TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISMS IN TRANSLATION: THE MAKING OF A WOMEN’S ANTI-DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MOVEMENT IN CHINA

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Lu Zhang, M.A.

The Ohio State University
2008

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Cathy Rakowski, Adviser
Professor Jill Bystydzienski
Professor Mytheli Sreenivas

Approved by

Adviser
Graduate Program in Women’s Studies
ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the construction of the contemporary Chinese women’s movement against domestic violence. It explores the anti-DV campaign in China within the global context of women’s transnational human rights campaigns against gender violence and historical factors (local and global) associated with the origin and work of the Network/Research Center for Combating Domestic Violence (the DVN), a new women’s non-governmental organization in Beijing with an unprecedented and exclusive commitment to the fight against domestic violence in China. Specifically, my analysis interrogates the DVN as a global-local interface for women’s rights that usually emphasizes initiatives at the global level and their “impact” on women’s organizing at the local level. My case study finds that transnational feminist advocacy activism, which has made violence against women an international policy issue through application of a human rights framework, provides crucial political opportunities and economic resources for women’s local political organizing. For anti-DV activism in the civil society sector of China, the processes of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 and the international donors who fund Chinese women’s NGOs are particularly important. However, Chinese women have not bee passive followers of their Western sisters, nor is violence against women an imposed agenda or imported ideology. In fact, for DVN activists,
mobilizing against domestic violence and establishing a specialized NGO to address this issue went beyond the goal of combating domestic violence. To raise social awareness and promote institutional action, the DVN focuses on inculcating gender and human rights perspectives in local agencies and adopts an “engaging” approach to the state through the official women’s organization, a strategic process shaped by local relations of power. In sum, my dissertation argues that local women’s activism forms a critical—though under-studied and under-recognized—site through which a global feminist cause (in this case VAW as a human rights violation) is advanced in locally appropriate ways that feed back into the cause’s increasing importance on the global agenda. Evidence comes primarily from archival research, observations and interviews with DVN activists.
Dedicated to my dear parents Zhang Ding and Zhou Lizhen, 
and to my husband and best friend, Bai Jie.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation is indebted to the work and support of many people. My adviser, Professor Cathy Rakowski, has been a loving, inspiring and tremendous mentor and teacher to me. Her patient and intellectual guidance, warming encouragement, and unfailing belief in me and this project have shepherded me through the Ph.D. program of women’s studies like an unflagging beacon of hope. I wish to acknowledge my deepest gratitude and most profound thanks to her.

I thank my dissertation committee for discussions and advice. I am grateful to Professor Jill Bystydzienski for providing editorial suggestions to my dissertation. I am also thankful to her for inviting me to her classes to talk about my dissertation. These experiences have helped to shape the development of my dissertation writing in important ways. I am also grateful to Professor Mytheli Sreenivas for sharing her critical insights and feedback with me. Her class on women’s movements and nationalism in India has been stimulating to my own thoughts on the relationship between women and the state in China. I am also indebted to Professor Wendy Smooth for her devoted attention to my project. She has always been a role model of diligence, intelligence and enthusiasm to me.
I also wish to thank Professor Cindy Burack, Professor Ara Wilson, Professor Mary Margaret Fonow and Professor Marie Cieri (in Geography) for inspiring me with their scholarship and assisting with my professional development at its various stages.

My dissertation research was supported by numerous small grants from the Ohio State University. Without the generous support from the G. Micheal Riley International Academic Fund, the Graduate Student Dissertation Research Travel Grant, the Coca-Cola Critical Difference Grant for Research on Women, Gender and Gender Equity, and the Phyllis Krumm Memorial International Scholarship, all administered by OSU programs, I would not have been able to conduct and complete my dissertation fieldwork.
VITA

January 25, 1978……………………… Born Shanghai, People’s Republic of China

1995-1999…………………………………B.A. American and English Language and Literature, Fudan University, Shanghai, China

2003……………………………………….M.A. Women’s Studies, The Ohio State University

2001-present………………………………Graduate Teaching and Research Associate,

The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Women’s Studies
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# List of Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASS</td>
<td>Chinese Academy of Social Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWN</td>
<td>China Women’s News</td>
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<td>CSW</td>
<td>Commission on the Status of Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWGL</td>
<td>The Center for Women’s Global Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV</td>
<td>domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVN</td>
<td>Network/Research Center for Combating Domestic Violence of China Law Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLS</td>
<td>Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWCW</td>
<td>United Nations Forth World Conference on Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCHR</td>
<td>Norwegian Center for Human Rights, Oslo University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.R.C.</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>United Nations Development Fund for Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAW</td>
<td>violence against women</td>
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research Question

As a country with a long history of state feminism, China perpetuated a “grand gender narrative” portraying the Communist as the savior who had bestowed gender equality on Chinese women. However, the “gender equality” myth has faced increasing challenges since the economic reforms in the 1980s, launched under the “open-door” policy by the Dengist regime. As the country rapidly opened up to the world and engaged enthusiastically with global capitalism to achieve fast economic development, the grand narrative began to dismantle gradually as women reflected drastic and often negative impacts of these changes. However, this history of globalization has not only brought forth the integration of China into the global economic system, it also has connected China to the tracks of what has been alternatively described as international/global/transnational feminism. As a matter of fact, the Fourth World conference on women and its parallel NGO forum, often regarded as a landmark event organized by the international women’s movement, was hosted by China in 1995. As a result, transnational feminist activism became inserted irrevocably into the gender narratives of China, contributing to a pluralization of women’s voices and political agendas in general.

1 Here, I follow Stetson and Mazur’s definition of “state feminism” as the “activities of government structures that are formally charged with furthering women’s status and rights” (1995, 1-2). China can be described as a country of “state feminism” because the All China Women’s Federation was formed by the Chinese government to advance women’s conditions following the country’s liberation.

One newly emerged “gender narrative” in China appears around the issue of domestic violence and against the background of an international women’s human rights movement since the early 1980s. In the 1990s, at both the grassroots and institutional level, an unprecedented wave of women’s domestic violence activism took off in China, aiming to transform public awareness and social policies. Gender violence, for the first time in decades, went public in the Chinese society. The growth of this activism was especially obvious after the Beijing conference in 1995. In 2000, this momentum led to the founding of the Network/Research Center for Combating Domestic Violence of the China Law Society (the Domestic Violence Network/DVN) in Beijing, the first and only women’s non-governmental organization in the country focused exclusively on addressing the issue of domestic violence. As the central hub of women’s organizing against gender violence in China, the Domestic Violence Network not only signals the formation of a local women’s movement, it also represents a local movement deeply involved with the cause of global feminism. As a matter of fact, this organization is founded as a local response to the global women’s movement’s call to create “a world free of violence for women.”

My dissertation is primarily a historical and critical investigative study of the formation and activism of the Domestic Violence Network in Beijing, China. Drawing on the DVN as a case study, this dissertation is, however, devoted to the exploration and discussion of the global-local interface created by the so-called international/global/transnational feminism in the context of women’s movements against violence against women. My research question is, how to understand the construction of a Chinese women’s movement against domestic violence, as is signaled by the emergence of the Domestic Violence Network in Beijing, in relation to transnational feminist activism against gender violence? To answer this question, I shall conduct a chronological inquiry and trace the development of women’s domestic violence activism in China between the 1980s and the present. Following the chronology of this movement, I shall pursue and discuss three specific main questions. First, how did transnational feminist campaigns encounter Chinese women’s movement? Second, how did this encounter mobilize the Domestic Violence Network in Beijing? Third, how is DVN deploying global feminist ideas and practices to
address the issue of domestic violence in China, and what are the products of this global-local relationship in the Chinese context?

My contention is that the mobilization of the recent women’s movement against domestic violence in the People’s Republic of China, as is illustrated essentially through the founding history and activism of the DVN, is the outcome of a vibrant global-local nexus enabled by the phenomenon of transnational feminisms in the area of gender violence. The political impact of transnational feminist campaigns against violence against women (VAW) at the international level has a stimulating effect on women’s movement initiatives against the same issue at the local side. In China’s case, the international recognition accorded to the issue of VAW, especially at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) hosted by the Chinese government in Beijing in 1995, fostered a positive and affirmative environment for Chinese women’s mobilization against domestic violence. I discuss the marginalization of women’s domestic violence discourses and activism before the FWCW and the transforming impacts of the Conference.

However, to identify only the global dimension of the picture is not adequate. The specific argument presented in this dissertation also asserts the importance of the local to the advancement of the “global” feminist cause. Chinese women are not merely passive followers of their Western sisters in the global tide of protests against VAW. Nor is VAW an imposed agenda or imported ideology. To the Chinese women activists I interacted with during my research, mobilizing against domestic violence and establishing a specialized organization to address this issue go beyond the purpose of combating domestic violence only. Their deployment of the global feminist discourses and strategies also are shaped crucially by local conditions of power. To reveal how the local is a site of agency and power instead of being just a product of global conditions, my dissertation addresses activists’ motivations for joining the organization, their relationships and attitudes to Western donors, DVN’s collaboration with and ambivalence towards state feminist machinery and the influence of state discourse on DVN’s deployments of global feminist discourses.
The recent women’s movement against domestic violence in China develops within the crucial international context of the global women’s human rights movement arising in the mid 1980s. Human rights is a universal principle specifying a standard of basic, indivisible rights for all human beings. The movement is best known for its motto “women’s rights are human rights,”3 which re-defines “the subordination of women as a human rights violation” (Cook 1994, 1). It champions the human rights approach as a central plank for advancing women’s claims to social, economic, political and cultural development and empowerment across all societies (Antrobus and Sen 2006). Spearheaded and coordinated by international women’s organizations such as the Center for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL), the movement gathered dynamic momentum through numerous strategic networking, campaign and information sharing activities around a series of United Nations conferences during the 80s and 90s (Friedman 1995; Dickenson 1997; Dorsey 1997; Berkovitch 1999; Bunch et al. 2001). This feminist activism transformed productively into an impressive body of international policy documents. From the Vienna Declaration of Human Rights of 1993 to the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, women’s rights were increasingly recognized, characterized, discussed, and implemented as human rights issues (Thompson 2002).

