

Contentious and Clashing Feminism---

Unpacking the 'Bot'-Mediated Feminist Discourses on Weibo

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Acknowledgment

Looking back at the whole process of turning this thesis from a clutter of ideas into an article, I still feel like it is a miracle. As the end mark of my undergraduate life and the possible beginning of my further research, I put a lot of effort into this article. But still, I don't think it is exquisite and mature enough to be dedicated to anyone, so I'm just dedicating it to myself who bravely started a difficult path and has stuck with it for a little while now. Hopefully I'll be able to write something good and mature enough for whoever I'm willing to dedicate it to afterward. Regarding the completion of this thesis, I have a million thanks. Thanks to my thesis advisor Dr. Cara Wallis for inspiring me to choose this topic and providing me with endless help and advice. You're the one who made the miracle happen. Thanks to Dr. Jimmy Draper who answered my endless questions. Thanks to my friends for bearing my endless complaining and supporting me all the time. Thanks to my family, especially my parents, for everything. My life will not move an inch without my supportive family. Thanks to myself for finally getting here. I went far enough and struggled enough. Thanks to all the scholars who have previously studied Chinese feminism and Chinese online activism. Thanks to the Chinese feminists who get to occupy a larger space and have a louder voice. Thanks to the women who fight and talk, and to those who shows the audacity to listen and just be there. May we all be able to get through all the hardships and make it to a new, safe, broad world.

Abstract

This thesis examines the complex feminist discourses on Weibo, one of China's largest social media platforms, by focusing on the interactions between radical feminists and anti-radical neoliberal feminists. Utilizing the novel perspective of "Bot" accounts, this study explores how these digital entities shape and reflect feminist dynamics within the broader social and political context of China. Through analyzing posts and discussions from two specific Bot accounts—the Radical Feminists Bot (RFB) and the Anti-Radical Feminist Bot (ARFB)—this research captures the patterns of cooperation and conflict that emerge between these two influential feminist groups. The findings reveal the nuanced ways in which these groups negotiate their ideological differences, and how they utilize social media to amplify their voices and influence public discourse on gender issues in contemporary Chinese society. This study not only contributes to the understanding of digital feminism in China but also highlights the role of social media as a battleground for ideological negotiation and feminist activism.

Keywords: Chinese feminism, Weibo, digital feminism, online activism

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Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of social media, Weibo stands as a vibrant platform where diverse voices converge, shaping the socio-cultural discourse in China. Diverse feminists also hold a large voice on this platform. Amidst the multitude of perspectives, two prominent feminist groups, radical feminists and anti-radical feminists who hold a neoliberal feminism perspective, have emerged as influential forces, each advocating for distinct ideologies and social transformations. To understand the feminist landscape and progress in China, the dynamic and tension between them must be studied in depth. This study intends to answer the questions of what radical and anti-radical feminists on Weibo are like, how they advocate for their ideas, how they view and interact with feminists hold different ideas. This study will focus on Weibo feminists who congregate under an account called "Bot" to express opinions, exchange ideas and resources, and interact with other feminists. By collecting and analyzing posts and discussions of Radical Feminists Bot and Anti-Radical Feminist Bot on Weibo, this research will mainly discuss the mutual influences, including cooperation and conflict, that occur on the platform of Weibo between two of the major feminist schools in China, radical feminism and neoliberal feminism. Through examining how these feminists interact with each other through collaboration or opposition, this study can help to gain insight into the broader social significance of their interactions, as well as their impact on shaping gender narratives in the digital age.

Feminism in China has undergone a profound evolution along with China's development and globalization. According to Karl et al. (2013), the first wave of the Chinese feminist movement can be traced back to He Yinzhen's critique of Confucianism's view of women as the property of men in the early 1900s. Subsequently, Wang (2015) noted in her

study that after 1949 and during the Mao era, the Chinese government introduced gender policies aimed at women's emancipation, but these efforts were often entangled with political goals. Later, after the reform and opening-up, Western feminist ideas flooded into China, contributing to the diversification of feminist thought. Today, the feminist movement in China encompasses a wide range of ideologies and has a unique landscape and dynamic. Women from all channels cooperate to fight for rights and freedoms. However, there are also very different guiding ideologies between the different feminists, which makes them frequently disagree with each other as well. This disagreement sometimes intensifies into attacks on each other. Among them, radical feminism and neoliberal feminism have become influential schools of thought, each offering a different vision of gender equality.

Recently, these two types of Chinese feminists seem to have found a new sanctuary in the ongoing conflict between contemporary policies and longstanding Confucian ideals: social media platforms. Weibo, as a dynamic social media arena, reflects this multifaceted feminist landscape, serving as a platform where these diverse ideologies converge, cooperate, and clash in their pursuit of reshaping gender narratives in contemporary Chinese society. These platforms have transformed into a shelter where Chinese feminists can amplify their voices and connect with a broader female audience. Feminism on Weibo represents a dynamic and multifaceted movement that addresses gender equality, women's rights, and social justice in the context of Chinese society. It has gained significant prominence and significance due to its role in advancing gender equality and promoting awareness of women's issues in a country with a complex history of gender dynamics and cultural norms. They help and cooperate with each other to fight for more voices and rights for Chinese

women in the patriarchal and conservative party-state system. They also contend with each other, and their encounters unfold in a complex interplay.

In this paper, I argue that Bots on Weibo can be taken as a unique and novel lens for understanding feminist discourse in China, highlighting its nuanced landscape. Despite a common focus on women's rights and gender equality, radical feminists and neoliberal anti-radical feminists engage with varying feminist ideologies and gender roles, advocating to shape societal views. This study unveils the complex interplay of influence, collaboration, and tension between these groups on Weibo, reflecting broader contexts. Understanding their approaches is essential for a thorough perspective on feminism's status and trajectory in China. Through a multidimensional analysis, I seek to inform policymakers, activists, and scholars about the evolving nature of feminism in the digital age, offering insights into how different feminist paradigms navigate and negotiate their positions within the intricate tapestry of Chinese society.

Literature Review

To better investigate my research question, it is imperative to understand what has already been done in the field. Three major fields, digital activism in China, feminism studies in China, and digital feminism studies in China provide the foundation for this study. In the digital activism in China section, I will discuss the impact of social media platforms on activism in China in its long history. In the feminism studies in China section, I will discuss the development of feminism in China and the two branches that are the focus of this paper. In the digital feminism studies section, I will discuss the intersection of the two previous sections, which is the impact of social media on feminist activism in China. Additionally, in this part, I will also discuss Xue and Ross's 2022 book, and other literatures that help to

understand the profiles and characteristics of feminists on Weibo. Together, these literatures lay the groundwork for this study, demonstrating existing understandings of Weibo feminism and serves as the key to advancing this study.

Social Media Activism in China

This section reviews how Weibo, in China's distinctive socio-political context, shapes and challenges online activism. Here, I examine prior research on social media as an activism tool in China, establishing Weibo as the study's focus, illustrating its significance in challenging the authority of the party-state. This review aims to provide a contextual framework for understanding Weibo's importance in contemporary Chinese activism. Although feminism is also one of the various types of activism in China, in this section I will only be focusing on Weibo's impact on the broader spectrum of all activism in China, and its impact on feminism will be discussed later in the digital feminism section.

Since blogs and micro-blogs became popular in China, they have become the platform for the Chinese public to implicitly engage in political discussion and criticism under the CCP's radar (Esarey & Qiang, 2008). Weibo is one such platform. Huang and Sun (2013) claim that it can easily and inexpensively help people at a power disadvantage, such as homeowners (as opposed to developers and government agents), to build collective activities and diffuse information beyond geographic boundaries. According to Yang and Jiang (2015), such characteristics have quickly turned Weibo into a major venue for popular sarcasm on social issues such as inequality and corruption. They further mention that the political sarcasm that happens on the Internet is an important aspect of Chinese Internet culture and politics because it can bypass the layers of stringent censorship by the Chinese authorities through puns, images, and artistic manipulation, and is a safer form of highly collective

resistance (Yang & Jiang, 2015). Yang and Jiang (2015) also state that sarcasm is a manifestation of China's long history of political sarcasm and folk wisdom in the contemporary practices of Chinese netizens. Chinese netizens have made multiple attempts to communicate their views about government and platform censorship. At the same time, sarcasm is also recognized as a form of grassroots political expression on behalf of the unprivileged, mostly reflecting the ideas and dissatisfaction of China's grassroots sector (Yang & Jiang, 2015). This is as opposed to the official press and media, which have been colloquially described as the "party's throat and tongue". The appropriateness and significance of online political sarcasm in the Chinese context have made microblogging social media such as Weibo an essential and irreplaceable part of online activism in China.

However, Weibo is not the answer to everything. According to Yang and Jiang (2015), Weibo actively engages and cooperates with government censorship demands, and while this limits the consistency of censorship strategies and creates opportunities for transgressive behavior, it still deprives many voices. It is also not really "Our Media" (Wallis & Cui, 2017). Political discourse is restricted to a very limited range of "positive" and "civilized" discourse (Wallis & Cui, 2017; Yang, 2018). Despite its grassroots character, Weibo as a public sphere is not equal. According to Wallis and Cui (2017), people with higher status, higher education levels, or more resources have louder voices and higher status than migrant women, rural residents, and people with lower education levels. These present challenges for online activism.

Overall, researchers have found that Weibo's ability to effectively carry and disseminate sarcastic messages and to connect individuals who want to launch activism across geographic boundaries has made it an appropriate choice for activists in China who

want to initiate activities and raise awareness (Huang & Sun, 2013; Yang & Jiang, 2015). Taking to the streets for protests in China carries significant risks. However, instead of fading away, Chinese people's courage and resistance have found safer and more effective outlets on online platforms. Even with the flaws of censorship and not being able to represent all people equally (Wallis & Cui, 2017; Yang & Jiang, 2015), Weibo is still the most vital tool and cost-effective option for Chinese activists.

Feminism in China

In China, feminists help and cooperate with each other to fight for more voices and rights for Chinese women in the patriarchal and conservative party-state system. However, there are also very different guiding ideologies between the different feminists, which makes them frequently disagree with each other as well. This section provides an overview of existing studies that identify and categorize various feminist groups in China, serving as the foundation for my subsequent classification of feminists on Weibo. Many online feminist groups mirror their real-world counterparts, demonstrating strong parallels in goals, ideologies, and practices. These studies offer historical context for identifying Weibo's feminist types, with the discussion in this section organized into Chinese feminism's development history, main subtypes, cooperation, and conflicts.

