perspective so that we can help to make our law better serve both men and women.

Shi Tong: How do you see the relationship between scholarly research and activism?

Chen Mingxia: I think that theoretical research and practice should be unified. But as for me, this is a change that did not occur until when I was about sixty years old. Prior to this I basically was engaged in theoretical research. Of course my theoretical research was very closely related to practice. Since I do substantive law, this is different from working on pure theory. I work on substantive law, like the Marriage Law and Women’s Law. The Marriage Law and the Women’s Law, for example, are all very closely related to practice. For instance from the beginning of the 1990s I have done research concerning the problems related to the implementation of the Women’s Law and how to make improvements. From the beginning I set out to protect women’s interests; I studied issues concerning women and women’s rights, or to say, our earlier approach was to say “we set out to protect women’s rights.” But I underwent a very big change when I accepted the concept of gender (I started using this after the 1995 World Conference on Women). In other words, I realized that it was not our research that would protect the rights and interests of women. But, instead we should use the gender perspective to analyze our laws and we should use this perspective to research social issues and research women’s issues. Therefore we came to realize that we should not adopt a condescending attitude. Instead we should stand with women, empower women, and study and solve women’s

issues together. I think this approach will make huge differences. It will enrich my own research. In other words, in the past we focused on theory and we also seemed to attempt to “make connections between theory and practice.” However, that kind of “making connections between theory and practice” is fundamentally different from the feminist approach that I am adopting now. Now I stand among women as a woman, and research and solve our problems in society. In this way we will gain freedom and greater consciousness of our rights and solve our problems. I feel that this should be very different from only using a legal perspective. Therefore now I think that those of us who do this kind of work have a high degree of gender sensitivity. For instance, throughout our anti-domestic violence project we all took a gender perspective as a fundamental starting point during the whole process. Because of this, things that we discussed and wrote were extremely different from the things written by people who did not have this point of view. Therefore, I think that our theoretical research and practice are closely connected. As women, based on the differences of women and certain situations that women face, we can better study issues concerning women. In other words, I feel this is something different.

Shi Tong: Could you cite an example, an actual example of the significance of engaging in activism?

Chen Mingxia: Give an example – take for instance, our anti-domestic violence project. From June 2000, we have worked on this project. This project encompasses fifteen small projects; one, for example, is an oral history, and another concerns legislation. I do not work on the oral history project. This is one of our projects that fall under the umbrella of the larger anti-domestic violence project. They interview women for this project. In the interview process the interviewer and the woman who is the victim of domestic violence reflect on her experience of violence together. In the meantime the conversation enables the interviewee to reclaim her rights. Through the process she not only will be able to recognize that being a victim of domestic violence is not her problem – in the past these women often thought that they were to blame. Moreover she will be able to stand up and oppose this kind of violence. In the end, some people, who were interview subjects, became volunteers for the anti-domestic violence program. Therefore I feel that this process tells us there is a very big difference between the two approaches: you stand in an observer’s standpoint and research these women or you stand with them together to research women’s issues. In this way we empower ourselves and we all raise our consciousness. This is our own process. I think this is an example.

Moreover, we also have held many trainings. For instance we have carried out trainings for victims and lessons for abusers. I think this process also involves introducing men to feminism or revealing to men how harmful domestic violence is. This allows him to recognize that actually he himself is also one kind of victim. What kind of victim is he? He lives in a kind of male-dominated society. This kind of masculinist culture and male control are harmful to him. They cause many problems such as the inequality between men and women, the notion that men are superior and women are inferior, and so on. After people see issues in this way, we can move towards a society of equality, of gender equality. That is the goal of our project.

I can talk about another example in our attempt to have some kind of intervention in the legislative process. I have participated in this work and I am one of the main participants. We came to realize that our laws must reflect the idea of gender equality. Take the female victim of domestic violence for instance. A woman who has been abused over an extended period of time takes matters into her own hands and kills her husband. How do you protect this kind of woman? How do you ensure that during her trial she has the rights that she should have and she receives a less severe sentence? Also for instance the application of theories like “oppressed woman syndrome” in our project will give us a gender perspective in our legislative process when we consider laws concerning evidence collecting, the definition of evidence, providing protection and stopping domestic violence. Thus we can propose innovative legislative ideas that have a gender perspective. We have already offered some suggestions on the anti-domestic violence legislation to the National People’s Congress.⁶ This draft was already submitted to the Tenth Session of the National People’s Congress Legislation Committee. This kind of process and this kind of work are accomplished because we have employed such notions and (feminist) ideas. Therefore we could organize the experts and accomplish these actions. I think this is a good example. But in the past...I think the time period before the 1990s, we simply upheld the notion of “fairness and justice” for the abstract man in the law.

Shi Tong: How does participating in these kinds of scholarly research and activism influence or affect you personally? In what ways have they changed you?

Chen Mingxia: Personal transformation... (She laughs.) I feel that of course I personally have undergone a very big change. First, I feel that I have changed from a person who originally did not have a gender perspective. Or you can say I used to consider defending women’s rights as a very simple process. Or you could say that I changed from merely sympathizing to – using a social worker’s term – I changed from “sympathizing” to having empathy. And then I changed from having empathy to a kind of true involvement. Instead of viewing these women as so-called subjects whom we must help I came to realize that we all must work together to solve problems that exist within the women’s movement. We should theorize this work and attempt to bring fundamental changes in terms of promoting women’s rights.