Violence against women is a centerpiece of women’s organizing for the human rights movement. The issue virtually provided the women’s human rights agenda with a universal theme and rallying point to critique and transform traditional human rights practices from a gender perspective (Reilly 2000; Fraser 2001). The fundamental flaw of the mainstream human rights framework, according to feminist scholars, lies in its exclusion of women’s experiences as well as its failure to intervene in the private/public dichotomy that often helps to maintain the invisibility of violations of women’s human rights (Charlesworth 1994; Rao 1995; Bahar 2000). VAW drew the attention of the women’s human rights movement because it “dramatically illustrated women’s subordinate position as no other issue had” (Fraser 2001, 56).

3 This motto is best known in association with Charlotte Bunch’s writings, see e.g. Bunch 1995.
The traditional human rights focus on the so-called public rights has resulted in the historical lack of protection of women’s rights in “private” spheres, where VAW often takes place. Amidst the various issues that constitute VAW, domestic violence particularly highlights the pitfalls created by the private/public binary inherent in the conventional human rights approach and is raised as a powerful critique of women’s human rights conditions. As Cook points out, “no issue raises the inherent limitation of the gender-neutral approach to equality more acutely than does domestic violence against women” (1994, 20). The omnipresence of VAW, especially domestic violence, in women’s lives across the globe, argues forcefully for the need to re-assess the human rights definition and needs from a gender perspective.

As VAW offers a strategic focus to the organizing efforts of the women’s human rights movement, the latter also made VAW one of the most prominent international women’s issues in the last decade of the 20th century. The 1990s saw a boom of activism led by the international women’s human rights movement and geared toward raising global awareness about the issue of VAW (see Bunch et al, 2001; Bahar 2000; Dorsey 1997; Friedman 2003). This activism wins the attention of international policy makers, as the issue is identified as a critical human rights concern to women across a set of U.N. documents and interregional conventions.

In 1992, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was revised deliberately to integrate the issue of VAW into its content through the addition of a General Recommendation. In 1993, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women drafted by the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was adopted at the Vienna Human Rights conference, calling on states to take significant steps to combat the issue in accordance with the provisions of the declaration. Subsequently, the U.N general Assembly assigned a special rapporteur on VAW to investigate problems pertaining to this issue and make policy recommendations to the states in this area. At the FWCW in Beijing in 1995, VAW was included among the top-tier 12 priority issues declared by the Beijing Platform for Action. In the follow-up processes to the Beijing Conference, VAW continued to remain a potent issue on the women’s rights agenda (Stamatopoulou 1995; Dorsey 1997). The issue also generated a group of
interregional conventions, such as the European Parliament Resolution on VAW and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of VAW (Cook 1994). According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), the global women’s human rights movement made VAW a “common advocacy position” at the international policy level.

The global scope of mobilization, transnational pattern of organizing and international impacts of the women’s human rights movement arising in the 1980s, with the VAW campaign as its most spirited example and outstanding achievement, inspired the differentiated but also interrelated conceptions of the so-called international/transnational/global feminism among feminist scholars. For instance, Mendoza opts for the term transnational feminism and refers to “the multiplicity of the world’s feminisms and to the increasing tendency of national feminisms to politicize women’s issues beyond the borders of the nation state” (2002, 296). Moghadam uses the term global feminism and theorizes it as “the discourse and movement of women aimed at advancing the status of women through greater access to resources, through legal measures to effect gender equality, and through the self-empowerment of women within national boundaries but through transnational forms of organizing and mobilizing” (2001, 115-16). Nesiah adopts yet another term “feminist internationality” to describe “a transnational political alliance of women whose differences are acknowledged” (1993, 6).

Indeed, transnational feminist organizing has a long history in the field of women’s movements and theorists often divide its historical development into three distinct stages to show how it has evolved from a more or less regional strategy to a widely practiced global movement (Rupp 1997; Lavrin 1999; Fraser 2001; Moghadam 2001). Dating back to as early as the late 19th century, the first wave of women’s international organizing appeared primarily in Europe and North America on issues ranging from suffrage to temperance to legal contraception, and lasted until the outbreak of the second World War (Rupp 1997; Fraser 2001). During the same period, women were participating in social reform movements in colonized countries and the concept of “women’s interest” began to emerge in socialist and communist debates (Antrobus and Sen 2006). The second wave is commonly perceived to coincide with the mid-20th century, when women were mobilized in unprecedented numbers across different sites of struggles against colonial rulers around the world, presenting a transnational landscape of women’s movements (Tripp 2006). The onset of the third wave is usually aligned with the beginning of the UN Decade for Women in the mid 1970s, whose processes opened precious political space for women’s transnational networking and also gave rise to the most contemporary cycle of women’s transnational mobilizations, widely recognized for its focus on institutional human rights activism and accentuation of a feminist rights-based approach (Berkovitch 1999; Reilly, 2000; Friedman 2003; Snyder 2006). It is the third wave global women’s movement that I will examine in relation to the international/transnational/global feminism in this thesis, as it is within this phase that violence against women has developed to be a global women’s issue.
I contend that though the labels are different, they essentially describe the same phenomenon, i.e., a composition of women’s political mobilization characterized by cross-national coalitions, identifications, strategizing activities and influences. To the degree that these labels are distinguished from and even oppose each other, my analysis derives more from the conflicting views among feminist scholars about the global-local nexus of women’s coalition politics (Chapter 2), rather than about the existence of and trend towards cross-national mobilization in the current political landscape of the global women’s movement itself. I propose that, precisely given the possible disagreements represented by the different terms used for what is sometimes alternately, sometimes interchangeably, described as international/transnational/global feminism in phenomenology, feminist scholars should acknowledge and address these differences by keeping the diverse labels in the debates. In terms of this dissertation, I honor all three terms and advocate the usage of the combination term, “inter-trans-global feminisms” (ITG feminisms). I use the plural form of “feminism” to acknowledge the fact that there is no unitary vision of what constitutes feminism and transnational feminist politics. Also, I use the plural form to suggest that we should keep these different conceptions and visions in feminist debates. In particular, my thesis focuses on the global women’s human rights movement against VAW as a concrete instance and politically significant example of ITG feminisms.

Though the women’s human rights movement has made ITG feminisms a heated subject in academic research and debates, the majority of the studies in this area have focused on its “global” processes only (e.g., Dickerson 1997; Dorsey 1997; Waterman 1998; Berkovitch 1999; Smith 2000; Ferree and Tripp 2006; Antrobus and Sen 2006). For example, much feminist scholarship is devoted to exploring the role of the United Nations in the facilitation and expansion of inter-trans-global feminism (e.g., Chen 1995; Galey 1999; Thompson 2002; Snyder 2006). These research points out that the U.N. Decade and a series of U.N.-organized world conferences in the 80s and 90s provided a crucial political space for the organization of the contemporary women’s human rights movement. These world conferences also shaped the movement’s strategic focus on international policy platforms as the primary site for influencing women’s social, economic, cultural and political status cross-nationally. Other scholars have documented and analyzed how the women’s human
rights movement made political inroads in the international policy arena by way of unconventional mobilization patterns, discursive strategies and innovative campaigns over a decade of U.N.-focused activism (Bunch et al 2001; Dorsey 1997; Friedman 2003). Keck and Sikkink (1998), two important scholars in this field, put forth the seminal concept of “transnational advocacy network” to theorize the mobilizing structure of the women’s human rights movement against VAW. They define the structure as a loose network of mostly civil society international actors bound together by common beliefs. Information exchange is the core of the network, as it enables the separate actors to operate on a transnational platform and also empowers them as advocates to higher authorities at the local level.

These studies show that the interest in ITG feminisms primarily lies with its “global” processes, which mostly address how the women’s human rights movement organizes into a transnational mobilization, gains room and presence in the supranational space of politics and achieves successful international impact. The “global” in these studies mainly refers to a domain of feminist activism exceeding the traditional boundaries of the nation state. My dissertation follows this general definition of the “global” suggested by existing studies. In addition, in the context of this study, “ITG feminisms” will primarily evoke the discourses, strategies and political outcomes pertaining to the contemporary international women’s human rights movement specifically, since it is the political force of this movement that has made VAW a global issue.

My proposition to study Chinese women’s domestic violence activism as an interface between local and global women’s movements acknowledges the current discussions that transnational feminist organizing forms an important political context that one must reckon with in research on contemporary women’s movement politics. It regards ITG feminisms as a distinct project of “globalization” aimed at empowering women through social, legal,

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5 My evocation of the word “global” in this definition shall be distinguished from the meaning of the “global” evoked by the feminist “global feminisms” discourse. I advocate the term “ITG feminisms” mainly because the terms (i.e., “international,” “transnational” and “global”) have been so politicized that they have been increasingly and sometimes exclusively used to identify a particular ideology and perspective on this issue in feminist debates. However, my dissertation perceives a need to preserve the common usage of the term “global” as descriptor of a spatial category distinct from the “local.” And I will use “global” as a general spatial term in relation to the “local” throughout this study unless when the specific discourse of “global feminisms” is discussed.
economic and political changes globally (eg., Dorsey 1997; Marchand 2003; Desai 2002; Sen and Grown 1987). It also follows the insight of globalization studies in general, whose basic premise is that global forces play an increasingly dynamic and influential role in the shaping of various social, political and cultural relations in the contemporary world (eg. Harvey 1989; Sassen 1998; Bergeron 2001). However, my proposition is particularly inspired by studies focused on local settings and the interactive dimensions of global processes on the local side. Anthropologists and social geographers point to the importance of “place” in globalization. They treat globalization as “place-making projects” rather than “place-transcending” forces, arguing that globalization is grounded in the local and the local is a global place (Tsing 2000; Massey 1994; Gille and O’Riain 2002). Theories of traveling feminism and translation studies of cultural appropriations suggest that global processes and influences are inherently unstable, as they are constantly revised, reconfigured and changed by the different contexts and localities they pass through (eg., Thayer 2000; Friedman 2001; Tsing 1995, 2005).