Development of Chinese Feminism

According to Dorothy KO and Wang Zheng (2006), the development of feminism in China can be studied in four parts: the late Qing period in the early 20th century, the Republican period around the 1950s, the Mao's era after the founding of the People's Republic of China, and the post-Mao era. This part of the literature review will draw on this framework to understand feminist development in China. Based on this, I have made some

modifications to address the focus of this article. Since this study focuses more on the development of feminism in modern China, I examine the late Qing period and the Republican period before the Chinese Communist Party came to power in one part. Subsequently, I also analyzed Mao's era, after which I divided the post-Mao era more specifically into two parts, the turn-of-the-century period and Xi's era, to understand the development of modern feminism in China in more detail. After 2013, when Xi Jinping became the supreme leader of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the leader of the Chinese state, the development of feminism in China was also greatly influenced, so in part 4 I will review Xi's influence more specifically.

During the late Qing period, as more and more students, artists, and diplomats traveled to Japan, they facilitated the circulation of new ideas about ethnicity, gender, and citizenship among Europe, America, Japan, and China (KO & Zheng, 2006). Scholarly opinion suggests that the spark of feminism in China was ignited by a man named Jin Tienhe through his aspiration to the civilization of Western countries, and claims in his book *Bells of the Women's World* that liberating women can improve the country (Karl et al., 2013). But this was soon strongly criticized by He Yinzhen (also known as He Zhen), one of its first female readers, as admiration and emulation for the advanced civilization and power of the so-called civilized Western countries, and a mindset that considered women entirely as men 's personal belongings (Karl et al., 2013). As He Yinzhen learns and discusses further about global feminism as well as Chinese feminism, the history of modern Chinese women's rights has been unveiled in the twentieth century.

Chinese feminism underwent a second major change after 1949, during the Mao era. As Wang Zheng (2005) points out, in this period, what prevailed in China was state feminism, in

which national patriarchalism advocated women's liberation, albeit with wavering and contradictory attitudes. It is a state-derived feminism in which agency was monopolized by the state and changes in gender relations were inspired from above and mobilized through organizational channels like the Women's Federation (Wang, 2005). Under this kind of feminism, while women can be mobilized for change, they cannot be changing agents in their own right.

The next major change in contemporary Chinese feminism occurred during the 2000s and early 2010s when Chinese feminists began to enthusiastically embrace the gender perspectives of global feminism and apply them in innovative ways to their local practices (Wang & Ying, 2010). According to Wang and Ying (2010), feminists of this period realized that Mao's gender equality narratives had met with de facto failure and took advantage of China's desire to integrate into the international community and the opportunity of hosting the UN's Fourth Women's Conference in Beijing to try to empower the Chinese female population through the education provided by NGOs. Yu (2015) suggests that during this period, Chinese feminists began to translate a large number of foreign feminist works, among which Beauvoir's *Second Sex* and Enslin's *Vagina Monologues* appeared in a number of different versions of translations to adapt to China's social environment and censorship. Moreover, Wang (2018) emphasizes that the information and communication technologies of the new millennium have paved the way for virtual mobilization and online communication, thus providing new, safer, and more flexible alternative online channels for feminists to come together.

The next big change came after Xi came into power. Wang (2018) argues that since 2000, under the Chinese government's progressively tighter social control, it has become both

difficult and dangerous for established feminist NGOs to organize and participate in organized activities. The extent of this difficulty became even greater when Xi Jinping took power. Since 2013, Xi Jinping's state propaganda has re-emphasized traditional Confucian family values, leading to decreased female public participation and increased inequality. Xi has intentionally constructed and reshaped women's gender roles on top of gender essentialism and sexism, claiming that China's success depends on such a state-imposed social order (Yang, 2022). This advocacy does not stop at the level of propaganda and persuasion. Under Xi's leadership, the Chinese government has stepped up its efforts to eliminate all kinds of dissent, including an unprecedented crackdown on feminists and human rights lawyers. One of the more influential incidents was in early March 2015, when five feminists planned to distribute stickers about sexual harassment on public transportation in China's capital city of Beijing, the southern city of Guangzhou, and the eastern city of Hangzhou to mark International Women's Day, yet they were arrested (Fincher, 2016). This event mirrors not only the current changing societal expectations faced by Chinese women under Xi's rule, but also the difficult conditions and challenges faced by Chinese feminism activists in today's Chinese society. Yet the development of feminism in China has not stood still.

Finally, we have traversed the winding path and arrived at the focal point of our research, online feminism on Chinese social media. Feminism in China has always been dynamic, with its landscape and frontlines constantly shifting. Despite the harshness of censorship and the knowledge that there is a serious price to pay, more and more women are voicing their discontent on Chinese social media such as Weibo. Understanding the past development of feminism in China is necessary for this study because it provides a historical

explanation and context for the current state of feminism in China. Familiarity with historical societal attitudes toward feminism can help this study assess how far Chinese feminism has come, understand how the Chinese government, conservative forces, and other stakeholders have responded to the feminist movement in the past, and analyze similar challenges that may exist on Weibo today.

Identifying and Classifying Major Feminist Groups

On Weibo, the main battleground for feminism in China nowadays, there are two types of feminists who have the loudest voices, the neoliberal feminist and the radical feminist. According to Rottenberg (2018), neoliberal feminism, a particular variant of feminism that embraces neoliberalism has risen to prominence in the U.S. and spread around the world and has become detached from societal ideals of equality, rights, and justice. Rottenberg (2018) further explains that it recognizes gender inequality while denying that socio-economic and cultural structures that shape our lives while constantly inciting women to take full responsibility for their own well-being and self-care, ultimately targeting the middle and upper-middle classes and effectively excluding the vast majority of women from view.

In the field of post-socialist feminism in China, neoliberal feminism is very popular due to various reasons. According to Ye (2021) because of China's unique history and complex relationship with colonialism, feminists' collaboration with the state as a radical strategy is often seen as despicable, whereas association with neoliberalism is seen as creative and empowering. Ye (2021) further elaborates on how collaboration with neoliberalism and consumerism has enabled Chinese feminists to enter and influence the global stage in different manners. In contemporary China, Peng (2019) argues that the most relevant counterparts of neoliberal feminism are the female-centric key opinion leaders on Chinese

social media, who adopt a "feminist" self-branding strategy, targeting Chinese women as their audience, and attempting to construct a feminized male ideal in the context of Chinese women's increased consumption power. Such characters, such as Mimeng, whom Peng (2019) focuses on, are both popular with women, hugely successful in their careers, and very influential. However, neoliberal feminism in China allows for the pursuit of new lifestyles and values on the premise that the state still has unlimited power. Wallis and Shen (2018) address this situation by proposing the notion of neo/non liberalism, which is the idea that, despite the constant emphasis on consumption and self-styling, the state's paternalism and authoritarian control continue to limit public discourse and culture. Wallis and Shen (2018), through their study of SKII advertisements and left-over women, found that instead of actually empowering and liberating women, Chinese neoliberal feminism's collaboration with consumerism and marketing techniques emphasizes gender and class norms.

Another major contemporary Chinese feminist strain, radical feminism, scoffs at the commercialized character of neoliberalism. According to Willis (1984), radical feminism is a view within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of society, eliminating male supremacy from all social and economic contexts, while recognizing that women's experiences are also influenced by other social divisions, such as race, class, and sexual orientation. In China, the earliest radical feminism can be traced back to He Yinzhen's criticism of Chinese men's feminism in the early 20th century. Zarrow (1988) notes that He Yinzhen holds an anarchist view of feminism, linking feminism to demands for radical social revolution. She believes that the oppression of women in China is linked to modern class divisions, economic exploitation and traditional culture, and that feminism should be severed

from nationalism, claiming that 'women's liberation' is not 'for the sake of the nation' but out of moral necessity (Zarrow, 1988).

Collaboration and Confrontation Among Feminist Groups

Different Chinese feminisms have kept producing internal interactions throughout history. They often collaborate to mutually benefit each other. According to Wang and Ying (2010), after the Fourth United Nations Women's Conference in Beijing, there has been frequent cooperation between different feminisms, and the scope of this cooperation includes but is not limited to official women's federations and unofficial NGOs, between domestic and international feminists, and between urban and rural feminists. Wang and Ying (2010) also point out that these collaborations have helped to spread feminist ideas, promote sensitive public policies, and bring great progress to the development of feminism in China. Peng (2019) critically suggests that, although not divorced from its patriarchal origins, neoliberal feminism, as represented by Mimeng, can be seen as addressing contemporary women's sexual and emotional needs, fulfilling Chinese women's expectations of masculinity and family life, and that neoliberal feminist discourses, which have a degree of alignment with the Chinese government's social governance practices, provide a space for female-centered Chinese KOLs to promote their business interests while avoiding Chinese political censorship. Neoliberal feminism has contributed to the widespread dissemination and acceptance of feminism, and it has paved the way for other feminist movements.

Harmony has not always been a main theme within feminism. Wallis (2017) points out that even though the stated goal is to pursue gender equality, China Women's News, one of China's state-run newspapers operated by the Women's Federation, still positions women as inferior citizens to men in certain situations, identifying with the tensions inherent in the

beliefs of naturalized gender and class distinctions. Neoliberal KOLs like Mimeng, who are well known on WeChat, are also seen by feminist scholars like Peng as reviving patriarchy and traditional female virtues, shifting the responsibility for the well-being of society from the government to the individual. Radical feminism is also often criticized as aggressive, divisive, and extreme that leads to homogenization of ideas and stigmatization against feminists (Bao, 2023; Chen & Gui, 2023).

Based on this section, it can be noted that although there has been a great deal of research on the current state and history of feminism in China, the interactions between online feminisms have not been adequately researched. The dynamics between traditional offline feminisms cannot be fully and directly projected into the more complex and broader online environment. Weibo is a very active feminist platform, but there is still a lack of research on the interactions and mutual influences within the Weibo feminist community. This study will build on previous research and focus on how neoliberal feminism and radical feminism on Weibo communicate, influence, promote, and confront each other.

Digital Feminism in China

As I said before, feminism is a branch of activism. The influence of social media on it cannot be ignored. While the impact of social media on other activism may have a similar projection on feminism, gender adds a new dynamic to it. In this section, I will discuss the impact of social media on feminism from previous research, the well-known Chinese feminist activists The Feminist Five and their online activism, and Weibo feminism and its characteristics.