As for me, I feel this is a really great process. I think that this process has a lot of significance for me. In the past I was only a law person. But now I have been transformed into a new law person with a gender perspective and gender approach. Therefore I feel that this is very important for me. This is one aspect. Also, I changed into someone who is much more accommodating. Although I seem to be a person who talks fast and is easily agitated, I think that my work has made me more tolerant. Through my change to embrace feminism, I feel that I am now better able to collaborate with others. Moreover I especially advocate the idea that all women should unite. Because I think that people used to have the notion that “women” are a weak community. Of course women are definitely not weak. Historical reasons have resulted in their disadvantaged position. I do

⁶ The People’s Congress is the legislative body of the People’s Republic of China.

not intend to talk about this now. However it does seem that the issue of women's disadvantage, especially in terms of political participation, is very prominent in our country. But I think that even though we are at a disadvantage, it is not true that we do not have any strength. But what about these strengths? All women should unite. Therefore if you ask me what I have to say about the future, for example stopping domestic violence, I would call on all people to unite. All women and all those who oppose domestic violence should unite and together maintain our wonderful lives. So my big change was that I began to look at things in a much more open way. I think that I have become much more able to embrace different points of view. Some people say that feminism is very radical and is intolerant, and so on. However I believe in the opposite. It was after I embraced a gender perspective that I became more able to accommodate differences and better understand the multiplicity of views, collaborating with more people and with those who hold different points of view. I think this is an important change in me.

Also another change that I underwent was in my way of thinking. I believe that women should come together better. Women's NGOs also should unite and work with everyone in society, including men, in order to achieve women's liberation, or, in order to build a more civilized and progressive society – in the current rhetoric of the communist party and popular way of putting it, to build a “more harmonious society.”

Shi Tong: What types of changes have your scholarly research and activism brought to the organizations that you were involved in, for example, your work unit⁷ or some projects that you have worked on, like the anti-domestic violence project you discussed earlier? Can you speak a bit more concretely about some of the changes?

Chen Mingxia: Our anti-domestic violence project began in June 2000. I could be considered one of the initiators of this project, but I was not the earliest organizer. I think that the initiator of this project was a group, which was composed of several people. Our initial participants were many people from different organizations. This brought together experts and scholars from the fields of philosophy, law, sociology, social work, medicine, journalism, psychology and so on. The people in charge of each sub-project were either scholars above an associate professor's rank or women's activists. We gathered together to do the work of opposing domestic violence, which was carried out in 15 sub-projects. This project currently has already entered its second stage. I was a coordinator in the first stage. The so-called “coordinator” is the person who coordinates all of the various people's efforts. You could say that as a coordinator I devoted a lot of effort and energy to the project. But I think that working this hard was really worth it because while doing this work I learned many things. I learned about all kinds of things and many issues related to fighting domestic violence. In addition I learned how to be a leader, learned how to be a better leader of an NGO. In English you call this person a “leader.” Moreover I learned how to better coordinate and to better see the whole picture and think about each aspect of what needed to be done, how to encourage collaboration among women's non governmental organizations, and also how to encourage collaboration and improve interactions between NGOs and the government. I think my work enriched my life and I

⁷ “Work unit” is the literal translation of the Chinese word for “workplace.”

studied many things. Therefore I think that when I have the opportunity for some down time, I certainly want to produce some very good research on women's NGOs, and research on how women's or even how all kinds of NGOs are contributing to the construction of a democratic society, a civil society. In addition I would like to research how NGOs interact with society and the government, how they promote a progressive, civilized, and democratic society governed by the law. Because I am involved with the law, I want to research this. It is too bad that currently I do not have time to do this, but I think that I should study this.

This is for my personal development. As for our organization, I think that due to the development of our project, we had a very big impact on combating domestic violence in society. We have 15 sub-projects; and when these projects were being established, they were very sensitive. We had to overcome many obstacles in order to establish these projects. I am not going to discuss this process now since we do not have enough time. After we established these projects, our fifteen sub-projects all had a very tremendous influence on society. For instance, later we worked together with the Women's Federation⁸ and on China Central television⁹ Channel Six – a channel that has a very high viewer rate – we aired an anti-domestic violence program. On this channel, we had a “project ambassador” in these short programs that aimed to promote an anti-domestic violence position in order to maintain our beautiful lives. This aired for a month – think about what a tremendous influence this had on society!

Shi Tong: On Channel Six?

Chen: Yes, on Channel Six. Also for example we have made anti-domestic violence street signs, which also has a very tremendous influence on society. If you want me to talk about the benefits of this project, I have to say that it has been very useful for society. This could be a way of encouraging people to change their ideas since it will help them realize the harmful ramifications of domestic violence and that domestic violence is a social malady that should be eradicated. In this sense the project had a great impact on society. Therefore I feel that these projects were all very good, but I do not want to talk about what I, as an individual, have done, because as I said earlier, the founders of this project were a collective and there were several NGOs participating as well. From the very beginning we all felt that it was very important to emphasize coalitions between various NGOs. Many NGOs have joined in our network. We currently have already developed our network members in twenty-four provinces, cities and autonomous regions¹⁰ throughout the country. Our network members include the Women's Federation, members of the Association of Legal Studies,¹¹ research institutions, and

⁸ The All China Women's Federation is the largest women's organization in China. Its network reaches down to the basic local administrative level and has played an important role in promoting women's rights and gender equality. Scholars and activists disagree on whether the ACWF is a non-governmental organization, because it has strong official ties and status.

⁹ The China Central Television is a TV station run by the government. Its programs claim a large viewer population in China.

¹⁰ There are several “autonomous regions” in China, where ethnic minorities live.