However, very few studies have directed systematic inquiry of the “local” as an organic, indivisible and fundamental dimension of inter-trans-global feminisms. Feminist scholars debating this topic have often pointed out the necessity of engaging the “local” in theorization of ITG feminisms (Naples, 2002a, 2002b; Basu 1995; Peterson 1996, 1999). One major study addressing the global-local interface animated by transnational feminist activism as well as the subject of violence against women is Merry’s recent ethnographic research on the localization of international human rights law (2005). Through a comparative study of four national contexts, including mainland China, Merry shows how the legal re-conceptualization of gender violence as human rights abuse, promoted by the global women’s human rights movement, becomes a global agenda through both global and local processes. Globally, what she describes as “transnational consensus building processes” enable the sharing of common understanding at the international level. However, the worldwide circulation of these globally-produced standards depends heavily on the extent of investment and involvement of local actors in the forging of the global-local linkage. Her study situates the global-local nexus at the center of the theorization of inter-trans-global feminisms and contributes a unique, wide-angled insight into the phenomenon
by revealing both the global and local processes generated by the women’s human rights movement.

My research pursues a similar endeavor to understand ITG feminisms as an interactive collaboration between both global and local agents. It specifically seeks to shed light on the global-local nexus stimulated by ITG feminisms and experienced by a local women’s movement, for the reason that this interface is the least explored and most underrepresented in the subject area. As I have discussed previously in this section, violence against women is a research and movement field that not only develops in close relationship to but often furnishes a remarkable example of the politics of contemporary ITG feminisms. This dissertation hopes to contribute continuing reflections on this productive relationship, especially with respect to how the outcomes and dynamics of the successful “global” feminist campaign against VAW are recycled and are playing out in the context of local women’s activism and movements. My hope is that the insights gained from this study will enrich the theorization and inform the politics of inter-trans-global feminist projects in the future.

Chinese Feminism and the Global Question

The women’s movement in post-Mao China provides an intriguing new site for studying ITG feminisms. Historically, China is a context where the “state as a mode of production and cultural force is much more ancient and developed than capitalism and has expanded tremendously as a result of modernity and anticolonial efforts” (Young 1999, 9-10). Women’s liberation in China delineates a trajectory closely intertwined with the nation-building project led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the country’s struggles for independence during World War II. The communist regime was founded significantly through the mobilization of women’s participation in the revolution with the promise of women’s emancipation within a class-free society (Andors 1983; Stacey 1983; Gilmartin 1994). In the post-revolution period, the “woman question” has evolved largely within a state-controlled agenda and has been primarily addressed through the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF), a mass women’s organization set up by the CCP with numerous grassroots branches all over the country. Supposedly a political organ to represent women’s
interests, the priority of Party goals has rendered ACWF largely an instrument for the implementation of party policies designed mainly by male leaders (Mies 1998; Edwards 2004).

In recent decades, scholars have observed considerable changes in the dynamics of the Chinese women’s movement, as it began to embrace a more diverse range of identities, forms and agendas under the impact of China’s economic reforms in the post-Mao period (Barlow 1994; Edwards 2000). Wesoky points out that in China, the women’s movement has moved from one “entirely dominated by the state, to one with significant measures of organizational and discursive autonomy” (2005, 4). Most scholars point to the contemporary global women’s movement as a particularly important force in effecting of these changes. China’s hosting of the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 is discussed by many observers as an invigorating stimulus to the contemporary women’s movement in China. It was a critical event that enabled the Chinese women’s movement to “connect tracks” with the international women’s movement through cultural, political and intellectual exchanges (Hsiung 1998; Zhang 1995; Wang 1996). Domestic violence also emerged from a no-name problem to an important women’s issue on Chinese women’s movement agenda as a result of this interaction.

Direct and indirect studies of domestic violence in China only began to appear in the early 1990s and the issue stills remains a topic that is far from being adequately and widely researched. Though there are no consistent findings from current studies, due to the varied size of samples, limited scope of samples, lack of a uniform definition of domestic violence, different methods of measurement, and other factors, most findings show domestic violence to be a prevalent problem in Chinese society--affecting spouses in particular. In several studies surveying couples across the nation about their marriage quality, between 6.7% to 60.2% of the husbands admitted to having used violence against their wives in conflicts and at least 20.1% of the women reported experiencing occasional beatings from their husbands.6 One 2001 review of existing research on intimate partner violence against

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6 The figures presented here synthesized statistics from three different marriage studies reviewed by M. Liu 2006, 289. The women’s statistics come from Tao and Jiang (1993), the men’s statistics are drawn from Sheng and Yang (1995) and A.Q. Xu (1997) respectively. The variation in the percentage of aggressive husbands reflects regional and urban-rural differences among the husbands.
Chinese women found that, even though incidence and prevalence data in China are hard to come by and often not generalizable to the entire population, there is ample evidence suggesting domestic violence is a significant cause for women’s requests for divorce in mainland China (Xu et al. 2001). According to ACWF’s records collected from different years and different cities, between 21.5% to as high as 70-80% of the women who contacted ACWF for divorce issues indicated partner abuse as an important motivation. The same review also presented prevalence and lifetime risk studies conducted in Hong Kong, which distinguished verbal, physical and sexual abuse from each other. The studies seem to suggest a higher percentage of verbal aggression than physical or sexual abuse. Another included study, which was conducted in a health care setting in mainland China, estimates that 3% of Chinese women experience physical abuse, 10% forced sex, and 7% verbal aggression, based on a small sample of 30 female respondents. More detailed information about the surveyed studies in this review is provided in Table 1. The heterogeneity in the findings does not lead one to any convincing conclusions about the national scope of the issue, but these statistics at least suggest that domestic violence is a problem impacting not just a few and that it cannot be dismissed as a minor concern.

A more recent collaborative study between Western and Chinese researchers provides the first national analysis of intimate partner abuse in China (Parish et al. 2004). Recruiting from the participants in a 1999-2000 Chinese Health and Family Life Survey, this research interviewed 3,806 respondents aged 20-64 and living with a spouse or steady partner about the prevalence, severity, risk factors and health consequences of physical abuse from their partners.7 The study found that 34% of women and 18% of men had been physically abused during their current relationship and the prevalence rate of injury-related beating was 12% for women and 5% for men. Severe hitting was found in significant correlation with self-diagnosed negative health and sexual outcomes such as unhappiness with life, mental distress, poor health, sexual dysfunction, sexual dissatisfaction, and so forth. Table 2 points to a group of risk factors of partner abuse identified by the study, which

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7 Respondents were asked whether their partner had ever hit them, and those who responded yes were asked if their partner had ever hit them hard, “hit hard” defined as physical attack that results in bleeding, bruises, swelling, severe pain, and injury. See Parish et al. 2004, 175
include sexual possesiveness, patriarchal beliefs, low female contribution to family income, low male socioeconomic status, alcohol consumption and residence in Northern regions. A significant drawback of this study is its restrictive definition of intimate partner abuse that is focused on physical abuse alone and ignores emotional, verbal, and sexual violence. Research worldwide has shown that women are subjected disproportionately to sexual violence both in public and private, and yet sexual violence by acquaintances and partners remains one of the most underreported crimes among women. One has reason to believe that a higher percentage of women suffer intimate partner abuse in China than is claimed by this study. However, even with limitations, this research has demonstrated that women are the primary victims of domestic violence in China and provides one of the few available and direct assessments of the national scope of the problem.

The increase of research devoted to the issue of domestic violence in China, though still largely insufficient, can be regarded as a positive outcome of women’s rising activism against the issue and its consciousness-raising effects. The relevant literature suggests that the growth of women’s anti-domestic violence activism in China is an area that benefited significantly in the 1990s from the interactions between Chinese and ITG feminisms due to Beijing Conference (Wesoky 2005; Milwertz 2003). The Beijing Conference not only raised global awareness about the issue of VAW as a grave violation of women’s human rights, but it also brought the issue and concept to the attention of a wide circle of Chinese women activists and scholars. According to Miwertz, the formation of the Domestic Violence Network in 2000, joining both popular women’s groups and ACWF forces, signaled the “establishment of a movement within the women’s movement, as the Network is indicative of a collectivity of activism and commitment” (2003, 648). China’s increasing exposure to ITG feminisms through the three U.N. women’s conferences of the 80s and 90s played a crucial role in the composition of this new landscape (Milwertz 2003). Domestic violence certainly represents a new issue on the contemporary women’s movement’s agenda in China, which mobilized a critical mass of women within a relatively short period of only a decade. In addition, domestic violence is also an issue area where important and profound changes can be observed in women’s movement politics in China in the era of globalization.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City &amp; Year</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Definition of Domestic Violence</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wuhan 1983</td>
<td>760 divorce cases</td>
<td>Abused by husband or husband’s male chauvinism</td>
<td>30% due to domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjin 1983</td>
<td>100 random selected divorce cases</td>
<td>Wife beating (operationalization not clear)</td>
<td>41% had been beaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjin 1984</td>
<td>100 random selected divorce cases</td>
<td>Wife beating (operationalization not clear)</td>
<td>51% had been beaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuhan 1986</td>
<td>1,005 women came to Wuhan Women’s Federation</td>
<td>Abused without further definition (operationalization not clear)</td>
<td>33% had been beaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Unknown 1991</td>
<td>106 divorced women</td>
<td>Wife beating (operationalization not clear)</td>
<td>46% asked for divorce due to beating, 70% had been beaten at least once by ex-husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qindao 1996</td>
<td>205 divorce cases</td>
<td>No definition</td>
<td>25.3% (52 cases) caused by domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qindao 1991-1997</td>
<td>2,348 women came to Qindao Women’s Federation</td>
<td>Wife beating (operationalization not clear)</td>
<td>15.2% (358 cases) had been beaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China 1997</td>
<td>Divorced cases</td>
<td>Wife beating (operationalization not clear)</td>
<td>70%-80% of divorced cases due to beating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing 1993</td>
<td>30 women, victims of violence</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing 1995</td>
<td>2,118 women</td>
<td>Beating</td>
<td>21.3% had been beaten by husband (lifetime)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued onto the next page)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Definition of Violence</th>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>4,000 women with Wenzhou, 1,000 in each city Hinghan League, Qianxi, 1997-1998</td>
<td>Defined as physical, mental, and sexual abuse</td>
<td>Wenzhou city has highest violence rate; Hinghan league has a high incidence of severe violence cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong 1992</td>
<td>246 females &amp; male under-graduate students</td>
<td>Spouse aggression defined to include physical, psychological, and sexual abuse of spouse, operationally defined</td>
<td>Prior year: 14% of parents engaged in physical violence; 2%-5% of parents used weapons against each other; 75% of parents engaged in verbal aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong 1996</td>
<td>1,132 women above age 18</td>
<td>Verbal and physical abuse, conceptually and operationally defined</td>
<td>Prior year: 67% of women had at least 1 incident of verbal abuse; 10% experienced at least 1 incident of physical abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong 1998</td>
<td>631 pregnant women</td>
<td>Abuse defined as either emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse</td>
<td>Lifetime: 17.9% were abused, 4.3% were abused while pregnant; year prior: 15.7% were abused, 9.4% were sexually abused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuzhou 1998</td>
<td>30 female in an OB-GYN outpatient clinic</td>
<td>Defined as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse</td>
<td>Lifetime: 3% physical abuse, 10% forced sex, 7% verbal abuse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Domestic Violence and Divorce in China, Comparable Studies** (Source: Xu et al. 2001, 300-301)