Social media as a tool of feminist activism in China

In China, social media, particularly platforms like Weibo, has proven highly effective for feminist activists challenging traditional gender norms rooted in patriarchy and Confucian values. It serves as a new public sphere, offering a community for discourse and a refuge from gender persecution in a nation marked by pervasive censorship. The unique effectiveness of social media lies in its provision of a grassroots activism model, enabling feminist activities to circumvent targeted censorship and empower women. Weibo, in particular, has emerged as a pivotal stage for the feminist movement in China. As outlined by Hou (2015), the development of the Internet has empowered grassroots feminists with limited resources, fostering a bottom-up activism model that contrasts with the dominant top-down paradigm of the 1980s. Weibo's instant information sharing and interactive features make it a powerful advocacy tool for young grassroots feminists, reshaping the landscape of feminism in China and amplifying grassroots voices in the feminist discourse.

Moreover, Hou (2015) also mentions that Weibo has helped grassroots feminist activists circumvent censorship from the government. Mao (2020) argued for feminist activists in China, censorship and repression against feminism from officials, platforms and even the general environment has been a major challenge. Mao further states that with the feminist movement under intense scrutiny, the activity on Weibo has provided women with the opportunity to speak out, and their voices have been heard and spread (Mao, 2020). Hou (2015) agrees with this by saying that while censorship still exists on Weibo, this censorship is generally not considered to be very effective, as the instantaneous nature and its large user base make information disseminated via Weibo have irresistible power. These voices and messages are much less likely to exist and be sustained in traditional media and feminist paradigms (Wang & Driscoll, 2018).

Lastly, social media empowers women in feminist activism. Feminists have long been stigmatized in China. However, the Internet, especially platforms such as Weibo, provides a relatively free, non-hierarchical, and participatory space for the general public, especially marginalized and stigmatized groups, to carry out online activities and fight for their rights (Hou, 2015). Overall, social media like Weibo has helped women and feminists take back the definition of who they are and has brought awareness to the fact that feminism is a growing social movement and reflects their growing numbers, diversity, and influence (Bao, 2023). Specifically, researchers Chang et al. (2016) have found out that on social media, women's choice of profile picture reflects their unique feminism differs from Western feminism, pursuit of an independent image, and self-empowerment in the Chinese context.

Similar to what Weibo did for online activism, Weibo has had more than only a positive effect on feminist activism. According to Bao (2023), one of Weibo's very notable side effects in feminist activism is that it has led to divisions among feminists and the stigmatization of feminism by other social groups as extremists. Bao (2023) further elaborates using the data that the practice of distinguishing between various forms of feminism and feminists based on different attributes became more prevalent, leading to a weakening of the collectivity of feminists.

Weibo has been crucial to feminist activism in China in terms of forming a grassroots ideology, circumventing censorship, and empowering women. This once again emphasizes the rationality and importance of using Weibo as an example to study feminism in China in this study. The literatures provide insight into the present Weibo feminist ecology and how it should be understood. Much of the previous research has focused on the ideologies of

feminists on Weibo and Weibo's promotion of feminism, but very little research has focused on the cooperation, confrontation, and mutual influence among feminists.

The Feminist Five and the New Era of Digital Feminists

In my previous discussion of the development of feminism in China, I briefly mentioned The Feminist Five and their detention, here I will discuss them and their online feminist activism more specifically. The Feminist Five refers to Li Maizi (birth name Li Ting Ting), Wu Rong Rong, Zheng Chu Ran, Wei Ting Ting, and Wang Man, five feminists from China (Fincher, 2016). They were supposed to be five feminists with no international profile, but something happened just before Women's Day 2015 and changed everything. After entering the digital era, the younger generation of feminists in China has taken new measures. According to Wang Zheng (2015), because of the lack of social and political resources, creative and intelligent young feminist activists are adept at public performances on the issue of sexism to attract the attention of the media. That's exactly what The Feminist Five did. They planned to circulate messages against sexual harassment on public transportation but ended up being arrested. The news caused a great deal of discussion around the world. In the first two weeks after their arrest, more than 3,000 people from more than 100 countries signed an online petition calling for the activists' release, and by the time they were released, more than 2 million people had signed petitions on multiple websites set up by various multinational organizations (Wang, 2015). Even though on the thirty-seventh night of their detention, and in the face of intense global diplomatic and social media pressure, the authorities eventually released all five women on bail, the five women remain "suspects" who are being investigated for the charge of "mobbing to disrupt public order," which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison (Fincher, 2016).

Social media and the internet have played a very crucial role in this incident of feminist activism in China. First of all, Wang Zheng argues that one of the remarkable advances of young feminists is the enormous knowledge resources gained from transnational feminism in this era of globalization and the Internet. This facilitation of the digital age has brought new vitality to the development of feminism in China, giving Chinese feminists a stock of knowledge that allows them to carry out their movements (Wang, 2015). Secondly, the impact of social media on feminist activism is reflected in this event, both in the preparatory stages of publicizing it on the internet and in the online petitioning after The Feminist Five's arrest. The digital age allows feminists to utilize the specificity of media practices to set media agendas, expand public reach, and circumvent censorship (Tan, 2017). In this case, under pressure from the global media, the authorities finally released The Feminist Five conditionally. It wasn't the perfect ending, but in China, this was the first time that a group of detained social activists were released at once (Wang, 2015). Social media played a crucial role in this process and turned out to be an important tool for Chinese feminists to develop digital feminism later.

Weibo Feminism

Feminism on Weibo, China's popular social media platform, represents a dynamic and multifaceted movement that addresses gender equality, women's rights, and social justice in the context of Chinese society. Only by understanding the similarities and differences in the demands and practices of feminists on Weibo can we have a complete picture of the current state of feminism in China and the direction it is heading. For this literature review section, I will be focusing on Weibo feminism to explore the characteristics of Weibo feminists, the landscape, and their influence at the social and political levels.

In the book *Weibo Feminism*, the authors Xue and Rose (2022) group decentralized progressive feminism on Weibo into one broad category, Weibo feminism. Despite departures from the specific breakdown of feminist organizations on Weibo and the concern for the dynamics between them that this study will undertake, this book still provides a very valuable look at studying and analyzing digital feminism in China. To start with, a part of this book focuses on illustrating the current status and characteristics of Weibo feminists through in-depth discussion and analysis of a topical social event, such as the Stand by Her project initiated by Liang Yu during COVID to donate tampons and pads to female healthcare workers in infected areas and the female patriotic stereotype cartoon character Jiang Shanjiao (Xue & Rose, 2022). The authors discuss not only the initiators of the social events, but also the wide range of reactions and impacts they caused, and what makes them the center of attention. The discussion of these events demonstrated the important characteristics of Weibo feminists, which is having strong aggregation power. Social hotspots related to women often spark widespread and passionate discussions among Weibo feminists. They quickly come together, heat the discussion, and support each other. This cohesion and the power to use online public opinion to maintain long-term attention on a topic are some of the notable characteristics of Weibo feminists.

In addition to this, the authors discuss Lin Maomao in a way that reflects some other important characteristics of Weibo feminists, which are relatively radical and resilient. Feminists active on Weibo, as represented by Lin Maomao, tend to be very hostile to the patriarchal system, emphasizing escape from traditional family roles, advocating for taking one's mother's name, being anti-marriage and anti-breeding (Xue & Rose, 2022). This has also attracted tough censorship. However, Weibo feminists continue to open new accounts to

continue the expression of the banned accounts. Although Lin Maomao has left the Weibo platform, the influence of her ideas among Weibo feminists remains on the platform. The authors also point out that another characteristic of Weibo feminists is transnational cooperativeness, and that by using a variety of means to avoid The Great Firewalls, Weibo feminists engage in frequent exchanges of ideas and resources with feminists in other countries and regions, as well as helping each other (Xue & Rose, 2022). Xue and Rose (2022) conclude by noting that by being denied their own space, feminists have learned to be everywhere. Feminists on Weibo respond to public issues in an autonomous, unorganized, and flexible way, putting pressure on authorities to resist the pervasive culture of misogyny. Overall, this book provides a foundational portrait of Weibo feminists and their characteristics through careful observation and analysis of Weibo feminists. As powerful, resilient, ubiquitous, and flexible groups, the dynamics among feminists deserve a nuanced understanding.

In the digital era, according to Chen and Gui's (2023) example of Weibo feminism, they found a radicalization of online feminism. On Weibo, one of the main feminist discourses is the amplificationist discourse, which argues for the superiority of women over men, and advocates for the negation and overthrow of the existing gender structure. According to Chen and Gui's research (2023), in the view of the amplificationist feminist discourse, women should be the first sex as the mother of babies, but the patriarchal system has stolen women's rights and status, bound women through the marriage system and the birth system, and taken away from women the right to give birth, the right to name, and believes that only by destroying the patriarchal system, the marriage system, the birth system, and re-establishing the female-led society and its institutions can women's rights and interests

be safeguarded. This increasingly prevalent discourse meets previous definitions of radical feminism in both Eastern and Western history and is a type of radical feminism in online feminist expression. Chen and Gui (2023) also found through their data that the percentage of blog posts and the volume of communication of amplified feminist discourse increased, and that although it fluctuates due to platform governance, radical feminism using amplified feminist discourse is still the most interactive online feminist sub-genre.

Conclusion of the Literature Review

As a summary, the literature review section of this study consists of 3 main parts, a study of online activism in China, a study of feminism in China, and a study of digital feminism in China. Overall, all the literature review of this study provides important background. These insights affirm the huge impact of social media on activism in China and the complexity and fluidity of Chinese feminism. At the same time, these works of literature expose a research gap in Chinese online feminism, that is, how Weibo influences and promotes feminist expression and intensifies tensions among feminists. Based on this, the study provides a new perspective on understanding Chinese feminism on Weibo, exploring the impact of the emerging Bot culture on Weibo feminists and the dynamics between them.

Theoretical framework

Bot Culture

To better understand the dynamics between feminists on Weibo, the bot culture currently prevalent in Chinese social media provides the theoretical framework. According to Chen (2021b), a bot, fully known as a robot, is a social media bot that is free of subjective feelings and regularly updates its content, first appearing on Twitter. After the introduction of

the bot concept to Weibo, due to technical differences between Weibo and Twitter, the bot accounts that became popular on Weibo were not real robots like the Twitter bot but were run by real people. Chen (2021b) further emphasizes that Bot on Weibo simply has an additional layer of impersonality, i.e., it adheres to the same operational guidelines as a "robot": regular posting, objectivity and neutrality, strict screening, and no frequent interaction with followers. Bot accounts on Weibo are centered around a specific theme, which is defined by the prefix of the individual bot and is sent out regularly through private messages or emails. The theme is defined by the prefix of each bot, and submissions on this theme are accepted through private messages or emails and are sent out regularly after screening. Chen (2021b) believes that the earliest known bot on Weibo is the Poet Bot, which started operating on September 8, 2017, after that, there are a series of bots such as the Breakup Bot, Love Bot, and Original Boylove bot, and the scope covered by bot accounts is getting wider and wider, and the field is getting more and more interactive. The coverage of bot accounts has become broader and broader, and the fields have become more and more vertical and subdivided, making Bot an information distribution method that has gradually gained momentum on Weibo in the past few years (Chen, 2021b). According to Wang (2020), Bots can be subdivided into three categories based on their contents: hobby Bots, emotional resonance Bots, and commercial marketing Bots. The two feminist Bots discussed in this paper belong to the emotional resonance category. This type of bot tends to engage the audience through a "communal" experience (Wang, 2020).