¹¹ The Association of Legal Studies is a national organization in China. Its members consist of legal scholars and research institutions.

even members from local communities, such as the local police station, public security bureau, and the Bureau of Civil Affairs.¹² Therefore such a wide network system certainly has a very good influence on many levels of society. This group of people has very strong ties; we are bound together. I am only a coordinator, but as a coordinator I work with everyone in order to complete this project in the best possible way. I think the reason why we could be so devoted is that all of these people who work on this project have embraced feminism (*nuquan zhuyi* or *nuxing zhuyi*).¹³ We are all willing to make contributions and sacrifices for this enterprise. This is a kind of public enterprise. Sometimes we use the time in the evening from 9:00 to 11:00 to hold a meeting or even sometimes find time on Saturdays or Sundays. Yet no one complains. So I think that in this process I have benefited greatly. This group of people is all really great; working with them makes me very happy.

Shi Tong: You are very humble; you don't want to talk about your own contributions. But I would still like you to evaluate your work in this anti-domestic violence project.

Chen Mingxia: The work... Well... I was a coordinator and now I am the council president. Currently, during the second stage of the project, I am the council president. This, I should say, is a reform. This reform has a price – in China under this kind of environment, or you could say in an environment where for a long time dictatorship prevailed, if we want to establish a council system our work might temporarily be negatively impacted. We had some costs associated with this, but I feel that these costs have been worth it. This new system allows us to experiment with a kind of democratic management style, a kind of transparent NGO management style. I think this is really very important. If you ask me about my contributions or what I have done, let me just say that I have set an example for others. First I am willing to make the necessary sacrifices, because I love this kind of work. I believe that women must make certain sacrifices in order to achieve women's liberation, or for women to achieve independence and development as well as equal rights. As women we must make certain contributions and love this kind of work. I deeply love this kind of work and I am willing to make contributions for this enterprise. I have done some work and I am willing to work for this. This spirit probably has to some degree influenced some people. In addition I think I am accommodating. When we are all together, it does not matter who I work with, I am able to get along with them and work with them. I think that society is composed of many different kinds of people. This is something that I have come to know through my studies. Originally I was not so accommodating. During this process of over ten years, I realized that I have many shortcomings and problems. But what is important is that I want to keep learning. Therefore I feel that through the process of doing this project or the process of studying feminism (*nuquan zhuyi*) I have not stopped learning new things. I am willing to study very hard and learn from the people in my project, from each person

¹² The Bureau of Civil Affairs oversees administrative management on the community level, grassroots organizations, relief and welfare programs, services to the military, and so on.

¹³ Chen Mingxia keeps mentioning these two terms together to refer to “feminism,” because among Chinese feminists there is no consensus on the translation of this term. See footnote 1 for a detailed explanation.

responsible for a sub- project, from people of other countries, and from everyone that I work with. I think I can learn many valuable things from them. Thus if you ask me what sort of contributions that I have had, perhaps in these aspects I have been of some use. In addition, I am able to draw everyone together. Perhaps this is because of my age. I am not the oldest among the participants in this project but I am rather old compared to many of the others. Therefore possibly colleagues are willing to work with me and do these things together. If you want to speak of how I have contributed to this project, then I should say that I have been useful in bringing everyone together.

Shi Tong: You mentioned a moment ago that your anti-domestic violence organization underwent a reform; your individual role also went through a transformation, from a general coordinator to later becoming the council president. The organizational structure has also undergone a tremendous change, from the system of “project management committee” to the council system. Can you talk a bit about the significance of such transformation?

Chen Mingxia: I really think this is very significant. For this NGO, the new system separates the management and the decision-making bodies. In this way, I feel that the management level can better carry out its work. They can better implement some of the council’s decisions and goals. This separation makes supervision easier and makes transparency possible. Our project has from the very beginning been upholding several principles: transparency, democracy, and equality. We want to have these principles. So if we separate the two, we could be more transparent, and thus let everyone better understand this process. Of course this kind of reform has its costs; by this I mean it takes a period of time to make adjustments. Originally every management committee member concurrently managed a sub-project. We would hold discussions, make decisions and then execute the plan. But now the organization operates in a different way. Now there is a management level; sometimes it takes time to get things done, because the council cannot directly make decisions on certain matters. The council makes decisions and the management carries them out. The management level has undergone its own transformation in terms of personnel. Sometimes the new people are not necessarily very familiar with the process and this can possibly cause delays. I think this whole thing is a process. If we can do a good job of reforming the mechanisms and make good selections for all of the personnel, I think this reform will have great significance. I think this is especially helpful for transparency and is helpful to the democratic decision making process. I think it will benefit us. But perhaps acting completely according to the methods that foreigners use is not necessarily appropriate for the Chinese situation. Therefore I think that we are in the process of exploring. We are exploring and debating.

Shi Tong: What sort of role did you play in the transformations that took place in the anti-domestic violence project?