**Note:** The table listed here is a simplified version of the original, which also includes information about the source, design and limitations of the cited studies.
Percentage distribution of respondents; and percentage of respondents who had ever experienced intimate partner violence during their current relationship and relative risk ratios (and 95% confidence intervals) from multinomial logistic regression analyses examining the likelihood that respondents had ever experienced intimate partner violence, by type of hitting—all according to selected characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Relative risk ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male-on-</td>
<td>Mutual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (ref)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South/Southeast coast (ref)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North/Northwest</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>22.0*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>21.1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship duration</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤6 (ref)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20.1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21.3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age difference</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 22 yrs. older (ref)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>15.1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 3-11 yrs. older</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men's socioeconomic status</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18.1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (ref)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>25.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-30% (ref)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-40%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol consumption</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married (ref)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20.7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual jealousy</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never (ref)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that men lead in sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significantly different from the referent category. Notes: na = not applicable. N is unweighted. All results are weighted. Absence of hitting is the referent outcome for both the percentages and the multinomial logistic regression.

Table 2: Risk Factors of Intimate Partner Abuse in Chinese Households (Source: Parish et al. 2004, 176)
Given the context outlined above, I contend that women’s contemporary anti-domestic violence movement in China, as a very young and still ongoing mobilization, provides an appropriate, fresh and extremely productive “local” site for the investigation of the global-local nexus created by inter-trans-global feminisms. The “local” in this dissertation is discussed primarily in terms of the conditions of the Chinese women’s movement, its perceptions and aspirations in the area of anti-domestic violence activism and the way Chinese women activists interpret, adapt and transform ITG feminisms for their own use. My dissertation will focus on the Chinese women’s movement as a case study to illustrate and analyze the global-local interface of inter-trans-global feminisms. Thus it will contribute both theoretical insight and empirical data on Chinese feminism. Theoretically, my research is an attempt to explore women’s political mobilization in contemporary China within a conceptual frame larger than the state. Rather than displacing the state as an analytical construct, my dissertation situates the dynamics of the contemporary Chinese women’s movement within a wider set of social relations and forces. Empirically, my dissertation is focused on the Domestic Violence Network, a recently founded civil society women’s organization in 2000 whose history and activities are not yet widely documented. Also, since the women’s anti-domestic violence movement in China is a recent development and an ongoing enterprise, information about this movement will contribute to a more inclusive view of the worldwide pattern of women’s anti-gender violence activism.

Methods

My research is based on eight-months of fieldwork conducted in China from March to November 2007. According to Hughes (1992), fieldwork refers to “observation of people in situ; finding them where they are, staying with them in some role which, while acceptable to them, will allow both intimate observation of certain parts of their behavior, and reporting it in ways useful to social science but not harmful to those observed” (139). As such, fieldwork both encourages and allows the researcher to engage with a multitude of research methods. My dissertation project combines participant observation, semi-structured
interviews and documentation research, and this triangulation of methods enables me to approach my questions from various angles and through different types of data.8

As a study about women’s political organizing in contemporary China, my project is itself a feminist ethnography according to the three goals defined by Reinharz (1992). The goals are to document the lives and activities of women, to understand the experience of women from their own point of view, and to conceptualize women’s behavior as a product of relevant social contexts. The center of my fieldwork is the Domestic Violence Network in Beijing, the only women’s NGO in China organized to address exclusively the issue of domestic violence in China. As a network and multi-pronged program, DVN has brought me into contact with a multitude of other sites. These not only include DVN’s program sites across Beijing, but also other women’s NGOs and associations affiliated with the Network.

Participant observation is research in which “the researcher observes and to some degree participates in the action being studied, as the action is happening” (Lichterman 2002, 320). This method provided a valuable tool for me not only to study the interactional processes between women activists in the anti-domestic violence movement in China, but it also allowed me to experience these processes within their social and institutional contexts. My employment of this method adhered to the principles of feminist methodology that reject the objectification of the research subject and emphasize a dialectical relationship between the researcher and the researched throughout the entire research process (e.g. Cook and Fonow 1986). In my fieldwork, I adopted a participatory approach by volunteering. I was a volunteered at DVN throughout my fieldwork primarily as a translator, but I also assisted with miscellaneous other tasks at their administrative office. As a volunteer, I was able to both participate in and observe a variety of activities going on within the organization. I attended their discussions, internal meetings, conferences, public events, trainings, workshops, and one support group for battered women in Beijing. Across all these settings, I was able to observe both the interactions within the organization and those between the organization and its context. These opportunities also enabled me to talk with many

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8 See Appendix A for information on the consent process and the recruiting materials used in my fieldwork.
members, both from the civil society and the ACWF, who were not included in my formal interview schedule.⁹

In addition to participant observation, I also used semi-structured interviews. Interviewing provided a primary way for generating data about women’s lives and perspectives in relation to my research topic. With information provided by DVN, I identified and interviewed 31 key activists associated with the organization.¹⁰ Interviews ranged from 1-3 hours and most of them were tape-recorded and transcribed. Semi-structured interview is a method that, instead of using a pre-established schedule of questions, relies on a consistent set of core questions to guide responses but at the same time also permits the respondent considerable flexibility to digress based on the actual exchanges during the interview (Blee and Taylor 2002). Therefore, although there was a group of key questions I asked of each informant, the interviews also encouraged the respondents to engage in topics, details and stories they deemed important. This approach conceives of interviewing as an “active” process and acknowledges respondents as “constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers” (Holstein and Bubrium 2002). It is committed to fostering a dialogical relationship between the researcher and the researched, to reducing the unequal power in the research process and to the empowerment of women in accordance with feminist principles. I achieved these goals through providing interview questions to the respondents before the interview, encouraging them to ask questions for clarification, keeping the interview process open to both of our interests, allowing the respondent to withdraw or turn down questions they did not feel comfortable answering anytime during the interview process, and returning the transcripts to the respondents and allowing them to modify the content where they saw fit. All these strategies aim towards creating an egalitarian interview paradigm through involving the respondent as an active participant in the process as well as providing her with maximum control over the process.¹¹

Documentation research is another method I adopted, which gave me access to a rich amount of information not only about individual activists and their history of activism, but

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⁹ See Appendix D for a list of my participant observation activities outside the DVN office.
¹⁰ See Appendix B for a list of interviews and explication about the use of names.
¹¹ See Appendix C for more information on my interview procedure and the questions used.
also about the larger historical, social and cultural context of my research question. I collected materials from all possible sources, including DVN’s organizational archives, government documents, personal writings, the public library and local bookstores. Many documents are DVN-specific, such as their newsletters, conference papers, grant applications, budgets, reports, publications, presentations, and so forth. I also collected artifacts and visual materials, such as DVN-designed posters and DVN-related videos. Other types of documents collected outside the DVN archives primarily included published books and articles addressing a broad range of issues ranging from gender violence to the women’s movement to women’s NGOs in China.

My focus on qualitative methods derives from new social movement theories that regard collective action as a social construction rather than a structural product and place the human agent at the center of analysis. They view cultural contestation as an integral and central component of social movements (e.g., Melucci 1980; Larana et al. 1994; Johnston and Klandermans 1995). Gamson and Meyer define a social movement as “a sustained and self-conscious challenge to authorities or cultural codes by a field of actors (organizations and advocacy networks)” (1996, 283). Such conception places the human agents at the center of analysis, as it suggests that it is through interaction and negotiation with the environment that social actors are able to define new grievances, forge collective identities, and create opportunities in order to bring about social change. In general, a qualitative approach provides the most effective way for understanding “how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth” (Berg 1998, 7). With respect to my focus on the local responses to and experiences of ITG feminisms in the field of women’s anti-VAW activism, qualitative methods allowed me to understand the dynamics of the Chinese women’s movement from the perspectives of the movement activists and organizations.

Chapter Outline
In this introductory chapter, I presented my dissertation questions, laid out my thesis argument and identified my research objectives through a review of relevant literature.
concerning the international women’s human rights movement against violence against women, women’s anti-domestic violence activism in contemporary China, and the research status on the global-local nexus in the field of what I refer to as ITG feminisms. In addition, I also described my fieldwork and discussed the methods of my study.

Chapter Two offers an expanded discussion of the conception of the global-local interface and argues for the importance of exploring the global through the local. First, it examines and compares the different and often competing views on the global-local linkage in current feminist debates addressing the topic of ITG feminisms. I subsequently discuss bodies of theory asserting the importance of studying the local as an interactive product and agent of global forces, drawn from different fields of studies, are discussed. Based on these discussions, I will propose a conceptual framework for my dissertation topic.