There are complex factors behind the popularity of this account on Chinese social media. According to Wu (2019), the Bot constitutes a "hyperspace" for the public, with free access and visual unity. Wu believes that as a space for the expression of a subculture, it

opposes the condescending discourse of mainstream officials, forming a type of cultural consumption behavior that young users can lead themselves, freely joining or leaving (Wu, 2019). Chen (2021b) supports this position by arguing that, in this space, people can acquire group validation, reduce loneliness, and satisfy the desire to confide in others while balancing security. Moreover, Ren's study (2020) shows that the process of socializing on Weibo bot is also a process of self-disclosure, which enhances subjective well-being and promotes mental health in the process of self-disclosure using different types of Bots as a platform. For society, bot provides new pathways for information production, allowing the small individual to become part of an "influential" communications leader (Wang, 2020). Looking at the dynamics among feminists on Weibo by using the Bot as an entry point is an appropriate choice, as the use of the Bot not only reflects the new communication possibilities that the Bot culture opens up for users, the platform, and the community, but also provides a multifaceted framework for studying the nuances of feminist communication on Weibo. Through Bot, we can better understand the advocacy, activism, and emotionality and the broader social impacts of contemporary feminists on Weibo.

Methodology

To start with, the type of data I will collect are posts in the Radical Feminists Bot and Anti-Radical Feminist Bot. According to Chen (2021b), Bot, fully known as Social Media Robot, is a type of account popularized on social media platforms that does not carry subjective feelings, accepts posts from users, and sends them out through anonymous means. A Bot is generally about a specific topic, and in the context of this study, I will be collecting posts from the Radical Feminists Bot and Anti-Radical feminists Bot. Bots can amplify certain perspectives and emotions within a group of feminists, influence narratives, and

contribute to the dynamics of online feminist conversations. Understanding the contributions of these Bots is essential for comprehending the multifaceted nature of online feminist interactions. The data above complement each other and generally contribute to an understanding of how different feminists are represented, how they interact with others, and the extent to which their contributions shape online feminist discourse.

It's worth noting that Radical Feminists Bot and Anti-Radical feminists Bot are not the names of these two accounts, but the names of the Bot recreated based on my observation of feminists who participate in the activities of these two accounts. Radical Feminist Bot's account name as of the time I finished collecting data was 大女人聊天室怒火窜天版(dà nǚ rén liáo tiān shì nù huǒ cuàn tiān bǎn), which means Big Woman's Angry Chatroom. Users who would contribute to this Bot tend to hold radical feminist ideas or support such ideas. The account name for the Anti-Radical Feminists Bot is 小激乐秽土重生版(xiǎo jī lè huì tǔ chóng shēng bǎn), meaning revived people who make fun of radical feminists. Users who would contribute to this Bot, on the other hand, mostly hold neoliberal feminist ideas. To simplify, the Radical Feminist Bot will be referred to as RFB and the Anti-Radical Feminist Bot will be referred to as ARFB. Feminists who use and directly interact with RFB will be referred to as radical feminists, and those who use and directly interact with ARFB will be referred to as anti-radical neoliberal feminists.

Regarding the data collection, Weibo has its own unique censorship mechanism, and all the contents of these two accounts are not always visible and accessible. At certain times, they are even inactive. Although the two accounts were in operation at much earlier times, the only overlapping active time they had was from February 4, 2024, to February 15, 2024.

During this period, all public content posted by the account was crawled and screenshotted. For more details, considering the total amount of data and Weibo's censorship mechanism, I hired someone with professional data crawling knowledge and experience to help me complete the data collection. The data collection was done using Python's Selenium framework.

Based on the data collected, RFB has more diverse content, a larger user base (12.5k followers), and more interactions (8200 posts and 1.4M interactions in total), while ARFB because it exists purely for the purpose of attacking radical feminists, is more focused, more directed, and relatively less active (7k followers, 429 posts and 409.6K interactions in total). In the end, I got 262 informative data for RFB and 58 informative data for ARFB that potentially hold valuable insights. After crawling, collecting, and taking screenshots of the data using Python, I read through the data and identified some commonly occurring comments. I then categorized and coded comments based on themes, sentiments, and prevailing attitudes, and discussed by theme in the analysis part. In analysis, I will mainly be using textual analysis. Instead of focusing on one isolated word, this study focused on the interactions and dynamics within a theme between the different feminists who have commented. Based on this, I identified three common themes from all the data, that is, at Weibo, Bot protects feminists and helps them build communities, feminists face intense censorship, and feminists show anger against men and other feminists. In the following analysis, I will explain and analyze these three themes specifically.

Analysis of Bot-Mediated Feminist Discourses on Weibo

Bot As a Tool for Feminists

Bot accounts play an essential role in the activities of feminists on Weibo. In this study, radical feminists and anti-radical neoliberal feminists both utilize this approach for their activities on Weibo, regardless of their stance. Through data collection and detailed analysis of the data, even with their relatively significant differences in content and methods of interaction, it is clear that Bot has created an exclusive public discourse space for feminists on Weibo. This public space is favored by feminists primarily because it offers the following conveniences.

Community Safe House

The feature of helping to create a supportive community is very evident in RFB's account. A lot of radical feminists have raised issues they have encountered in their lives in RFB. These issues can be general life issues, specific issues related to radical feminist identity, or an intersection of the two. In the process of asking questions and helping each other to solve problems, radical feminists build safe, supportive community territories on Weibo.

Firstly, among the 262 RFB posts I collected between February 4 and 2.15, 33 posts that could be categorized as seeking help and advice. In this type of post, users who contribute to RFB are looking for answers to life and feminist activism. In terms of questions about seeking life advice, some ask questions about careers, health, academics, sexuality and relationships, friendships, and consumption (See chart 1 for examples). Once these questions are sent out, there will be advice from others who follow RFB in the comments section or subsequent submissions. Radical feminists from all industries and fields will help each other develop and progress together based on their own experiences. Based on Chen's research (2021b) illustrating the collective feelings and affirmations that Bot brings to people, it is

possible to see through the collection of posts that RFB has developed a more practical supportive role on top of this. Radical feminists seeking advice will mention that they believe their peers who share the same advocacy as themselves can better empathize and help them. From everyday life to feminist activism, radical feminists have created this safe house where they can always seek help and advice for free at any time and not have to worry about ideological differences. When they are unable to find support because of their radical ideas that are not accepted by family, friends, and society, this place provides not only a sense of security, belonging and identity but also practical and feasible solutions.

Category	Original Post	Translation
Career	失业半年了, 真的好绝望, 怎么办(shī yè bàn nián le , zhēn de hǎo jué wàng , zěn me)	I've been unemployed for half a year, I'm really desperate, what should I do?
Health	有什么推荐的健身方法? (bàn yǒu shén me tuī jiàn de jiàn shēn fāng fǎ)	What are some recommended workouts?
Academics	有休学在家的姐妹吗 (yǒu xiū xué zài jiā de jiě mèi má)	Are there any girls who are taking a break from school?

Sexuality and relationship	<p>怎么既不在同性里竞争又追求自己喜欢的人呢 (zěn me jì bù zài tóng xìng lǐ jìng zhēng yòu zhuī qiú zì jǐ xǐ huān de rén ne)</p>	<p>How do you pursue someone you like without competing in the same sex?</p>
Friendship	<p>想推广一下群聊, 全女群, 支持女主控, 反男缘的赌妹进群, 对爱女纯度要求较高 (xiǎng tuī guǎng yī xià qún liáo , quán nǚ qún , zhī chí nǚ zhǔ kòng , fǎn nán yuán de jiě mèi jìn qún , duì ài nǚ chún dù yào qiú jiào gāo)</p>	<p>I would like to promote a group chat, an all-female group, women who support the love of female protagonists, anti-male can join the group, the purity of the love of women requirement is high</p>
Consuming	<p>有没有爱女的漫画啊小说大部分都看了, 过年在家好无聊 (yǒu méi yǒu ài nǚ de màn huà ā xiǎo shuō dà)</p>	<p>Are there any pro-women comic or novels, I've read most of them, and I'm so bored at home over the New Year's Eve</p>

	bù fēn dū kàn le , guò nián zài jiā hǎo wú liáo)	
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Chart 1. Example of radical feminist comment seeking advice at RFB

Secondly, among the posts collected, 25 posts that could be categorized as discussions about radical feminist concepts. These questions can be very basic, for example, a user asks: “I’m new to feminism, can I ask if there’s a difference between feminism and radical feminism? What’s the difference? What is the basic board? Thank you sisters (刚接触女权, 可以问一下女权和激女有区别吗?区别在哪啊?基本盘是什么。谢谢姊妹们/ gāng jiē chù nǚ quán , kě yǐ wèn yī xià nǚ quán hé jī nǚ yǒu qū bié má ? qū bié zài nǎ ā ? jī běn pán shì shén me 。 xiè xiè zǐ mèi mén)”. These discussions of concepts can also be professional and specific, such as another user’s question: “Are the concepts of “homo” and “hetero” still being used nowadays?(现在使用不使用“同”“异”概念?/ xiàn zài shǐ yòng bù shǐ yòng “tóng” “yì” gài niàn)”. In these posts and their comments, radical feminists discuss knowledge related to radical feminism such as the definition and main claims of radical feminism, how to differentiate between radical feminism and other feminisms, icons that represent radical feminists, and more. In addition to this, they discuss the irrationality of patriarchal society and how to subvert it and envision what a feminist society would look like. The topics they discuss span from serious research and literature to creative imagination. The ideas and implications of radical feminism in China are constantly being tested, debated, and disseminated in such discussions. People share knowledge they wouldn’t have access to

in school, learn details about radical feminism, and preserve and develop them. Bot takes on the responsibility of education at this point because of its openness and accessibility. Many users have mentioned in their submissions that they were first exposed to radical feminist ideas or enhanced their understanding of radical feminism through this RFB. Through content crowdfunding, RFB discusses and spreads radical feminism in a more grassroots way and empowers the community.