Chen Mingxia: I am also one of the advocates in favor of these changes. This was what our management committee collectively decided. We all thought that we should manage this NGO in such a way that we would have a democratic style. We believe that our network should not only work to combat domestic violence; at the same time we also

want to show how to operate a women's NGO in China. We had discovered that within a women's non-governmental organization some problems also existed. Thus we thought we should explore how women's NGOs and all NGOs in China work to help build a democratic civil society. In a democratic civil society grassroots NGOs should play a major role. Therefore we also wanted to explore what this kind of grassroots organization should be like. So we thought we should take this step. Thus our management committee collectively decided that we must make a transition. We wanted to change the original system in which the management committee managed the projects as well as got involved in decision-making and execution, and was both in charge of funds and operation. We wanted to change this whole process into a council system. The council members should all be volunteers, not in control of any funds but have the power of oversight. We hoped this new system would enable the NGO to function better. This was decided collectively. If you ask about my contributions, then I would say that I helped with the coordination and operation during the transformation. Of course we also learned some lessons, for example how to select people. In the beginning we still were not clear about how to do this, so we did not do too much recruiting work. Thus we recruited people who were introduced by those we knew. Doing it this way might not bring the most efficient or the best candidates for certain positions. But after a little while, we now already have a formalized recruiting body, which consists of people from all levels in the network. Council members, sub-project leader, and network members of specific projects join a recruitment team to recruit people for the positions of director, director assistant, and assistant director. Currently this system has already been built up rather well, and it operates quite smoothly. They have started to operate with few problems. So I think this was a cost that needed to be undertaken if we wanted to explore this kind of non governmental organization, a democratic or in other words, a feminist organization or a very democratic transparent non governmental organization, we must pay a price. It may take half a year, a year or even two years, but I think it will be worth it because it is good for the future development of the organization. Therefore we think that this process is necessary. Now we can say that the procedures for the anti domestic violence network have already become standardized. From now on, the network, president, and the council will continue to change. The president will change and the council members will continually be supplemented with new people when the older members leave their positions. Thus, there will be a continuous renewal. This should be a very big advantage to the development of this organization. At present, the anti domestic violence network has regularized its operations.

Shi Tong: As an individual, and as a person in charge of this organization what sorts of difficulties did you face during this process? In what ways were you deeply affected?

Chen Mingxia: Difficulties and how was I affected? I think that as a non-governmental organization, an organization like ours... What this kind of non-governmental organization does cannot be narrowly defined. Instead we are an organization that deals with a comprehensive body of work such as combating domestic violence. Moreover, all of us are people who all have some other work; basically everyone has their own careers. Thus, we are all extremely busy. So I feel that is rather difficult to bring everyone

together to work. This actually is quite difficult. Possibly because I am a bit older, everybody takes good care of me. Now as soon as I call them to convene, they come together. But if it was not like this, I think that it would still be rather difficult because they all have their own matters that they have to deal with. China has not formed a very big middle class. Most of us are still in the position where “If I did not have this job then I would have no way to sustain myself.” So these people must first complete their own official duties at work, before they can do work for the non governmental organization. I feel this is very difficult. How can you mobilize volunteers so that they become actively engaged in NGO activities? I feel that this is a rather prominent difficulty in our work. Moreover, I think that women’s NGOs – other NGOs might be the same – work on a very specific issue, but ours unites many non governmental organizations to do the special work of combating domestic violence. In this situation, because each organization has its own aspect of work, the question of how we can get united and build good connections with each other in order to operate better, poses certain difficulties. Although we have had some achievements, I still feel that we have not done enough. So in the future, we need to strengthen this aspect. As for me personally – actually it is not only me; other people perhaps also feel this way. Everybody is different; people are different. They are interested in different things and have different ideas. To unite people with different ideas – to do this kind of work requires a great deal of effort, and I feel that this is difficult. But we still get things done and you could say that we have some successes. But, nevertheless, this is still a rather large problem. People have to deal with conflicts. This can occur at any time. So we still need to do some work in this aspect.

Shi Tong: How do you think that you can overcome these difficulties, especially at the organizational level?

Chen Mingxia: I think at such times, since everybody embraces gender and a gendered perspective, we should be able to analyze these issues. Think about it. Society is diverse and people’s ways of thinking are also very diverse. Thus we should attempt to seek common ground while maintaining differences. We should look at the good qualities of others. We should combine our strength on the basis of our commonalities while keeping our differences; we should develop the good things. We should gather together to do things. In any case I basically persist in advocating this attitude and urge everybody to try to seek common ground while maintaining his or her differences. We all should work harder to find the good qualities in others. Moreover I think that at the leadership level, those people who are in charge of each sub-project should be tolerant. We found that currently within our project there are also some leaders who disagree with each other. So we had to tell everybody to seek common ground while maintaining their differences and to also look for the good qualities in others. I think that this should always be the direction that we try to pursue. That is to say that I feel that feminists (*nuquan zhuyizhe* and *nuxing zhuyizhe*), as people who struggle for the rights and interests of women, should all be especially magnanimous. I think it should be like this. Only in this way can we then all come together.

Shi Tong: “Seeking common ground while maintaining differences” is a principle that you and the network members hold, right?

Chen Mingxia: I think so. Moreover I think that we should all be tolerant. Tolerance is very important. Since everybody is different, I think everybody should be tolerant. We should see the good qualities in each other. In this way we will all be able to get along better.

Shi Tong: What type of relation does this network have with other women's organizations?

Chen Mingxia: Other organizations – our network has many organizations within it. What are you referring to?

Shi Tong: Outside of the network, for instance, are groups like the Women's Federation.