In Chapter Three, I begin my exploration of the global-local interface between the global women’s human rights movement and Chinese women’s movements with a historical investigation of China’s decision to host the 1995 Fourth World Conference on women, a crucial event that has enabled the two movements to meet. Towards this end, I lay out the social, political and economic context in which this decision was made by the Chinese government. In addition, I also review the conditions and struggles of the Chinese women’s movement within this historical context, devoting particular attention to the status of domestic violence and women’s activism on the issue in China prior to the Beijing conference.

Chapter Four analyzes how the 1995 Beijing Conference created a legitimate and fundamental political opportunity for the facilitation of women’s domestic violence activism in China, especially in the NGO sector. It discusses both the state’s and Chinese women’s participation in this process, showing how the Beijing conference was not only a transformative moment for the marginalized discourse on domestic violence in China, it was also an unprecedented stimulus and significant boost to women’s NGO activism. In terms of the impact on domestic violence discourse, I analyze both Chinese government’s policy statements and Chinese women’s NGO forum discussions with regard to the issue of VAW and domestic violence. In terms of the impact on women’s NGOs, the chapter explores both
Chinese women’s participation experiences in the NGO forum and the development of several Chinese women’s NGOs during the Beijing process.

Chapter Five tells the founding story of the Network/Research Center for Combating Domestic Violence of the China Law Society (Domestic Violence Network), the first and only women’s (non-profit) organization devoted exclusively to the issue of domestic violence in China. This chapter draws extensively on my interviews with a number of key activists and NGOs who co-founded the organization. My study shows that the formation of the DVN is a product of dynamic interactions between Chinese and ITG feminisms facilitated profoundly by the economic power of international donor agencies and the status of VAW as a popular funding category on many such donors’ human rights agendas in China. My discussion particularly addresses the power relations between the international donors and local women activists. It also highlights Chinese women’s agency with an exploration of the different motivations and visions revealed by DVN activists about their participation in the organization.

Chapter Six moves beyond the founding process of the Domestic Violence Network to expose and explore a continuing global-local dialectic in the organization’s localization of the gender and human rights framework advocated by the global women’s human rights movement against violence against women. This chapter reviews and examines three main localizing approaches adopted by the DVN, namely empirical research, gender training, and legal advocacy. It also examines how the DVN “translates” the gender and human rights frame through political engagement with the state. My research shows that while the gender and human rights perspective promoted by the transnational feminist movement certainly shapes DVN’s focus on condemning domestic violence as a violation of women’s human rights, its localizing agenda also makes significant attempts to connect and even assimilate the human rights approach into local discourses and a policy framework that emphasize community harmony, social stability and public control. This chapter draws on both interviews and participant observation to offer a critical analysis of the promotion and transformation of global frames on the local side. This analysis involves charting DVN’s multiple projects, addressing the relationship between women’s NGOs and the ACWF, and
discussing the impact of women’s activism on policy and legal developments with regard to the issue of domestic violence.

Chapter Seven, the Conclusion, summarizes the main findings of my research and uses the case study of the DVN to reflect on the conceptual debates on the global-local interface in the field of ITG feminisms.
CHAPTER 2

INTER-TRANS-GLOBAL FEMINISMS: THE GLOBAL-LOCAL LINKAGE

Introduction

The term “inter-trans-global feminisms” that I adopted as a broad description of the phenomenon of women’s coalition politics across national borders, as exemplified by the international women’s human rights movement in the late 20th century, is indeed an artificial denominator that deliberately combines and conflates an array of different conceptions of the global/local nexus in relation to the internationalized women’s movement. These conceptions do not merely differentiate from each other; they actually debate each other and constitute a heterogeneous and evolving feminist discourse on what is often separately identified as “international,” “global” and “transnational” feminisms. As a study of “inter-trans-global feminisms” through the case of a local women’s movement, my research is politically and theoretically informed by these debates in important ways. Thus, this chapter will provide a critical review of the various conceptions of the global-local relationship in feminist scholarship on inter-trans-global feminisms. To address the disagreements among feminists on the global-local linkage of inter-trans-global feminisms, I will introduce a body of theories discussing the subjects of traveling feminisms, “global place,” and translation to propose the importance of examining the global-local relationship as an interactive process and of studying the local as such an interface. These discussions will map out the conceptual framework of my research.
International, Global and Transnational Feminisms: The Problematic Global-Local Link

Women’s political organizing across national borders is not entirely a development of recent decades. However, it is in the contemporary historical context of the international women’s human rights movement, which emerged in the 1980s and is still unfolding now, that what I refer to as “inter-trans-global feminisms” (ITG feminisms) becomes a vital subject of theorization and debates among feminist scholars. The debates are not about whether or not ITG feminisms exist; on the contrary, it is a fact that most agree on. Rather, it is my contention that the center of the debates revolves around the issues of globalism and localism related to inter-trans-global feminist politics. In the following, I will discuss and distinguish three theories of ITG feminisms to explore their conceptualization of the global-local nexus, especially with regard to the contemporary international women’s human rights movement.

Global Sisterhood (or Universal Sisterhood): The Idealist Global-Local Link

In her introduction to the 1984 anthology *Sisterhood is Global*, which documents women’s political struggles against gender subordination worldwide, Robin Morgan puts forth the seminal concept of “global sisterhood.” Though this term and concept was later contested and critiqued by many feminist scholars, it nevertheless articulates a significant and stimulating vision for ITG feminisms. Raised as a rallying call to urge women’s movements around the world to cross national, political and cultural boundaries and form a united front against a universal patriarchy, “global sisterhood” ostensibly suggests “global-ism” as a desirable goal of feminism. In this formulation, localities are both acknowledged and minimized, since it avoids addressing the power relations among women in different locales and assumes so-called “planetary feminism” to be a natural outcome of the accumulation of women’s movements worldwide.

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12 For example, see Sinha, Guy and Woolacott 1999. Entitled *Feminisms and Internationalism*, this volume assembles a number of historical instances of feminist international activism in a global framework throughout the 20th century.
Morgan (1984) argues that feminism is intrinsically global and multiplicitous because it is a form of spontaneous resistance to the ubiquitous presence of gender oppression. According to this argument, local, “indigenous” feminism is the origin and foundation of “planetary” feminism, and to this extent, the importance of locality is acknowledged or at least strongly implied. However, she also argues that women, because of their common experience of gender subordination that cuts across nationality, race, class, culture and other social categories, apparently share political sentiments against patriarchy and constitute a distinct “world political force.” Her conception of “global sisterhood” is predicated on the notion that gender oppression is a universal experience among women. It also promotes a naturalized view of women’s solidarity to each other. In this view, where patriarchy seems to be essentially the same no matter its context, locality disappears as a unique or significant category.

More importantly, Morgan’s conception of “global sisterhood” expresses the urge that women transcend their differences and commit their collective force to the fight against male dominance, whose global magnitude demands nothing less than a global revolution on the part of women. She particularly denounces the accusation of feminism being a Western product and euro-centric agenda, arguing that such discourse is a “pernicious” patriarchal strategy to deceive women and keep them in isolation. “Global sisterhood” is envisioned as the ultimate means to terminate isolation and revolutionize women’s subordinate status. Internationalism is suggested as a replacement goal for nationalism of women’s movements. To Morgan, the globalism of “global sisterhood” will offer an emancipatory and inclusive space to all women, an alternative to the compartmentalized and fractional space occupied by women in any variety of patriarchal society.

One could argue that Morgan’s formulation implies localism as an obstacle to be overcome to the achievement of a universal sisterhood. At the same time, since she is also of the opinion that women identify with each other fundamentally through gender oppression, the assumption is that women can simply transcend their differences, because differences are only barriers preventing women from grasping the larger picture of their own oppression and coalescing with each other in resistance efforts. To this extent,
locality is deliberately minimized in the scheme of “global” feminism. Overall, the
global-local link conceived by Morgan is an idealist one, with a kind of gender-based
“natural” sisterhood serving the linkage between “indigenous” and “planetary” feminism.
It is also a vertical relation, as in this scheme, the global is emphasized over the local and
“global sisterhood” is achieved through rising above the different localities both situating
and separating women’s lives.

Strategic Sisterhood

It happens that Morgan articulated the concept of “global sisterhood” in a decade
when the international women’s human rights movement was at a critical stage of
formation. In many aspects, the women’s human rights movement realizes what Morgan
envisions. The ideological affinity between Morgan’s concept and the women’s human
rights movement is manifested both in the essentialism that they accord to the category
“women” and the political necessity they attribute to cross-national coalition politics as a
means to advance women’s status. The women’s human right s movement’s mobilization
of women as a distinct constituency defined by women’s experiences of gender injustices
is essentialist. However, compared to Morgan, the women’s human rights activists are
more outspoken and reflexive about the strategic nature of this essentialism. This crucial
difference, I contend, results from the material global-local processes produced by the
movement and is most distinct in the emphasis placed by the movement on the strategic
nature of the global-local relations.

The appeal and impact of the women’s rights movement relies fundamentally on
the universalist human rights rhetoric, which is best encapsulated in the motto “women’s
rights are human rights.” This evocation of the human rights paradigm stems from the
belief that there should be a universal, transcendent standard that defines the basics of
humanity and transcends social, economic, political, geographical, religious and, indeed,
all differences. The movement’s focus on “gendering” international policy agendas (see
Friedman 2003) and the transnational mobilization’s dependence on women’s
identification with their gender identity (see Dorsey 1997) reveal an essentialized notion
of gender similar to Morgan’s concept. The construction of “violence against women” as
a distinct and globally resonant category that describes the unique features of violations of women’s rights and represents women as universally subordinated also suggests the Morganian notion of a sisterhood of oppression.