Lastly, there are 17 posts fell in the category of exchanging resources. These resources that were interchanged were feminism-related and involved two aspects, entertainment and education. On the entertainment side, users who contribute voluntarily share feminist-friendly music, games, influencers, TV shows, and media pieces and remind other peers of anti-feminism or objectification of women. On the educational side, radical feminists share books, literature, accounts, podcasts, and the like related to their advocacy. In addition to actively sharing, they also help retrieve information based on others' posts. By exchanging resources in this way, radical feminists not only raise awareness of feminist issues and theories and help inform and educate others in the community but also enable individuals in the community to potentially feel more empowered and supported knowing that they have access to resources and a network of peers who share their values. And, when members voluntarily contribute and share resources, they develop a sense of ownership and active participation in the community. This involvement strengthens bonds and makes for a more vibrant and dynamic community. Moreover, sharing feminist-friendly media and educational resources can help strengthen the community's shared values, create an environment that celebrates and promotes those values, and help sustain and nurture a community culture. By reminding each other of anti-feminism and objectification, community members create a support network that

can provide solidarity and comfort. The replacement of whatever resources brings important or useful content to the forefront and allows individuals within the community to potentially feel more empowered and supported.

Although more pronounced in RFB, community support is also reflected in ARFB. Although more pronounced in RFB, community support is also evident in ARFB. In the 58 data entries I collected, community characterization among anti-radical neoliberal feminists was reflected in two main areas, common attacks on radical feminists and support for peers. Submissions attacking or calling for attacks on radical feminism and a certain influencer make up the majority of ARFB's content. There are a total of 49 pieces of content that can be grouped into this category. Their main claims include accusing radical feminists' opinion leaders of faking their lifestyles, accusing them of double standards, and being too hard on women. For example, one entry in the AFRB accuses radical feminist representative Fang: "Fang body shame women all day long, doesn't radical feminism say women need to be strong? (我们方方整天 body shame 女性 , 激女不是说女性要强壮吗 ? / wǒ mén fāng fāng zhěng tiān body shame nǚ xìng , jī nǚ bù shì shuō nǚ xìng yào qiáng zhuàng má ?)" ARFB users in this case share the evidence they find, support each other's findings, and even provide additional literature and details to support their legitimacy.

While posts attacking radical feminists dominated, supportive content for fellow members also made an appearance at ARFB. Of the data collected, 9 entries were about submissions in support of peers who have been blocked, reported, and harassed by radical feminists. For example, one of the posts from ARFB says: "I really don't understand what kind of power you're trying to show by blocking me first and then posting things to make

others criticize me. Radical feminists, you've already blocked me, who are you showing your posts to?" (真的不明白先拉黑后挂人是在耍什么威风，激酶你都拉黑我了你挂给谁看啊？/ zhēn de bù míng bái xiān lā hēi hòu guà rén shì zài shuǎ shén me wēi fēng , jī méi nǐ dū lā hēi wǒ liǎo nǐ guà gěi shuí kàn ā). They accused radical feminists of being too aggressive and taking inappropriate measures against women and dissidents on behalf of their voiceless peers. As I mentioned in the methodology section, unlike radical feminists, the users who contribute to and interact with ARFB don't exactly belong to an identifiable branch of feminism. Based on their activities and statements at this Bot, the feminist ideas they support can be categorized as anti-radical neoliberal feminism, but they still lack an identity like radical feminism.

ARFB as a community allows its users to be united by a common cause, a cause that resists the aggressive nature of radical feminism. This shared identity provides a solid foundation for a community. Taking a stand against radical feminists creates a sense of solidarity among members, allowing members to affirm the validity of their feelings and opinions, and strengthening the sense of community. Moreover, the group developed a collective defense mechanism against what they perceived as attacks. By contributing to this community and calling on peers who are also opposed to radical feminism to join in attacking others, users in this Bot elicit shared anger and galvanizing group cohesion and opposing the claims of radical feminism more effectively and loudly. Defending and advocating for peers who have been blocked out and therefore do not have a voice strengthens the role of the ARFB community as defenders of values and as a support network for those who feel

marginalized or attacked. Although not as strong as RFB, ARFB still provides emotional support and maintains a community where members feel understood and supported.

One Minute Experience as an Influencer

In addition to helping to build a community of mutual support, another important reason Bot is favored by feminists is that it provides a platform for higher exposure to lesser-exposed feminists. It gives everyone a momentary period of being a key opinion leader, outputting to a larger number of followers and interacting with them. This is crucial for feminists who are always affected by Weibo's censorship and can't maintain a stable account and user base. As Xue and Rose suggest (2022), one of the distinguishing characteristics of Weibo feminists is their flexibility. Like drops of water, they can disappear into the sea of social media at any time. But along with this flexibility comes the cost of individual feminists who often find it difficult to run the same account for long periods and gain steady exposure. The emergence of Bots offers a way out of this situation.

As I mentioned earlier, as of February 15, RFB has 12.5K followers and 1.4M interactions, and ARFB has 7.5K followers and 409.6K interactions. It's worth noting that all of these user buildups started relatively recently. RFB's existing account has been in operation since December 22, 2023, and was suspended by the Weibo platform for a period during that time. ARFB's existing account has been in operation since January 29, 2024. In other words, in a matter of months, these two accounts accumulated a sizable number of followers and interactions at a rapid pace. This kind of growth rate and exposure is difficult for the average Weibo user to achieve, especially those who would discuss topics like feminism, a topic considered sensitive by both Weibo and the authorities. By contributing to major accounts like this instead of sending posts on their own accounts, Weibo feminists

have a much better chance of getting their questions addressed and getting useful resources. Thousands of followers from various fields with a variety of perspectives closely follow what Bot sends and are always ready to join the discussion. Feminists can also gain more attention both within and outside the community through Bots, getting access to a level of influence that would be difficult for them to have individually. This assists them in efficiently campaigning for their claims, quickly gathering users who care about and support their feminist claims, and confronting the patriarchal system and other feminists who hold different ideas.

In a previous review of the literature, Wang (2020) noted that the existence of a Bot provides the possibility for an individual to temporarily become an influential figure. This kind of emotional experience also accounts for feminists' willingness to use the Bot as a medium for communication. By contributing to the Bot and being able to put their ideas into a more vibrant, more exposed community, Weibo feminists were able to share the aura of the Bot account itself and lead the discussion for a short while. This is a free-trial version of leadership and appeal for Chinese feminists, who are struggling to get exposure and group recognition in real life. During Xi's reign, the space for public activism was compressed, traditional Confucianism prevailed, and women were trapped in domestic space, making it more difficult for them to have influence or be heard, whether in the home, the workplace, or in society. The Bot provides a therapeutic and affirming platform for emotional outbursts, for female individuals to amplify their voices and become temporarily influential with a high level of visibility and anticipated vibrant interactions. This emotional fulfillment is also a significant reason why feminists have unanimously chosen the Bot as their social media

vehicle. Bot allows them to detach themselves from the powerlessness of real life and be influencers in their field for a minute.

Bots as Protective Safeguards

Bot's anonymous feature also contributes to a large part of feminists' preference for it. When the Bot resends a submission that a user has privately messaged to it, the Bot's operators do not reveal the source of the text unless the contributor requests it. Whether for radical feminists with aggressive ideas or anti-radical neoliberal feminists who gather primarily to oppose, this anonymity ensures that they can freely express their opinions without fear of harassment. Opposition from the platform, from the public, from the government, or from other feminists filtered through the Bot would have significantly less impact on the content contributors.

If all feminists are considered as a whole, the filter on harassment can be analyzed in two parts: external (e.g., the platform, from the public, from the government), and internal (other feminists). Bot's filtering of external harassment focuses on filtering of antagonism and safety threats. In response to antagonism, Lindberg (2021) notes in her study that one of the main costs of feminists vocalizing themselves is that it can be opposed by male netizens. The Bot provides a space that is more isolated from other men on Weiboⁱ. The exclusive feminist Bot's default rule is that any form of male involvement is not allowedⁱⁱⁱ. On top of that, Bot's anonymity takes this protection to the next level. The difficulty of linking statements on Bots to specific users is more evident when compared to other opinion leaders who have identifying information about themselves, such as Liang Yu of Xue and Rose's study (2022). In this case, where the use of Bot is happening, male opposition and attacks hardly reach

specific feminists. Feminists can still exchange ideas and amplify their voices with other allies but don't have to deal with objections and arguments from male netizens.

Regarding safety threats, Weibo has only negative effects on user privacy protection. It forces users to display their IP address when posting posts and comments. Accounts with more than 500K followers are even required to show their real name, occupation, and company on the homepage. This has deterred many users from taking the risk of being targeted by platforms and governments to express their true thoughts. This is especially true for sensitive topics like feminism, which violates the mainstream thinking of Chinese society today. Individual feminists take the risk of having their accounts banned, being reprimanded by the police, and being criticized by their companies after expressing their views. This is also particularly dangerous for the radical feminists who are the focus of this study, as they are potential criminals. This may also be why RFBs are more active. However, the presence of Bot prevents this privacy leakage. Contributors' private information is hidden and protected. While regulators can still use back-end data to determine exactly who is contributing, locating the specific person sending a particular piece of content through a Bot is much harder than locating them through individual accounts.

In the interaction between these two Bots it was also observed that the Bot plays a role in filtering attacks and harassment from feminist dissidents. There is a strong antagonistic relationship between the two feminist Bot's that are the focus of this study. They sometimes screenshot each other's content and then submit it to their own Bot for discussion and ridicule. The repetition of this behavior can easily cause the other to attack. The presence of the Bot also mitigates the aggressiveness of this interactive behavior to a certain extent. It turns the strife between individuals into a mutual attack between two groups, allowing the

damage to be spread evenly across each of the Bot's users instead of being focused on one individual. When attacking each other, feminists on both sides have difficulty attacking a specific person and can only attack feminists who hold certain ideas as a whole. The difficulty of locating a specific user makes the attacks significantly less harmful and makes the interaction seem more like an exchange of ideas than an act of violence. ARFB has a few exceptions to this rule though. In their posted submissions, some of them focused on attacking a radical feminist called "Fangfang". However, because these attacks are all from one account, it seems that one individual is attacking, this damage has a less significant effect on Fangfang than an attack from many accounts from all sides. The Bot acts as a two-way protection, both for ally partners and feminists in opposing camps. It spreads attacks from others over more individuals rather than concentrating them on one person and concentrates the attacks sent out in one account rather than spreading them out.