Chen Mingxia: In terms of organizations outside of our network, I think that in our relationship with the Women's Federation, we try to maintain independence while seeking collaboration. I think... currently overseas there are many different views. They think that the Women's Federation is both a governmental institution and non-government organization.¹⁴ But I think that it does not matter if the Women's Federation is governmental or non-governmental. The All China Women's Federation from top to bottom is composed of six levels of networks. These six levels of networks could greatly help our anti-domestic violence project. Moreover, the Women's Federation is also a women's organization. Thus we should cooperate with the people there. Therefore in our network, the leader of the All China Women's Federation's rights and interest department is a special consultant. Various levels of the Women's Federation are members of our network. We have made it very clear to the All-China Women's Federation that we are not out to compete with the Women's Federation for work; we want to help the Women's Federation with their work. I made this point very clear to the officials of the Women's Federation. Of course this possibly is because I am senior in my age so it is somewhat easier for me to say such things. I said to them that we wanted to help them and we all should do women's work together. But we have one point that we are very clear about. We may ask them to be a consultant or ask them for other support, but we still must maintain our principle of independence. In other words, we insist upon our ideas and our principle of independence. Based on our ideas--feminism (*nuquan zhuyi*) or the idea of gender mainstreaming—together we can collaborate in many aspects. Therefore we have really good relations with the local Women's Federations. Basically the Women's Federation is willing to work on our project and also willing to help us with our work. In some places our network's operating center is located in the Women's Federation. So we work together. The Women's Federation is very willing to work for women. What we do is to spread the idea that it is not that we are to protect or liberate women; instead all women liberate ourselves together. At the same time that we are helping these women, we also empower ourselves. The Women's Federation thinks that this is a very good

¹⁴ Chen Mingxia is mainly talking about the All China Women's Federation. ACWF calls itself an NGO; but because of its close connection with the central government, especially in terms of administration, personnel and funding, many argue that ACWF is not an NGO.

thought. Take for instance the Hebei Province¹⁵ Women's Federation. We feel that we can work really well with the Hebei Province Women's Federation; we can discuss our work with Wu Meirong.¹⁶ They have done a very good job. Qianxi County of Hebei province and some others are areas where I have carried out projects. Yu Guixin¹⁷ has transformed from a person without gender perspective to a member of the gender working group and takes the initiative to carry out gender trainings there. This is a very good example to illustrate my point about the relationship between the Women's Federation and us. Not only the Women's Federation, but also all NGOs are all our allies if they are willing to do work to combat domestic violence. Our allies can be found everywhere. Because of this we are better able to do our work.

Also for instance we have to consider how to work together with the community and the government. In Hunan Province's Furong District, our network member, the district magistrate, took the initiative to propose the establishment of a "zero domestic violence community." We told him that establishing a so-called zero domestic violence community might not be very accurate. I said that he should explain the "zero" part of the term of "zero domestic violence community." They embraced our suggestion, because we carried out trainings. In the end, they explained that the meaning of "zero" is that "zero non-intervention." That is to say if we have to intervene in all instances of domestic abuse. This result was very good and our ideas were reflected in the final outcome. Their government accepted the ideas and conducted the work very well. Therefore we have friendly cooperative relations with others but continue to uphold our ideas and our principle of independence. Therefore I think that with the government we have a kind of interactive relationship; we have coalitions with other NGOs. I think that in this way we are better able to spread the idea of gender and feminism (*nuquan zhuyi*).

Shi Tong: Do you think there are conflicts?

Chen Mingxia: Conflicts... I think these are unavoidable. We have a lot. For instance, I will tell you about a very small example. For instance, in some of the communities, which are our experimental sites, when a place to lodge complaints is located inside a judicial office¹⁸ or is located in the local government buildings, then who is the main person in charge of this place? Generally speaking its leading official should be the Women's Federation or women's representatives who are in charge of women's work. But oftentimes they will call on a male official from the local government. In this sort of situation we need to point out that this is a conflict. At such moments we must bring up the problem. This is an instance of conflict. We have to clearly express our point of view. If we are not able to have a woman to be the director of this place, then at the very least the assistant director has to be a woman. Moreover this person should be the deputy director. You cannot only ask her to take the responsibility; you must give her a

¹⁵ Hebei province is in northern China.

¹⁶ Wu Meirong is the assistant director of the Department of Women's Rights and Interests at the Hebei Women's Federation.

¹⁷ Yu Guixin is the president of the Qianxi County Women's Federation.

¹⁸ Judicial offices are an institution of the lowest level in the Chinese judicial system. There are currently over 40,000 judicial offices in local communities in China. Their main functions are to solve legal disputes, provide legal services, educate citizens about laws, and so on.

corresponding powerful position. This is our effort to strive for power, because people are an important factor in putting ideas into practice. Take for example women's participation in politics. Inside the Politburo¹⁹ everyone is male. Can their decision-making truly incorporate women's perspectives? Obviously this is not possible. Thus our effort to obtain positions for women is really a matter of principle.

Therefore these conflicts are likely to happen. Also for instance in training, we have to think about the underlying principles of these trainings. We call our style the "participatory style." There are many different kinds of participatory styles. I am not saying that you cannot hold classes or large lectures. But when we think about how to balance large lecture and participatory, face-to-face training, we must represent our fundamental principles. We can sometimes stretch the rules in order to solve problems, but our principles must be upheld. Therefore conflicts also exist in such instances. Conflicts also could happen when we try to decide on the approaches of our work or the time of training—because time determines the content of our trainings. Although conflicts do not always appear, at the time of disagreement we need to have a good discussion.

Shi Tong: How do you feel about the outcomes of these kinds of negotiation and struggle?

Chen Mingxia: I think there has to be a process. Sometimes it is good; sometimes it is done well; in some areas it is really good. For instance in our community, the urban communities, we are doing very well. Perhaps sometimes the result is not ideal, but I think that this takes a process. Since in China we are accustomed to the top-down approach, this kind of process is inevitable. Our project has only been in operation for several years. Therefore I think that there still needs to be a process. We can understand this process is necessary but it cannot always be like this. We must persist in our views.