The international women’s human rights movement is often discussed as a beneficial and invigorating influence on women’s local struggles. The human rights instruments formulated by the women’s movement, which are purported to codify gender equality as a universal human rights standard, are perceived to have a particular significant impact on local women’s movements. For instance, in Latin America, feminist movements have maintained a vital relationship to the human rights movement because this linkage provides a powerful stimulus to feminist motions across the region and within many national contexts. Geske and Bourque (2001) suggest that the local-global linkage, at least for women’s movements in Latin America, has been a central component in the maintenance of democratic regimes and the further liberalization of those regimes. Molyneux and Craske (2002) raise a similar observation, pointing out that while Latin American women’s movements are active participants in national struggles to promote democratic regimes, it was during the years of authoritarian rule that they also engaged with the international arena. They also point out that the growth in the number of international conventions coincided with the consolidation of democracy in Latin America, indicating the former as a significant impetus to the latter. In addition, legally binding international treaties, such as CEDAW, empower local actors because they offer them considerable agency in their interactions with the state and inspire significant discursive and institutional changes domestically (Alvarez 2000). The institutionalization of a human rights standard for women has also opened new conceptual and political space to examine and demand change on a variety of women’s issues, such as women’s property rights, reproductive and health rights, subordination under personal and customary laws, economic situation under structural adjustment programs, and so on (Cook 1994).

In her discussion of the effects of transnational organizing on local women’s movements in Latin America, Alvarez (2000) identifies two distinct logics driving women to form cross-national alliances. The first logic concerns the use of transnational
liaison as a means to establish “personal and strategic bonds of solidarity with others sharing the same “locally stigmatized values” (33), and the second logic lies in the possibility of “seeking to enhance women’s local political leverage via the ‘boomerang pattern’ of influence” (31).\(^{13}\) Alvarez’s discussion stresses the strategic dimension and consciousness of women’s global sisterhood, as she argues that the possibility of such a sisterhood is a result of women’s sharing close identities as marginalized social groups across different localities. Different from Morgan’s concept, Alvarez’s analysis of why local women’s movements mobilize across the traditional boundaries of nation states and geographical regions suggests global sisterhood as a result of politicized, not naturalized identity politics.

Indeed, historical examples of women’s international movements, including the women’s human rights movement in recent decades, indicate that “global sisterhood” is often formed around a strategic goal to use global pressure to effect local change. In her study of women’s cross-national organizing for suffragist, anti-slavery, anti-war and labor initiatives between the 1880s and the Second World War, Rupp theorizes sisterhood politics as a form of “internationalism” and documents the process of its formation. She argues in particular that the “Internationalist consciousness—the forging of an international ‘we’—emerged out of never-resolved tensions over the relationship between nationalism and internationalism” (1997, 129). Merry’s ethnographic research of the women’s transnational human rights movement against gender violence points to “transnational consensus building” in the international policy arena among women representing a multitude of interests across the world as an essential process to the making of this international movement. The process is a deliberate effort to seek global consensus among a variety of local activists and policy makers (2005). These studies, based on real instances of “global” or “international” feminism, emphasize global sisterhood as a “collective identity” that is constructed out of a process of dialoguing and

\(^{13}\) The “boomerang pattern” refers to a political strategy to pressure the state with higher authorities and influences gained from the international level. Keck and Sikkink explain that when channels between the state and its domestic actors are blocked, domestic NGOs often form transnational networks to bypass their states. The purpose is to seek out international allies and use their influence to negotiate with the state. See Keck and Sikkink 1998, 13.
negotiation (Rupp and Taylor 1999). Localism, such as nationalism, is recognized as a source of not only difference but also potential conflict. However, the feminist globalism, in these instances, is not conceived as a suppression of the local. On the contrary, it is suggested that globalism has to work through localism.

According to Ferguson, “global feminism” should describe “a solidarity between women that must be struggled for rather than automatically received, a solidarity that fosters alliances to fight any other social domination relations of key importance to those in one’s affinity networks” (2000, 203). It is an “inclusive and integrative” feminism (203). Charlotte Bunch, a leading organizer in the transnational women’s human rights movement, states that, “when I speak of the ‘global’ in global feminism, I do not see it in opposition to the ‘local’” (2001, 131). She explains that “it is the richness of this very particularized and local experience that makes it possible to imagine global networking” (132). Also, she contends that, “these diverse, local, and particularized women’s movements are the ground upon which any global activity must build and where it must always return to check out its viability” (132).

These conceptions, which identify primarily as “global feminism” and “international feminism,” depict a largely strategic and horizontal linkage between the global and the local. It means that globalism is pursued primarily for the strategic purpose of empowering and boosting the local. More importantly, the globalism in this perspective is envisioned as a women’s horizontal network and coalition not positioned above but built through differences. The global does not have to transcend the local; on the contrary, it has to acknowledge, accommodate, develop through and represent the local. Within this conception, the global and the local entertain a fluid, reciprocal, and

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14 When feminist scholars invoke “internationalism” to describe transnational alliances in the field of women’s movements, they often make explicit attempts to distinguish their concept from the one associated with international relations. For example, Barry et al. 1984, in a workshop on international feminist networking against sexual slavery, point out that “when we speak of international, we do not mean ‘among nations’ but rather among peoples of differing nationalities, or what some of us call ‘global’” (10). Similarly, in a 1995 edited volume evoking the term “international feminism,” the authors define “internationalism” as “a philosophy of affinity, alliance and compassion, all of which disregard the imposition of nationality and frontiers” (7). They clarify that their use of the term “internationalism” “reclaims international relations from relations between states, which do not represent or present women’s interests, to relations between people” (7).
mutually rewarding relationship, characterized by political alliances fostered on ideological affinities rather than pre-existing identity categories as Morgan has suggested.

**Transnational Feminism**

Both Morgan’s concept of “global sisterhood” and its revised version of “global” or “international” feminism in the global women’s human rights movement have been critiqued, and it is in these critiques, often voiced from postcolonial feminist perspectives, that a far more conflicted and power-laden perspective on the global/local nexus has emerged. It is also in this critical discourse that the concept of “transnational feminism” has endeavored towards a self-definition by distancing itself from what it perceives to be an essentialist, imperial and Eurocentric perspective embodied by the model of “global sisterhood” and the international women’s human rights movement. This shift in terminology stems from a far more skeptical and critical engagement with the global/local linkage. As Mendoza (2002) suggests, to transnational feminist theorists working within the postcolonial framework, the globalism embodied by the concepts of “global sisterhood” or “global/international feminism,” is an ideology that tends to elide differences in localities and relies on the self-centered perspectives of world powers. As a different discursive practice, transnational feminism is based on and theorizes from the concept of difference, arguing for the paramount importance of studying and acknowledging the historical, cultural, economic and political specificities of localities that map unequally in relation to one another within the global landscape.

As two of the most vocal proponents for replacing the term “global feminism” with “transnational feminism,” Grewal and Kaplan base their critique on the argument that “global feminism” evokes Western cultural imperialism, as the term has “elided the diversity of women’s agency in favor of a universalized Western model of women’s liberation that celebrates individuality and modernity” (1994, 17). Alexander and

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15 For definition of postcolonial feminisms, see for instance Schutte 2000. Her definition refers to “those feminisms that take the experience of Western colonialism and its contemporary effects as a high priority in the process of setting up a speaking position from which to articulate a standpoint of cultural, national, regional, or social identity. With postcolonial feminisms, the process of critique is turned against the domination and exploitation of culturally differentiated others” (59).
Mohanty (1997) articulate a similar perspective when they argue that the internationalism derived from the notion of “global sisterhood” erases complex questions of power relations, especially those of race and capitalism, among women. In a separate, famous article, “Under Western Eyes,” Mohanty (1991) makes the critical observation that Western feminist scholarship on the Third World often functions as a form of discursive colonization of Third World women’s lives and struggles through its construction of Third World women as a signifier of difference inferior to Western culture. This critique has resonated among many non-Western feminist scholars (see for example, Chow 1991; Ang 2001; Ong 2001). Speaking from a postcolonial feminist perspective rooted in an enhanced awareness of the asymmetrical power relations among women, transnational feminist theorists are highly critical of any feminist discourse that emphasizes essentialism and universalism over difference and local particularities. Indeed, they suggest that in “global feminism” based on the Morganian premise that the commonality of gender oppression in women’s experiences will simply give rise to a united political sisterhood, the global signifies the West, the center and the normative, while the local represents the non-West, the periphery and the deviations that have yet to progress and develop toward the standard exemplified by the former. According to transnational feminists, to recognize this relationship between the global and the local as conflictual and full of discontent may provide the first step toward any possibilities of sisterhood.

Though the sisterhood model articulated and practiced by the global women’s human rights movement has achieved pragmatic results for women and is characterized by a more strategic consciousness, criticism that takes issue with universalism as a Western, individualistic and liberal project also has been leveled at the movement. Indeed, the human rights paradigm is perceived to be an extension of Morgan’s earlier model of “global feminism” as far as it endorses a universal rights agenda, which represents women as a monolithic category and implies Western feminist subjectivity to be the model of women’s emancipation (Mohanty 2003). One such critic is Sara Ahmed, who argues that the model of “global woman” promoted by the women’s human rights movement promotes an idea that equates justice for women with women’s entrance into modernity (2000). In her analysis of Hillary Clinton’s speech and the Platform for Action
of the Beijing Conference, an event that marks the “historic moment of constitution” (59) of women as global actors, she finds that this signification of the global woman actually involves “a universalism predicated on a prior act of differentiation” (59), which already distinguishes Western women from various other women in their unequal proximity to modernity. In this scheme, Western women exemplify the norm of advancement and the other women embody the distance from that norm. Ong (1997) articulates a similar concern with the universalism of the feminist human rights paradigm, albeit on a different ground. Drawing on her research about women’s work and labor movements in Asia, she argues that since women’s identities are heavily shaped by communitarian ideologies in many Asian countries, any discussion of women’s issues that aspires to gain a wide audience in this region shall also frame itself in collective interest. She points out that the human rights paradigm championed by the women’s rights movement prescribes “individualistic notions of transnational feminine citizenship” that has wiped out many “alternative political moralities” (108) couched in community instead of gender interests. To her, the human rights strategy championed by the transnational women’s rights movement is simply not adequate or legitimate, because it envisions a singular universal model of women’s emancipation and ignores significant historical and cultural differences between Western and non-Western contexts.