Guerrilla War Against Censorship

In the process of collecting data, I found that censorship should be considered as part of the dynamics of interaction between RFB and ARFB and the feminists behind them on social media. The suppression of all kinds of activism by the Chinese government under Xi, especially those that violate traditional Confucianism, is not news. Under such government policies and attitudes, Weibo as a platform is also actively monitoring and censoring its users. Whether to operate properly in the face of government pressure or on purpose, Weibo's censorship has become increasingly extensive and draconian, seriously infringing on users' privacy and anonymity. According to a news report by Reuters (2022), starting in April 2022, Weibo made it mandatory for all domestic users to display province-specific IP addresses on their homepages and under the content they post, and for foreign users to display the country,

claiming that this is an effort to build a more harmonious online environment. Weibo is also making it mandatory for influencers with more than 500,000 followers to display their real names from October 2023, according to Liu Caiyu from Global Times (Liu, 2023). On top of that, Weibo has always had a policy of mandating users to authenticate their IDs and cell phone numbers on the backend. For feminists, these policies, along with the longstanding and increasingly stringent text and image censorship, affect their online activities.

Forced to Keep Fleeing

As I collected data, I found that the biggest impact of Weibo censorship on feminists and their corresponding Bot was that they had no means of having a stable base and were forced to keep migrating. Specifically, this is caused by the fact that Weibo has two types of policies that can restrict the activity of an account. The first is known as banning(禁言/ jìn yán), which means that when a user violates the platform's rules, Weibo will prohibit the user from posting new content for a certain period (ranging from a few days to a few hundred days), but the old content will still be visible and the user will not disappear. The other is known as account blow-up(炸号/ zhà hào), which means that when a user seriously violates the rules, Weibo will simply cancel the user's account, all content will no longer be visible and the account will not be searchable. Notably, Weibo allows users to report each other for violations and reserves the right to decide. As I mentioned before, both RFB and ARFB's accounts operated for a short period of time, but that doesn't mean they didn't exist before. That's because their previous accounts were blown up by the platform and fully canceled. Feminists have been very aware of this and have their own ways of dealing with this policy. In ARFB's profile and post, the real operator of the account repeatedly mentions that the

account was not registered through regular channels but was purchased from the second-hand market and implies that if the account disappears there is another one who can replace it. The name of RFB's account is called Big Woman Chatroom Furious Version. on the other hand, implying that there were other versions before it.

Such account revivals and migrations have become the norm for Weibo activists. The platform is aware of their existence and has targeted them for restriction. With the latest strong real-name policies such as IP display, locating a user or a user's new account has become much easier. This forces feminists to spend considerable effort and time dealing with censorship besides publicizing their claims and discussing them with others. The risk that an account could disappear at any time always hangs in the air. At the same time, such censorship results in neither account being able to have a stable user base like other more moderate Bots or influencers, and they often need to start from 0 to accumulate followers again and lose their former content. For Weibo, this approach has been effective in limiting the proliferation of sensitive topics and the aggregation of activist power. But for feminists, this method is not only a waste of time and energy, but also a limitation of community dynamics. When accounts are erased, all previous content is lost, and this can obliterate the movement's history, valuable discussions, and previously shared resources. The long-term risk of account deletion also creates an environment of uncertainty for feminists. For fear of incurring censorship, feminists sometimes actively suppress open and lively discussion and engage in self-censorship. The impact of this on the visibility of feminist claims over time has been significant. And since new accounts typically have fewer followers, this will not fully make up the lost and cannot really stop the diminished reach of feminist information and advocacy. Not only that, but strict real-name policies and IP displays can make users more

easily identifiable, compromising their privacy and potentially exposing them to real-world influences. The potential loss of accounts and the need to constantly adapt to censorship can also bring fear, stress, and irritation. This is why radical feminist Lin Maomao left Weibo. The loss or failure to sustain such a voice is a considerable setback for the feminist movement in China.

Creative But Compromised Language

Censorship for Weibo feminist activists and Bot has had other implications, such as compromised language use. Weibo regulates content based on keywords, and content or comments can't be sent out when specific words are triggered. RFB and ARFB, and the feminists who contribute to them, have taken two main approaches to circumvent this censorship, sharing images and homophonic words. Regarding sharing images, during my data collection process, because Weibo is a text-heavy platform, I only crawled the text posts, but when organizing the data, I found that a lot of posts only had the words "share image(分享图片/ fēn xiǎng tú piàn)" without any specific content. There are as many as 51 such posts in RFB. After researching, I found that when content contributors wanted to discuss something that might contain Weibo censorship keywordsⁱⁱⁱ, they avoided sending direct text and instead wrote down what they wanted to say, took a screenshot, and then submitted the post as an image. Bot will also take the submission and send it out as a picture. Weibo's censorship of feminists resulting in their need to use images instead of text makes it impossible for people to find out about this information through keyword searches. As a result, this leaves a lot of advocacy and knowledge confined to the Bot, making it difficult to disseminate it outward. And because of the extra steps required for both content creation and

consumption, it may not be efficient for widespread information. While picture allows activists to bypass automated keyword-based censorship systems so that they can disseminate sensitive or restricted content, it is not a sustainable approach as technology and policies evolve.

In addition to images, another measure feminists have taken to get around censorship is the use of homophones (see Chart 2 for examples). Homophones in Chinese refer to words that sound the same but have different shapes and meanings, and this has a long history of use on the Chinese Internet. According to Poplin (2016), the earliest use of homophones to circumvent censorship on Chinese social media started with “grass mud horse”. Chinese netizens used neutral characters to replace cursing characters but still made the word sound the same, to circumvent governmental censorship on rude language use. This method is still widely used by Weibo. There are many examples of this in the two Bots that are the focus of this study. In the table below, I have listed some examples of homophones used in these Bots. Notably, when looking for alternatives to words describing men, feminists tend to choose words with humiliating or demeaning connotations.

Original character	Original meaning	The version to avoid censorship	Meaning of the version to avoid censorship
善人(shàn rén)	Good person (not gender-specific)	骗人(shàn rén)	Castrate man
爹(diē)	Father	跌(diē)	Fell-down

哥(gē)	Brother	割(gē)	Cut
男权(nán quán)	Patriarch	男拳 ^{iv} (nán quán)	Men fist
男(nán)	Male	蠕(nán)	Worm
辱(rǔ)	Insult	乳(rǔ)	Milk

Chart 2. Example of homophones used at RFB and ARFB

On top of the homophones, they also added emoji and English letters to their usage. They use ♂ to refer to males, 🌟 to replace sex, and sfz (a phonetic abbreviation for ID card) to replace ID card. While such images, words, and emojis can help bypass censorship to communicate ideas, this is still a compromised use of language. It is both more time-consuming and less efficient compared to writing a straightforward text message. It may lead to misunderstandings as the audience may interpret or misinterpret the intended message since the use of language may become more complex, as it contains multiple layers of meaning and can only convey information indirectly. Moreover, choosing this way of communication is almost like giving up the opportunity for the information to break out of the information cocoon and be searchable by others. If information is only shared with feminists who understand the coded language, it reinforces an echo chamber where only like-minded people can interact and fails to vocalize for the feminist movement. Public discourse may be stifled or limited, and feminist voices or perspectives may be marginalized if they cannot adapt to these new forms of communication. This compromised language may also require a higher level of digital literacy to navigate and understand indirect forms of

communication, which may widen the digital divide and prevent feminist claims from being communicated. In conclusion, while these strategies may be necessary to ensure expression in restrictive environments, they may have complex implications for how feminists communicate, understand, and interact in digital spaces.

Bots as Solutions

The prevalence of censorship again explains the feminists' choice to adopt the Bot as a communication vehicle. Bot prevents privacy leaks while ensuring consistent exposure. As mentioned before, Weibo displays the user's IP address, whereas users who send posts via Bot have no such concerns. Posts sent by Bot tend to show only the IP address of the account holder, which is often changed using a proxy. This goes a long way to alleviating the worry that feminists have about receiving harassment and punishment. They can send what they want to say, ask the questions they want to ask, and not be easily targeted by other male internet users, platforms, and governments. It was also mentioned earlier that compromised language usage can limit the exposure of content as it cannot be targeted by keywords. Bots mitigate this problem to some extent as well. Due to its larger follower base and community nature, Bots can help content that cannot be keyword-searched gain some attention. No matter how the content is edited and altered, it will receive a promised number of views from Bot followers. Once a piece of content has had a certain number of initial views, Weibo will not continue to strongly restrict that piece of content and may even recommend it to the public. That said, even if it doesn't completely solve the problem, Bots are still one of the more sensible responses to censorship that feminists can take at the moment.

The Hate Vanguard

Both radical feminists and anti-radical neoliberal feminists have demonstrated remarkable aggressiveness in their activities on Weibo Bot. The data I have collected provides support for this. In RFB, except for a small part of the content that is about mutual support and resource exchange, the content that makes up a major part of the Bot is still critique and attack. Radical feminists are here to furiously express not only their dissatisfaction with oppression under a patriarchal society but also their opinions about other women who hold dissenting views. In ARFB, attacks are also the main theme of the entire Bot, with occasional exceptions. The anti-radical neoliberal feminists here are actively refuting the actions and sayings of radical feminists on Weibo in addition to expressing their dissatisfaction with men and patriarchy. Why is feminism on the internet considered to be getting more and more extreme, and why do they sometimes reflect on whether they've become the vanguard of hate in the new age? Here I will look at this aggressiveness through data collected and attempt to discuss these questions.

Boiling Male-hate

Regardless of the type of feminist, their main target of attack remains men who have been favored by the patriarchal society. The anger towards men and patriarchal society is well represented in RFB. They argue against patriarchal social norms and strive to show that men should be considered the second sex because of their many inferiorities. They seek to subvert the traditional hierarchies that typically view women as the "second sex" and to liberate women from the judgment of patriarchal society. The anger displayed by radical feminists in RFB is a reaction to the injustices and inequalities created by patriarchal norms. They displayed a provocative stance that sought to subvert traditional gender narratives to

eliminate entrenched judgments and prejudices, and to seek progressive change from a cultural and linguistic perspective.