Shi Tong: You work at the Institute of Law at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. A Center for the Studies of Gender and Law has been established there. What sort of role did you have in this organization?

Chen Mingxia: Right, we established the Center for the Studies of Gender and Law. The Chinese title does not use *shehui xingbie*;²⁰ we use *xingbie*²¹ in our name to be brief. In fact it should be the Center for the Studies of Gender and Law. In terms of how our center was established, I should say that the majority of the people who work at the center are members of our anti-domestic violence network. To tell you the truth, the initial establishment of this center was really because of the anti-domestic violence project. During the process of developing the anti-domestic violence project, we found that many aspects of our work involved legal matters. As soon as legal problems are concerned, it is very difficult to move forward with our anti-domestic violence agenda.

¹⁹ Chen Mingxia is referring to the Politburo of the Communist Party of China. It consists of 19-25 people. Collectively they oversee the Communist Party and thus the most important political decision-makers.

²⁰ Chinese translation of "gender."

²¹ In Chinese, *xingbie* can refer to "gender" or "sex."

Take for instance the issue of “using violence to resist violence.” Many women who have used violence to resist violence receive an extremely heavy punishment – the death penalty or a postponed death sentence. Some simply have been executed and some have been sentenced to life imprisonment, etc. The sentences are very severe. According to the existing criminal law, this is a punishment that is deserved; the woman killed her husband. The woman, for instance, who had been abused, is unable to collect evidence. Domestic violence occurs in the home; it is hidden from public view. So how do you provide evidence? These are all very difficult questions. How do you punish the abuser? How do you stop domestic violence? Our country does not even issue protection orders. Therefore in the process of combating domestic violence we discovered things that were lacking in this aspect of the law. First, there was no special law that dealt with this. Second, the existing law could not protect women who were victims of domestic violence. The existing law does not address the so-called crimes that are a result of the victims’ resistance of domestic violence. So in this kind of situation, we ask why it is like this. It is because our laws do not have a gender perspective; they lack a gender point of view. There is gender-blindness. Therefore we deeply felt that it was extremely important to have a gender perspective in the law. When you look at the bigger picture, you realize that it is not only an issue of domestic violence. The entire civil law, the criminal law, economic laws and regulations, and the societal laws, and so on all lack gender perspective. This made us to think about studying the relationship between gender and law. Embodied in all of these problems is one issue – the lack of a gender perspective, or gender blindness. We thought that it was necessary to research these kinds of questions and to examine our laws. We have also found that in the legal domain, currently there are many female students who are studying law, and we also have many women working in the legal domain. There are quite a number of female attorneys and female legal researchers at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. But women’s positions are very low. There are only a miniscule amount of female judges and among the leading lawyers there are very few women. A lot of female law students are unable to find suitable work. Exactly what is underlying this kind of situation? Therefore at this time, we contemplated establishing such a center. This was not my personal invention. It was a group of people, who now constitute the center, and created it together. Of course at first it was the women legal scholars; we got together and thought about these issues. Then fortunately our president of the Institute of Law strongly supported this endeavor. Our president of the Institute of Law was a man but he very was extremely willing to support us to establish this center to research the relationship between gender and the law. This is how we established the Center for the Studies of Gender and the Law. The Center was established in September of 2002. In the past two or three years – a short period of time – I feel we have already done some very significant work. We have already conducted a lot of lectures on gender and the law and have held a training class. Fifteen universities from all over the country have held their first introduction class in feminist legal studies. We also want to further the process of examining the law. The work that we are currently doing has already received quite some attention from society and legal circles.

Shi Tong: Could you talk a bit about how you see the feminist (*nuquan zhuyi*) movement on the Chinese mainland?

Chen Mingxia: How I see feminism on the mainland? Actually, to tell you the truth, since we work with the law, originally we did not pay much attention to feminism (whether you call it *nuquan zhuyi* or *nuxing zhuyi*). Like I said a moment ago, it was only in the 1990s that I started to slowly pay attention to this. It was not until after the 1995 World Conference on Women that we became more involved. But it was when we started to work on the project, the anti-domestic violence project, that we came to truly learn about it and understand it. Our group, this group of people in the legal field, did not have a clear understanding of the concept of gender. But I think that feminism in China, *nuxing zhuyi* or *nuquan zhuyi* ... What shall I say? Are you talking about the influence it has had on China?

Shi Tong: I mean on the Chinese mainland-- for instance the feminist impact of the anti-domestic violence network?

Chen Mingxia: Do you mean mainly our work?

Shi Tong: Like your activism and your scholarly research-- for instance the anti-domestic violence network.

Chen Mingxia: I do not think that I agree with your way of asking questions about what influence I personally have on feminism on the mainland. I do not like this question.

Shi Tong: No, that is not what I mean. I am asking about the organization that you are working in.

Chen: Oh, our organization.

Shi Tong: Yes, your organization.

Chen Mingxia: If our organization has any influence on feminism (*nuquan zhuyi*), let me use the case of our anti-domestic violence network to talk about it. I think that this network has been useful in promoting the development of the Chinese feminist (*nuquan*) movement in both theory and practice. Our network not only does some actual interventions but we have also done anti-domestic violence research, an investigation of attitudes of citizens and judicial personnel of the situation of domestic violence in China. Based on this survey we produced some scholarship. In addition, during the process of our intervention, our real-world intervention, we have theorized the method of collaboration among multiple institutions – our proposal of the anti-domestic violence legislation fully reflects this. The fact that the results of our work have appeared in this draft²² should be considered as an increase in its impact. At the same time we were able to bring in a feminist point of view, and gender ideas and method of analysis in our proposal. We also brought forth a feminist interpretation of legislation. Therefore you could say that this kind of theoretical achievement in legislation should have definitely been a contribution to both feminist theory and practice. I think that the anti-domestic

²² Chen Mingxia is referring to the draft of the legislation against domestic violence in China.

violence project and network have made a contribution. It facilitated the development and impact of the feminist movement in China in terms of targeting violence against women, especially anti-domestic violence.