In Between Woman and Nation (1999), a project that aims to destabilize the “ordinary, natural and even compulsory relationship between woman and nation” (7), Kaplan, Alarcon, and Moallem formulate an alternative critique of an international women’s rights movement by questioning the centrality of the state promoted by its mode of global feminism. They argue that, despite the “international” identity claimed by the movement, “it actually relies on and reinforces the discrete nature of the nation, reifying and mystifying the historical phenomenon of the modern state” (13). They critique the movement not only for its focus on institutional instruments and policy advocacy because it naturalizes the notion of nation, they also question the movement for its imbrications with the liberal nation state, because its rights paradigm invokes a notion of modern citizenship whose fulfillment essentially depends on the state. In addition, they also are made uneasy by the idea that international women’s rights feminism carries the implicit
the trope of woman as nation, for it is invested in representing women as a self-closed community and it also promises this community emancipation through a model of international feminine citizenship provided by the human rights paradigm. Building on their investigation of the nation as a project that often produces homogenized identity through discursive processes of racialization, sexualization, and genderization, they refuse to champion the gender-centered and rights-based approaches endorsed by global feminism because of its tendency toward homogenization.

Despite their less rosy view of the global-local nexus than Morgan’s or Bunch’s, postcolonial transnational feminists do not deny the political necessity of forging a link between the two. Indeed, the term “transnational” both speaks of their desire to deconstruct the global/local binary and presents a different vision on how this dichotomy may be worked towards genuine alliance between unequally situated women. Grewal and Kaplan (1994) argue that transnational feminist practices require women to “compare multiple, overlapping, and discrete oppressions rather than to construct a theory of hegemonic oppression under a unified category of gender” (17-18). In relation to the changed landscape of women’s movements at the turn of the century, in which women are more actively involved in building transnational solidarities and in ever increasing numbers, Mohanty (2003) posits that it is both politically and intellectually crucial “how we think of the local in/of the global and vice versa without falling into colonizing or cultural relativist platitudes about differences” (229). Investigating women’s struggles with the nation both within and beyond national boundaries, Kaplan et al. (1999) propose that only by critically engaging the relationship between woman and nation as not only structured by patriarchy, can feminists begin to grasp the supranational and transnational aspects of cultures of identity” (15). In other words, they suggest that transnational feminist identity should not be based in the essentialist concept of gender oppression, but be examined in the specific situations where gender is performed in intersection with other social forces and where there are also manifest systemic patterns of women’s struggles against all forms of domination. Their theorization defines transnational feminism as a “betweenness” to counter hegemonic sites of identity production. As the
theorists cited before them, they also call for closer attention to local identities as practices in the transnational conditions of knowledge production and consumption.

The concept of transnational feminism represents a far more conflicted, fragmented and discontented view of the global-local linkage. It is primarily an unequal linkage, lopsided by the unequal powers positioned on this link. According to this conception, “global” is a term that has been appropriated to stand in for Western powers and Eurocentric perspectives. It is not just difference but a profound power cleavage that divides women, and this map of asymmetric powers and unequal relations, according to the proponents of transnational feminism, is what so-called “global feminism” has ignored, glossed over and brushed aside in its globalist visions. For these proponents, the local resists universalism and essentialism of any kind. For this reason, they view the “global” as a hegemonic, liberal, imperialist and therefore extremely suspicious position to be occupied by feminisms or feminists.

Instead, “transnational feminism” is proposed as an alternative to “global/international feminism.” It envisions the global-local nexus to be a truly democratic space that bridges differences and creates alliances through a “transversal” politics. According to Yuval-Davis (2006), transversal politics envisions an alternative approach to radical political organizing rejecting both universalism that often stands in for West-centric viewpoints and traditional identity politics that have reified group boundaries. It is a politics that endorses a “dialogical” approach to epistemology, a primary respect for difference and a non-essentialist view about people’s social locations, identity and political values (281). A transversal global/local politics emphasizes that a critical engagement with locations is a fundamental precondition to an egalitarian and productive dialogue on the global level. It espouses a sisterhood that foregrounds and is contingent on an acknowledgement of difference derived from an intersectional perspective on gender, rather than one that relies on a commonality derived from an

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16 According to Yuval-Davis, “transversalism” is a concept proposed by Guattari 1974, which envisions “the politics of the construction of a radical political group as a collective subject, in which there is a constant flow of communication both horizontally and vertically—hence the name “transversalism” (2006, 281). Other authors, such as Collins 1998, Marchand 2003 and Mendoza 2002, also use the term in their works.
essentialist notion of gender. In sum, the global-local nexus conceived from the perspective of transnational feminism is fraught with conflicts and power struggles, because globalism is viewed essentially as a form of domination. But at the same time, a transversal localism that recognizes the power differences among identities and still allows for the construction of progressive coalitions across different social positions is encouraged and aspired to.

Inter-Trans-Global Feminisms: Traveling, Translation and the Global-Local link

What results from the global/international/transnational feminism debates is a highly ambivalent and oftentimes contradictory characterization of the relationship between the “global” and “local” in feminism. However, these discussions, despite their difference from or even disagreements with one another, all depart from the perception that the global-local nexus is an important relationship to be theorized. Just as Karpinski (1999) has pointed out, despite the local specificities of feminism, feminism remains committed to the “cause of building women’s solidarity across race, class, nation, ethnicity, religion, ability and sexuality” (19). This consensus, I argue, is tied to the fact that, despite women’s significant differences from each other, a critical mass of women from across both sides of the power divide have mobilized into a “global sisterhood” under the universalist rhetoric of human rights.

The term “transnational feminism” is increasingly adopted over “international” and “global feminism” by scholars to distinguish and endorse the transnationalist position on globalism and localism. However, as stated in Chapter 1, I deliberately coin the term “inter-trans-global feminisms” to emphasize the connections among these discourses, since they all address the pattern of women’s cross-national political mobilization. I also use the term to acknowledge the fact that there exist plural notions about what constitutes feminism and feminist politics. I use the words “international,” “global” and “transnational” interchangeably to describe the contemporary women’s human rights movement. The term ITG feminisms is crafted for the purpose of including different conceptions of the global-local nexus in conversation, since this dissertation is largely an exploration of the global-local interactions between international and Chinese women’s
anti-gender violence movement against the theoretical background reviewed in the above. Does the global-local nexus construct a binary, foster reciprocal friendships, or replicate pre-existing, hierarchal power relations? In particular, how to explain the appeal of universal or globalist visions across diverse localities when it is also true that such visions often have Western origins and do not address the history of conflicts that might exist between such origins and the contexts to which they are transplanted? Theoretically and empirically, my research project in China is an exploration of these important questions associated with ITG feminisms.

However, my dissertation takes a different approach to the study of ITG feminisms. While the majority of existing studies on the international women’s human rights movement focus on tracing and analyzing how it produces global forces at the international level, my study chooses to explore how the global informs local women’s activism. Women’s contemporary domestic violence movement in China is my “local” entry point into the “global” picture of women’s cross-national political organizing. My choice of the localist approach to the subject of global-local interactions in transnational women’s human rights movement is informed by miscellaneous perspectives in feminist, geographical, anthropological and translation studies that endorse the importance of studying the local as an interactive product as well as an agent of global forces. In the following, I will review these theories and identify the theoretical insights important to the conceptualization of my research project.

Concern with the Local in Studies about the Global

Globalization, a multifaceted phenomenon that includes diverse social, economic, cultural and political processes, such as global capitalism, global migration of people, transcultural flow of images and cross-national social movements, gives rise to an explosion of sociological inquiries about the subject in the last twenty years. According to Gille and O Riain’s review (2002), while the first generation of globalization studies was primarily preoccupied with how to define globalization as a social phenomenon at the macro-theoretical level (e.g., Giddens 1991, Harvey 1990, Robertson 1992), more recent studies represent numerous efforts at re-evaluating and re-conceptualizing some of
the major ideas from the old body of literature. One such contested idea concerns the assumption that globalization has an essentially “displacing” effect on the local, rendering places a more or less obsolete concept because they are viewed either as subordinate to or replicating global forces (Giddens 1991; Albrow 1995; Altvater and Mahnkopf 1997). In challenge to this perception, a number of scholars have proposed to re-conceptualize the local in relation to the global beyond the early schemes that analyze the two as distinct, isolated and even oppositional categories. Many of them are geographers, anthropologists and ethnographers, whose research agendas are traditionally bound with specific localities and places. They argue that the global and local have to be studied through and not separate from each other, precisely because all global forces have to incorporate themselves into local conditions in order to take widespread effect.

Human geography is a discipline preoccupied with the notion of space and place at the center of its inquiries. In the 1980s, conceptions of “space” as a quantifiable, separate and self-contained realm only obeying and affected by its own rules and relations, which had been a dominant school until then, underwent radical challenges from within the discipline. One such reconceptualizing work is Geography Matters, a 1984 collection of essays and studies focused on demonstrating how space is socially constructed (Massey and Allen). The authors show that since space is always embedded in a particular set of social relations, such as capitalism, patriarchy and state-centered nationalism, spatial patterns and relations have to be investigated through the social contexts in which they are situated. This new framework also has led Doreen Massey, one of the editors of the anthology, to re-assert the importance of place and location, as the uniqueness and variation they embody represent a fundamental theoretical task to geographical analysis. According to Massey, the challenge here, given the new notion of the social spatial, is to link the specific to the general without abandoning explications about the specific. She argues that “‘general processes’ never work themselves out in pure form. There are always specific circumstances, a particular history, a particular place or location. What is at issue – and to put it in geographical terms – is the articulation of the general with the local (particular) to produce qualitatively different outcomes in different localities” (1984, 9). The advanced argument here is that the local
is always an outcome of mixed processes joining both general and particular forces. Far from being an insulated space, the local is and therefore should be regarded as the conjunction through which “interdependent systems of dominance and subordination” (9) are processed and manifested.