Firstly, concerning the use of language, radical feminists believe that many curse words in Chinese are associated with women, whereas when it comes to praising people, they are predominantly associated with men. Thus, radical feminists in RFB have devoted themselves to two main areas, the de-stigmatization of female-related terms and the desacralization of male-related terms. From the data I collected from RFB, there are 38 data points on how radical feminists have advocated for the subversion of the conventions of language use under a patriarchal society. With regard to combating the stigmatization of women, radical feminists collectively refer to abusive words containing women as femme-insulting words (辱女词/ rǔ nǚ cí) and actively refuse to use them, as well as educate more people to stop using them. Listing some examples of what is reflected in the data, such words include bitches (婊子/ biǎo zǐ), according to Collins Dictionary it is commonly used to refer to whore. It is a very gender-specific insulting term used to accuse women of sexual misconduct or of exchanging sex for profit. Radical feminists have argued that this is a patriarchal control and discipline of women, as there is no equivalent degrading term for men in Chinese, and in the structure of the character, one of the parts of a character is the word "female". In the data, radical feminists counseled their elder family members and others to stop using the word and replace it with a more gender-neutral term.

Another commonly used curse term that has been strongly resisted by radical feminists in RFB is the abusive term "fuck your mom" (操你妈). This is a much more widely used phrase, and even though it isn't something that can just be directed at women, the word

is very closely associated with the intentions of women, especially with mothers' figures. In the section on censorship, I previously mentioned the sanitized version of the term, grass mud horse, but they still convey the same meaning of shaming mothers. To attack not the person directly, but the mother, is to treat the female as a completely subordinate highly sexualized object. Radical feminists have called for replacing "fuck your mother" (操你妈/ cào nǐ mā) with "fuck your father" (操你爹/ cào nǐ diē) to oppose this sexualization and objectification of women in language that patriarchal society has perpetuated.

Regarding the desacralization of male-related terms, another important claim made by radical feminists at RFB is to replace the commonly used positive words about men in Chinese. To give some examples, on Chinese social media, one of the words used to praise people for being awesome is dick(屌/ diǎo), which means male genitalia. The word is used with no specific gender reference, but even when women achieve something or are very successful, it is the word that is used to praise them. Moreover, when used, the word does not seem to have a strong sexual connotation. People completely normalize the appearance of male genitalia in their everyday use of the word. As a response to this commonly used word, radical feminists have advocated replacing the word with clitoris(蒂/ dì) to praise, in particular, women and big women.

Another word commonly used to refer to an omnipotent God is also relevant to men. 老天爷(lǎo tiān yé), meaning Godly Grandfather, is often used as an exclamation. In China, "God" is the common name of the people for "heaven", and the mention of " grandfather" seems to have a kind of personality meaning. In the Chinese language, when someone is

called "grandfather" (爷/ yé), it means that the person's status and position are extremely honorable and noble, and thus the title "God Grandfather" came into being." "God" in the minds of the people is a supreme, the best, the most righteous, all-knowing, all-powerful person. He knows all the evils on earth and can punish evil and promote good. Because there is no uncivilized or rude interpretation, the word is used very widely and is not just restricted to the Internet or informal settings. However, the reference to gender in the word is obvious, that is, older men. Radical feminists have advocated changing this designation to 老天奶(lǎo tiān nǎi), the God Grandmother. They believe that women, as the fertile, empowered mothering gender are more deserving of taking the place of the almighty God. This change in language challenges subconscious biases, stripping excellence and praise from male-centered terminology and suggesting that women can embody the highest virtues and strengths.

By replacing words that stigmatize women and replacing words that praise men, radical feminists are using a two-pronged approach to fully communicate and share their long-standing anger and resentment through language. Also, through this change, radical feminists hope to eliminate the sexual norms and slut-shaming that have long been imposed on Chinese women. Radical feminists are working to challenge the gender hierarchies implicit in language, to assert women's identities in the public sphere, and to move away from male-dominated cultural narratives and the implicit misogyny in society. Through language as a form of social activism, radical feminists are further hoping to draw attention to and protest gender inequalities, empower women, educate the public and raise gender awareness to encourage women to think critically about the language they use and the values it reflects.

Secondly, the attack on men displayed by radical feminists in RFB also manifests itself in a boycott of all content related to men and accuses them of being intellectually and morally deficient. Of the data I collected, 20 of the RFB's data were about criticizing the inferiority of men. 8 of them were calls for boycotting products with male output, or with male protagonists. Across everything from entertainment programs, songs, games, novels, influencers, podcasts, and more, radical feminists have voiced the discomfort and offense they feel when men are involved and have called on other peers to join them in boycotting. They remind each other and, in many cases, explain in detail why these things are not female-friendly or sexualize women. By boycotting male works or products featuring male protagonists, these feminists are exercising their power as consumers to influence the marketplace. Their actions are a form of cultural critique and an effort to challenge and change the narrative of popular culture. They hope to use collective action to make a statement and get content creators to consider the impact of their work on notions of gender to address and rectify broader societal power inequalities and work to subvert the absolute sovereignty of men in patriarchal societies.

The remaining 12 data that fall into this category are judgments on the ability and moral inadequacy of men. Radical feminists see hatred of men as a legitimate response to the qualities and characteristics they exhibit. Radical feminists in RFB criticize men for being arrogant, stupid, deceitful, and for consistently using unjustified gender structures to exploit and oppress women. They also mobilize their peers to report men who demonstrate inappropriate behavior or verbally abuse and harass fellow feminists. Men and male-dominated patriarchal society are still the greatest enemies to radical feminists. They have angrily advocated for the demolition or reform of patriarchal gender norms and systems and

have made statements about the necessity for change. By criticizing men, radical feminists aim to promote a cultural shift so that these behaviors are no longer normalized or accepted, emphasizing a more confrontational and uncompromising stance on gender inequality and patriarchal structures.

Regarding the ARFB, even though their main target is radical feminists, men are by no means their allies. In fact, from the data I've gathered, a number of anti-radical neoliberal feminists are trying to redirect radical feminists' attacks by claiming that they're not attacking the men they're supposed to be attacking but are instead criticizing women. Far from being pro-male, users who interact with ARFB are almost implicitly recognizing the antagonistic stance of men and defaulting to the position that attacking them is the right stance to take. Neoliberal feminists have also criticized men for being overly sexually driven, for stigmatizing women, and for not being capable of working. Despite having a more primary focus other than attacking men, ARFB's criticism of radical feminists does not align them with feminists' greatest enemy, men. Although different feminist groups believe in different ideas to address the social problems they witness, reflections on and attacks on men and patriarchal society continue to be the focus of Weibo feminist activism. Whether they tend to focus on radical systemic change or on succeeding in the existing system, radical feminists and anti-radical neoliberal feminists agree on their attitudes toward men. Their anger and attacks against men demonstrate this unity of thought that men should not be exempted from causing gender inequality in any way.

Women-hating Feminists

Even though all women-identified, feminists do not naturally belong to one camp. Womanhood is an identity, but feminism is a political affiliation. Inevitably, there will be

more nuanced political subdivisions among feminists. Even though there can be a temporary unification of camps against men and patriarchal societies, feminists are still in strife with each other and continue to attack each other. This dynamic has manifested itself remarkably in RFB and ARFB I focus on for this research. Radical feminists believe that neoliberal feminists are dragging down the feminist movement, and anti-radical neoliberal feminists believe that radical feminists are too hard on women. RFB and ARFB bring together feminists with the same views to form echo chambers that keep ratcheting up the opposition and hate.

Not unthinkingly supporting all women, radical feminists seem to hold a relatively critical and cynical perspective on women as well. In addition to men, radical feminists' anger and main targets of attack include neoliberal feminists. As I mentioned before, Rottenberg (2018) defines neoliberal feminists as feminists who deny the socioeconomic and cultural structures that shape our lives while constantly agitating for women to take full responsibility for their own well-being and self-care. On Chinese social media, feminists who hold neoliberal feminist views often claim that women have freedom of choice and should be free to express and practice their own feminist ideologies, whether progressive or conservative. They believe that women should be respected and not interfered with no matter what kind of marriage, clothes, and lifestyle they choose. However, in the data I collected, radical feminists expressed strong dissatisfaction with this view. They argue that choosing to marry when not doing so is not a socially acceptable option for women is a drag on the feminist movement. When women have not been able to escape being sexualized by a patriarchal society and men, wearing clothes that sexualize women is a betrayal of the feminist movement. Neoliberal feminists, on the other hand, believe that women's choices should not

be judged, but should be fully supported, regardless of the implications in the broader movement. They believe that supporting all of women's choices is what makes feminism work. This ideological discrepancy has led to strife between them, and the existence of Boots has centralized and amplified this opposition.

In RFB, 64 pieces of data contained criticisms of this "women are free to choose whatever they want" argument. These criticisms focus on two main areas, beauty slavery (美役/ měi yì) and marriage. Regarding beauty slavery, neoliberal feminists claim that getting manicures, wearing makeup, losing weight, and other behaviors that cost money and energy to become beautiful is for the sake of women themselves. Radical feminists have collected these statements and satirized and criticized them. Radical feminists see this as an effort to fit the existing beauty standards of a patriarchal society that is designed to control and sexualize women. They accuse neoliberal feminists of pursuing the illusion of freedom. Radical feminists have pointed out in posts that women's quest for manicures, high heels, long hair, dresses, and the pursuit of a slim figure is not really of their own will but has been influenced by the beauty norms imposed on women by a patriarchal society. Equally, the neoliberal feminists who support the pursuit of these are accomplices to the stupid patriarchal system.

Another thing that radical feminists are strongly opposed to is marriage under a patriarchal social system and the women who choose to marry. Radical feminists are convinced that marriage is exploitative and oppressive to women and that women must not step into it if they want to escape the influence of patriarchal society. Based on this idea, they discuss and criticize women who choose to get married, or who suffer violence or bad treatment and still don't get divorced. They satirize women who choose marriage as naive and

unenlightened for still having illusions about men and romantic relationships under a patriarchal society. Examples of some of the criticisms in the RFB include: “women who choose to marry loving men and hate women”(爱男厌女/ ài nán yàn nǚ), “competing with women for men”(雌竞/ cí jìng), and “being willing to be used and exploited”(自愿做驴/ zì yuàn zuò lú).