As for our research on gender and the law, I think that no one in China had done it before. When we started this work and gave our first lecture, what sort of challenges did we face? They were the challenges from male legal experts. They would say such things like: What? You want to take account of gender in the law? This is ridiculous! What you are trying to do is irrational and has no rational analytical basis. They even brought up questions like these. I am not exaggerating our accomplishment. We were the first to do this kind of thing in China – the first to introduce gender into the law. In China, feminism – *nuquan zhuyi* or in the popular term, *nuxing zhuyi* – had already entered the disciplines of history, philosophy, and literary criticism. But no one had addressed the issue of gender in the law. But our Center for the Studies of Gender and the Law has already introduced this concept into the law. Moreover in the very short period of two or three years, we have already offered numerous lectures on gender and the law. We published a book that is called *The Studies of Gender and Law Forum*. Our forum has already trained very many people and has influenced many people. Moreover currently there are teachers from fifteen universities who are exploring these issues with us. Therefore even though we cannot immediately establish this discipline, the discipline of feminist law – we do not call it feminist (*nuxing zhuyi*) law; we call it “gender and scientific studies of the law” – I believe that one day we will be able to do this. This would have tremendous significance, because a very important point of the protection of women’s human rights, or you can say protecting men’s and women’s human rights, is the incorporation of such ideas in the law. The law is a very important tool. If the law does not ensure gender equality but remains only a law for men, it cannot possibly bring about the equality of men and women. And the ability to safeguard human rights, including truly safeguarding women’s human rights and men’s human rights, would not possibly be realized through such a law. The law is drawn up by people and is established in order to protect people’s human rights. Therefore the law should reflect the demands for rights of both men and women. So we should bring gender consciousness into the law so that it enters the mainstream. Thus I really feel that the study of gender and the law is extremely important for China.

Shi Tong: How do you see the future of the Chinese feminist movement on mainland China?

Chen Mingxia: The future? I think... I prefer using the term “gender equality” than saying “feminist movement.” I think China is a country where the doctrine of “men are superior and women are inferior” has prevailed for five thousand years. Feminism in the west has been demonized. Actually there are many different schools of thought and many developments in feminism. I think that one of the best aspects of feminism is that feminism dares to criticize itself. Feminism has grown through the process of self-criticism. The development of feminism is characterized by diversity. I think that this is precisely one of the reasons it is great. Therefore I appreciate feminism very much. However, how do you bring feminism from the West and develop it in China? I hope...it

does not matter if you call it *nuquan zhuyi* or *nuxing zhuyi*. No matter what you call it, I hope we can all unite, that everyone can have the same goal, and that peoples' points of view can be different. But we must work hard in order to make contributions to gender equality in China. We should adopt various angles and use different methods of analysis in our efforts to realize gender equality in China, working within the Chinese context and fully taking advantage of the unique conditions in China. China often is ruled in a top-down manner. Therefore I hope feminists (*nuxing zhuyizhe*) could creatively take advantage of the realities in China, integrating the top-down women's liberation framework and the bottom-up women's movement. In this way the work for gender equality will develop better. Thus we will be able to better protect the rights that Chinese women ought to obtain, realize the true equality with men, and at the same time create our happy life together, with men and women equally working together. This is my wish for the future.

Shi Tong: Finally I want to ask you, in what ways have international feminisms influenced you as an individual and also your organization?

Chen Mingxia: I think that the influence has been tremendous. If you ask where our ideas initially came from, it is probably from overseas. Some feminists might claim that they have created it. But I still think that these people were influenced by outside ideas in the beginning. Of course there were also some ideas from within our country, since feminism (*nuxing zhuyi*) in China had existed since a very early time. Today we are not here to discuss history, so I will not talk about it. However, if we look at history, women in the May Fourth Movement²³ and even the women pioneers a thousand years before the May Fourth Movement had sought to defend their own rights and have their own awakenings through their own efforts – for example, my mother influenced me by instilling in me the spirit of self-strengthening and independence. I think in terms of pursuing something like modern democracy, western feminism has had the biggest influence on us. It does not matter which school of thought; all have some good points that we can take from them. Therefore when we are talking about what has been influential for us, both the anti-domestic violence network and the Center for the Studies of Gender and Law have been tremendously influenced by western feminism. For instance our anti-domestic violence network has organized many activities to invite overseas colleagues to introduce how they carried out anti-domestic violence projects in their countries, as well as some of their experiences. We can take what is relevant and then discuss it. Our feminist legal research has been more influenced by scholars overseas. This was because China did not have any research in this aspect at all. Therefore we invited many overseas experts to talk with us. When we went overseas we also made a lot of contacts with foreign scholars; so we have learned many things and we are still learning. We want to write teaching material. Our teaching material will first introduce western feminism. Then it will move to how we can carefully examine our laws and develop our theories. I think this has great impact on us. I still remember that we first became involved in the anti-domestic violence project because in 1998 we went to India to participate in a conference. Violence against a

²³ The May Fourth Movement was an anti-imperialist, cultural and political movement. Growing from a student demonstration that took place on May 4, 1919, the movement began a patriotic outburst of new urban intellectuals against imperialism and traditional social and cultural forces.