Betrayal (背刺/ bèi cì) is a word that comes up a lot at RFB. Radical feminists are furious, claiming that neoliberal feminists are traitors to the feminist movement and collaborators with a patriarchal society because when radical feminists are going all out to fight for upward mobility for all women, they are jumping in to say that they prefer to go downward and that the freedom to go downward is also freedom. This is the main reason radical feminists are angry and critical of neoliberal feminists is that they argue that women do not have the freedom to choose downward at a time when the right to choose is still not universal for women. Radical feminists thus accuse neoliberal feminists of being performative feminists, stupid, blind, and uneducable. Radical feminists thus classify feminists according to their level of enlightenment and resistance to a patriarchal society, arguing that radical feminists are "more enlightened" than others and are the most progressive feminist pioneers, while neoliberal feminists are "feminist latecomers" for not being flagrantly opposed to patriarchal convention, and slowed down the movement. This critical and non-inclusive attitude is reinforced by the exclusive, isolated space of Bot. Radical feminists firmly believe that women should be natural anti-patriarchal allies and cannot accept potentially divergent viewpoints and camps. They set the bar for women to become "qualified" feminists, even at the risk of further divisions within the feminist movement.

ARFB's aggressive nature is evident in its name. This Bot was created to oppose radical feminists, so content that attacks them is essential. Of the 58 data from ARFB I have collected, 41 of them involve attacks on radical feminists. The main motivation for the anti-radical neoliberal feminists to attack is the idea that radical feminists aren't really supporting women but are judging them. Anti-radical neoliberal feminists claim that radical feminists are too paranoid and have deviated from the goals of feminist activism by turning the attack on men into the attack on women. Their attacks on radical feminists focus on two aspects, the first being that radical feminists' judgment and attacks on women have turned them into the new "patriarchal representatives" who constantly scrutinize and control women. Many posts in ARFB mention that radical feminists constantly harass and judge other women and influencers, causing them a lot of distress and fear in their real lives. For example, one post from ARFB says that the radical feminists influencer Fang “As an influencer who preaches about killing people on public social media platforms like Weibo on New Year's Day (作为一个博主，逢年过节在微博这种公共社交平台宣扬要鲨人/zuò wéi yī gè bó zhǔ, féng nián guò jié zài wēi bó zhè zhǒng gōng gòng shè jiāo píng tái xuān yáng yào shā rén)”. They criticized radical feminists for cyber-violence against neoliberal feminists using IP addresses and real names displayed on Weibo.

Another aspect of their attack focused on slamming radical feminists for claiming things they didn't do, exaggerating and falsifying for influence and attention. One representative of radical feminism that was centrally attacked was Fang. Feminists gathered on ARFB collected many inconsistencies and implausible details in her published posts and accused her of faking her lifestyle and identity in an attempt to deceive women into

practicing impossible lifestyles. For example, one of the posts says that: “I'm laughing my ass off at the fact that everything happens at 9:00 a.m. in the morning in the United States. (我真的快笑疯了, 异曲同工都是在美国早上九点呢/wǒ zhēn de kuài xiào fēng liǎo, yì qū tóng gōng dū shì zài měi guó zǎo shàng jiǔ diǎn ne).” In this post and its comments, anti-radical neoliberal feminists are discussing how Fang's shared life seems to be fabricated because all the events took place at 9:00 AM. Anti-radical neoliberal feminists believe that radical feminists hierarchize feminists by exaggerating their contributions and eliminating dissidents with false information.

Exposing and challenging radical feminists is a major mission of the ARFB. Judgment and control whether from women, especially feminists, or men, is just as unacceptable and outrageous to anti-radical neo-liberal feminists. Anti-radical neoliberal feminists angrily refer to radical feminists as female daddies(女爹/ nǚ diē), accusing them of violating feminist principles of empowerment and liberation. And they accuse radical feminists of using intimidation tactics, resorting to censorship, and reporting to harass and control neoliberal feminists and influencers. They also accuse radicals of undermining the credibility and unity of the feminist movement, deceiving, promoting unattainable lifestyles, creating hierarchies within the feminist movement, and breaking down already fragile feminist alliances. To counter the radical feminists' demands and hold on women, anti-radical neoliberal feminists have also begun to attack, even while claiming to affirm and support all women.

In addition to the aggressiveness of the two Bots that can be seen in the content, the text they used to attack other feminists is also worth mentioning. While radical feminists are

calling for the replacement of words that insult women, they are at the same time inventing new words that insult women. While anti-radical neoliberal feminists advocate in favor of all women, they also create gender-specific words to attack radical feminists. In RFB two words attacking women appear frequently, the first is freeman(自由人/ zì yóu rén) and the second is a donkey. Freeman is a term of contempt used by radical feminists against neoliberal feminists who support the freedom to move downward. The epithet is rich in mockery of the pseudo-freedom that neoliberal feminism pursues in a patriarchal society. While it is true that the use of female-related terms is avoided, it is clear from the data collected from RFB that the term is used only in relation to neoliberal feminists and never in reference to men. Donkey, on the other hand, is used by radical feminists to refer to married women, satirizing the fact that they are exploited and taken advantage of like donkeys without ever resisting. The word was also coined for women and is only used to describe women who are involved in marriage.

In the ARFB, the scornful term used to refer to radical feminists is the radical younger sister(激妹/ jī mèi). I've mentioned before that feminists use homophonic words to avoid censorship; here homophonic words have other uses. The term radical younger sister consists of two parts, radical(激 jī), and younger sister(妹/ mèi). Radical(激/jī), on the one hand, refers to radical, but on the other hand, it is also a homonym for whore(妓/jī), a word commonly used to humiliate women for being prostitutes. Younger sister, on the one hand, is a rebuke to the radical feminists' claim to be big women and big sisters, and on the other hand, it is also a mockery of their naivety. Despite the deliberate avoidance of the gender-

indicative "妹(mèi)" and the replacement with the homophonic "酶(méi)", the term was still created on the basis of femininity.

There was a question in the RFB that generated a lot of discussion. The question was: are feminists the vanguard of misogyny in the new century? Although feminists should be allies due to their common support for feminism, the dynamics displayed through Bots are instead aggressively confrontational. While radical feminists are active in correcting femme-shaming words, they also create femme-shaming words to use as weapons to attack and demean opposing viewpoints. Despite emphasizing the injustices of the system, when it comes to women who choose to marry, radical feminists do or can do little more than equate women with stupid, pathetic donkeys. Despite emphasizing support for all women, anti-radical neo-liberal feminists have also shown mockery and disdain towards radical feminists. Feminists on both sides kept justifying their positions and attacking each other's beliefs and behaviors by various means, even in some cases violating their own advocacies. The concept and direction of indigenous Chinese feminism have been frequently debated and negotiated in the controversy. Feminists blame each other for not contributing enough, for not supporting women enough, and try to find the one true meaning of feminism in this argument.

However, with this interactive dynamic comes the cost. The struggle for ideological dominance seemed to overshadow the broader goals of the feminist movement. Disappointment and hate for other feminists also diluted the forces that drove the feminist movement. The fervent debates within the feminist Bots have illuminated a complex landscape where feminists, despite sharing a common cause, often engage in contentious dynamics. The recurring disputes and the creation of divisive language not only reflect the struggle for ideological alignment but also signify the ongoing redefinition of feminism in

modern Chinese society. These internal tensions, while indicative of a vibrant discourse, hint at an underlying challenge: finding a balance between diversity and unity within the movement.

Conclusion

The long history of Chinese feminism and social media have collided to create new possibilities. Like empowering other activists, social media empowers Chinese feminists. Online feminism in China has taken on a whole new dynamic on Weibo. Bot as a form of content crowdfunding has also been adapted by feminists to make their case. What radical feminists at the radical feminist bot and anti-radical neoliberal feminists at the anti-radical feminist bot show is a fragment of this complex dynamic. In this study, some of the posts of these two Bots were collected, categorized, and analyzed in detail.

To explore the interconnections and dynamics between feminists on Weibo, I collected all posts from February 4, 2024, to 2.15, 2024 from RFB and ARFB, and subsequently coded and textually analyzed them. From this, I identified that the dynamics between the relatively vocal radical feminists and anti-radical neoliberal feminists on Weibo are mainly about three themes, Bot Culture, Censorship, and Hate. In particular, the rise of Bots has helped feminists create mutually supportive community safe houses where they can exchange ideas and resources. Bots have also helped feminists gain a level of influence that is difficult for individual users to achieve, gaining emotional support from public interactions and filtering out harassment from anti-feminist men and governments. Weibo-specific censorship is also an important part of this dynamic. Under censorship, feminists have developed a range of countermeasures. They have been forced to continually migrate accounts and develop and use compromising language, including emojis, homophones, and

images to avoid censorship and punishment. Finally, at Bots feminists showed total outrage. Their dissatisfaction with patriarchal society and men, as well as feminists who betray them or hold dissenting views, are left in Bots. Their attacks on these constitute a new dynamic in Weibo feminism and continue to debate the concept and direction of Chinese feminism.

This study offers some possible implications. First, the study of Bot culture on Weibo reflects a new strategy and possible support system for digital activism in China. This study discusses how feminist advocacy has shown a tendency to become more organized and sustained through Bots within the constraints of the Chinese authorities. Second, research addressing censorship and countermeasures demonstrates the resilience of feminists on Weibo. How they have adapted to censorship demonstrates innovative communication strategies that may have important implications for other movements facing similar challenges. Finally, this study depicts the landscape and dynamics of Chinese online feminism as reflected by Radical Feminist Bot and Anti-Radical Feminist Bot. It reveals tensions within the feminist movement, marking a key stage in the evolution of feminist discourse in China, and debates about strategy and ideology. The study's findings might reflect wider societal and generational shifts in attitudes toward freedom of expression, the role of social media in social change, and gender equality. The dynamics observed may have implications for policy and governmental approaches to internet regulation, online activism, and the relationship with feminist groups.

Have feminists really become the vanguard of hate for women? This study can only provide a glimpse of what might answer that question. The direction and landscape of Chinese feminism require more cross-platform comparative studies and research on state response and regulation. The two schools of feminism that this study focuses on are not

representative of all existing feminists in China. More diverse feminist camps will also provide a more comprehensive understanding. Online feminism in China is constantly updating and changing, and more dynamics remain to be seen and studied.

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ⁱ The use of a binary gender and sexuality scheme in this research is a concession to the prevailing social atmosphere and norms in China. The only widely recognized and visible genders in Chinese society are male and female, and the only sexual orientation is heterosexual.

ⁱⁱ From what I've seen this is mostly determined by the gender selected on the user's homepage. Sometimes the use of language, and topics of interest can also be a means of judgment. See related article: Li, W., & Dickinson, M. (2017, September). Gender Prediction for Chinese Social Media Data. In *RANLP* (pp. 438-445).

ⁱⁱⁱ Regarding Weibo's censorship keywords, they don't give a specific list, it exists more as a vague hidden rule. These are often guessed by the user based on whether or not what is sent is visible to the public or if it can be sent.

^{iv} This is actually a response to men calling feminists women fists.