woman violates women's rights to life and health as well as violates women's human rights. Before that event, we understood that domestic violence, violence against women, was a violation of women's human rights. But this is also a violation of a woman's right to life and right to health. Although we had heard this before, we really did not profoundly understand or recognize this. But our trip to India really had a huge influence on me. It was precisely the group of people who went to India, who when they came back, began to work on the anti-domestic violence project. Moreover in 1999 we went to Sweden to learn about their experience of combating domestic violence. At that time there were also people from the All China Women's Federation who went with us. We wanted to find out such things as how they organized, how they developed, and how many projects they worked on. The plans that we later developed were all influenced by what we learned in Sweden. Thus, I think that overseas feminism influenced us. And as for the research on gender and the law, we frequently were in contact with our overseas colleagues, so I should say that they were influential in this aspect also.

Shi Tong: What sorts of contributions have we made to global feminism?

Chen Mingxia: Us? In terms of activism that we are engaged in, I feel that it should have made contributions.... After all, we are a member of a big global family. The development of Chinese feminist theory should also be a part of the international women's liberation movement and the global feminist movement. Since we are part of it, the fact that we have developed such projects from scratch should of course be considered a contribution by itself. We are late to the scene; they are the trailblazers. But even though we came late to the scene, we still have made very big contributions. First in terms of a comprehensive campaign against violations of women's rights, for instance, domestic violence, we have made huge contributions. We have become a collective organization that does grassroots work to combat domestic violence. I think that this has enriched the content of the feminist movement. As for global feminism, China has provided a unique experience. This is an approach that has unified grassroots work with top-down methods. Moreover, our research about gender and the law has filled a space in the Chinese feminist movement that was previously blank. Perhaps this does not sound humble, but I feel that our Center's work on this aspect should be considered as having filled in the blank in terms of China's role in the international feminist movement. So I feel that the things that we do at our center are a kind of contribution to the international feminist movement.

Shi Tong: Thank you Professor Chen. I have asked you all of the questions that I prepared. Is there something that we have not covered that you would like to talk about?

Chen Mingxia: What else should I say?

Shi Tong: Are there things that you still want to talk about?

Chen Mingxia: Things that I especially want to address? I have not given this a lot of thought. Because I was answering your questions – whatever you asked I answered.

Shi Tong: Now you have time to freely talk about whatever you would like.

Chen Mingxia: Actually I think that if needed, we could speak a bit about a good point of our anti-domestic violence network. As an NGO in the feminist movement, we have indeed achieved the goal of uniting many organizations to work hard for our common goal. Our organization is especially successful at attracting local Women's Federations to work with us. They are very enthusiastic. We all felt that it was really good to be involved in this work. Therefore I feel that this clearly illustrates that Chinese women really need feminist ideas – *nuquan zhuyi* or gender theories. In my view, we should not think these ideas are purely “foreign.” I think that Chinese women's work to empower women from below and inspire people to empower themselves is indeed embraced by women and welcomed by women. Therefore as we do this kind of work at the same time it arouses this kind of spirit in women. Some people blame women and say that people in dreadful situations must have caused this themselves. I think this view actually does not attempt to awaken women's subjective consciousness and spirit. Therefore I think that the idea of gender can awaken these sorts of things in women. I do not know if you pay attention to this or not, but the participatory style of our gender trainings is more effective at the grassroots levels. The higher the levels that we get to do the training for, the less popular this style is. So what do these examples illustrate? This style is a good way to cause people at the basic levels to awaken their consciousness and pursue democracy and rights. Thus, this kind of work is better received at the grassroots levels. Therefore I think our work illustrates the necessity of this kind of approach. Only when you can mobilize people at the basic levels can you work better.

Shi Tong: So can we say that you are creating a model with Chinese characteristics?²⁴

Chen Mingxia: So I feel that in China, when you want to develop trainings and so on, you have to have Chinese characteristics. If you use one approach to work with a lower level, you have to change your approach when you work with high levels. When you work with even higher levels, you have to change your approach again. Thus, I think that we cannot say that western ideas are not useful in China. Absolutely rejecting them is not right. But because of some unique features of China's culture and conditions, in China, we have to have a Chinese way of doing things. I feel that this is very important. So feminism in China, *nuquan zhuyi* or *nuxing zhuyi*, must be based on China's own experience. But no matter what, you must know some of the basics of feminism (*nuquan zhuyi*). So I think that we have to read and grasp some things in feminism. This is what I wanted to say. Moreover I still want to emphasize my special appeal to everyone. It does not matter if you call it *nuquan zhuyi* or *nuxing zhuyi*. We should amicably sit together and hold really good discussions about these issues and explore them. We should not be divided by factions or borders. We should all sit together and research the issue of gender equality, women's issues, and societal issues. We should seek solutions with various approaches. This is what I call on everyone to do and what I hope for. When we all have academic

²⁴ In China, people often use the term “Chinese characteristics” to emphasize the uniqueness of the Chinese experience or some work that reflects the Chinese experience.

discussions we may have different points of view, but our studies of practices should hand in hand advance together.

Shi Tong: Especially in activism?

Chen Mingxia: Right, especially when we are doing practical interventions and activities we should unite. We may have different points of view about theories. But we should be collaborating in our actual work. We should advance our movement together. While advancing our movement, at the same time our theory will become more mature. So this point is very important and something I really hope that will happen. Because I am getting old, I will not always be able to do these things. Eventually I will have to retire.