Later, in her 1994 work “Space, Place and Gender,” Massey reinserts her early conception of place and locality, but this time as a particular response to the “time-space compression” perspective dominant in globalization studies, where time tends to be equated with “movement and progress” and “space/place” with “stasis and reaction” (151). She questions the assumption that any assertion of a sense of place or locality in an era of globalization is necessarily reactionary or escapist simply because globalization may have rendered spatial boundaries and place-attached identities increasingly vulnerable and in need of affirmation. She also acknowledges the danger of what she calls the “introverted” and “inward-looking” notion of place that insists on boundaries, territoriality and hegemonic identities (152). Instead, she proposes “a global sense of place,” which construed place as “a meeting place” (emphasis in the original, 154) of intersecting movements, networks and linkages between the local and the wider world. She states that, “in this interpretation, what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving at a particular locus” (154). She endorses this progressive sense of place and locality because it “includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local” (155). Massey’s discussions about place and locality suggest that the local is by no means isolated from or simply reactive to global processes. The local is not only an important but indeed crucial realm of analysis, for it provides the very locus from which both the specific and general forces in the formulations of varied geographical contours can be observed and studied. Against the background of globalization, she urges scholars not to relinquish theoretical investment in the local exactly because the local is always inherently and inevitably global.
In the field of cultural anthropology, Tsing argues that in order to study globalization without falling prey to the “globalist trap” (2000, 353), it is paramount to refrain from making and perpetuating a distinction between the global and the local. She contends that since all globalization projects involve “making terrain,” it is only logical to argue that “there can be no territorial distinctions between the ‘global’ transcending of place and the ‘local’ making of places” (352). However, she points out, the “globalist” thinkers often maintain an antithetical view about the global-local linkage, suggesting that the local is the place where global forces are inevitably stopped, absorbed or resisted. Her critique is that the tendency to emphasize the global over the local in globalization studies has the effect of “obscuring the ways that the cultural processes of all ‘place’ making and all ‘force’ making are both local and global, that is, both socially and culturally particular and productive of widely spreading interactions” (2000, 352, emphasis in the original). In his study of an anti-incinerator coalition in Hong Kong which deploys a universal language of environmentalism against local authorities, Timothy Choy articulates a similar view, contending that “universalities” and “particularities” are “concepts produced through, rather than preceding, political action” (2005, 7). Appadurai, in his seminal article “the production of locality,” defines “locality” more as a “relational and contextual” product than as a “scalar or spatial” location (204). He argues that locality is “a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts” (204). He specifically argues that contemporary global conditions of life, characterized most significantly by “diasporic flows” and “electronic/virtual communities,” have participated with increasing importance in the production of locality, a task formerly controlled more exclusively by the nation state (204). These discussions blur the boundary between the global and local to emphasize the need to understand globalization as a simultaneously global and local process. The local, according to this view, is an interface where global and local productions of culture, identities and other social and political relations are connected to and engaged in negotiation with each other. To attend to the local is to look for and capture the “overlaps, alliances, collaborations,
and complicities” that represent the most important aspects of the phenomenon of globalization (Tsing 2000, 334).

Gille and O’Riain’s proposition of a place-bound global ethnography derives from the conceptions of the local as a global place discussed above, but it makes the explicit suggestion that globalization may be best studied as a “placed” and not “displaced” process. With the local construed as a “globalized” place and the global as “place-making” projects, “location in place” becomes a useful and crucial site for the ethnographer to investigate “the social relations that extend beyond it” (2002, 279). Though they suggest that the challenges of an increasingly globalized world context may compel ethnographers to extend their concept and methodological approaches to “site” in both time and space, 17 they have primarily argued for “a global ethnography that still locates itself firmly in places,” because these sites are “homes to particular place-making projects” and, as such, embodiments of diverse and specific experiences of globalization too (290). This approach not only manifests a philosophic understanding of the local as a global situation, it also articulates a methodology that locates the local at the center of globalization studies, asserting the local as a fundamental analytic unit for the investigation of the global.

The Global-Local Linkage: Traveling and Translation Theories

In a body of literature that addresses the issues of “traveling” and “translation” across a broad spectrum of different social and historical phenomena, including feminism, the idea that the local is often shaped by social forces that extend beyond its material boundaries is a well-supported perspective. Moreover, these studies trace the process of the translocation of certain ideas and practices as well as the changes involved in such transmissions does not merely assert that a locational approach is necessary to the understanding of translocal forces and processes. Rather, these studies suggest strongly that the local is more than an outcome of its interactions with extra-local factors; it is also

an actor who exercises significant agency in such interactions. As a result of its own agency, the local is never viewed merely as a product or passive recipient of higher or external influences. The hint is that location, or place, deserves attention in its own right rather than only as a site of certain larger external force. To describe and analyze the historical process of “travels” and “translations” must be emphasized over the identification of their origins. This is the more important task.

One traveling project discussed within this body of literature is feminism. Such discussions all depart from the understanding that feminism is both global and local because it encompasses a wide array of aspirations and forms shaped by specific contexts as well as by their cross influences. They also argue that feminism does not have a fixed origin, but travels from context to context and accrues global influence through numerous processes of exchange and relocation that link women differentially situated to each other on a transnational map of power.

Thayer (2000) describes feminism as a traveling discourse, arguing that discourses indeed constitute an important part of the transnational cultural flows in an increasingly globalized world. Her usage of the term “transnational” suggests that circulations of discourses on the global scale follow multidirectional trajectories to and from multiple cultural sites rather than being characterized by fixed passages. She points out that relocation and assimilation of discourses are never smooth processes, but rather “an ongoing process of negotiation with distinctive moments” (208). Similarly, Schild (1999) has suggested that feminist discourses are best understood as cultural resources, “a social grammar that is neither inherently oppositional nor oppressive, but always amenable to be recruited for different projects” (88), albeit forever within limits. True (1990) adopts the term “antipodean,” a word that usually refers to opposite locations, to describe feminism as a creative form of rewriting of theories and practices elaborated elsewhere. The idea of “antipodean feminism,” according to her, suggests that feminism always claims a “Janus-faced” image “insofar as they [feminists] reconstruct feminisms received from outside and mobilize them in the indigenous discourses that contest gendered power relations inside” (268, emphasis in the orginal). It is important to note that these authors are not writing from abstract theoretical imaginations, but indeed
gained this common insight from their separate studies of feminism in a particular location, where, however, they have found links that have led them to other locations.\textsuperscript{18}

Other feminists have specifically challenged the notion of feminism as a Western product to reclaim the legitimacy and relevance of feminist struggles in non-Western contexts. Narayan (1997; 2000) is one such critic who refuses to designate Western origins to the concept of feminism. Speaking as a Third World feminist, she points out that equating feminism with Western ideology denies Third World feminists’ claims to their political identities, for it fails to acknowledge that their mobilization as feminists actually was initiated in their struggles against the specific powers affecting their oppressions as women in their lived contexts. She contends that feminism is always an indigenous product, but rhetoric polarizing Western and non-Western values often uses charges of Westernization to smear and suppress progressive feminist agendas that contest policies that are backed not only by Western powers, but also by local elites and patriarchal nation-states. In addition, she points out that the origins of a practice or concept seldom limit its scope of relevance (2000). Therefore, claims that “equality” and “rights” are Western values risk effacing the vital role such notions may have played and continue to play in social struggles against domination, though these are certainly discourses that are complicated by the historical practices of slavery, colonialism, sexism, racism and ethnocentrism in the West. Malti-Douglas (1997) articulates a similar concern when she comments that to identify a non-Western feminist as an importer of Western ideas provides a powerful shield for preventing important feminist ideas from entering indigenous discourses on class and gender. She suggests that this binary only functions to maintain hierarchy rather than to challenge it. Indeed, feminists often import ideas from each other to help with their struggles locally.

\textsuperscript{18} Thayer studied a feminist health organization in Brazil and traced its link to the 1970s Boston Collective in the U.S.; Schild explored the positioning of Chilean feminism within transnational feminist networks in Latin America; True researches how Australian feminist discourses are rewritten and transformed in the postcommunist feminist context in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.
Friedman’s call for a locational feminism may best encapsulate theories of feminism. She states that, “feminism is global in its widespread indigenous formations, but it is also global in the way that it travels, transplants, and transculturates” (2001, 22). She explains transculturation as a process whereby one culture digests and redefines within its own terms what it takes from others. Departing from this understanding, she calls for “a reinstitution of feminism in the singular” or what she defines as “locational feminism,” a feminism that is simultaneously situated in a specific locale, global scope, and constantly in motion through space and time” (15). She argues that a “re-singularization” of feminism does not mean that women should look beyond historical, national and cultural contexts for common ground, but on the contrary, it aims at a “thick description” of the myriad local manifestations of feminism, which also pays close attention to the larger regional, transcultural, and transnational conditions within which local resistance develops. She suggests that feminist theorization should engage in this “glocational” practice that “acknowledges the historically and geographically specific forms in which feminism emerges, takes root, changes, travels, translates, and transplants in different spacio/temporal contexts” (15).

The idea of feminism as a traveling discourse, a global history and a moving ideology shares crucial affinity with the increasing interest in studying “translation” as a creative process of “rewriting” both within and outside translation studies. Both the traveling and translation theories are invested in destabilizing the notion of the “original.” Translation theories, in particular, encourage a focus on the “translator” as the primary subject of investigation. What is worthy of investigating is not the locations that certain ideas or ideology, such as feminism, travel to and from. What constitute valuable subjects of investigation are the act of traveling and the products of that act.

Translation, traditionally a research area in language and literature, used to be dominated by a formalist, linguistic approach that treated words as the operational unit of analysis (Lefevere and Bassnette 1990, 15). Translation theories focused on translation skills often measure the value of a translation work by the faithfulness and accuracy of its renderings in reference to the original. While the original work is regarded as unique and authentic, the translation is often viewed as a replication and the labor of translation
completely non-creative and secondary, if not mechanical. However, under the influence
of postmodernist theorists such as Jacques Derrida, translation studies took a cultural turn
and shifted significant attention away from words and texts and onto the issues of social
and historical context. The 1990 anthology, *Translation, History and Culture*, edited by
Lefevere and Bassnette represents a major theoretical effort in the field to reconceptualize
translation from a culture-sensitive perspective. This new approach theorizes translation
first and foremost as a project of rewriting, instead of a mimicry of the original text. As
Lefevere and Bassnette have stated, “translation is a project of rewriting, that is at least as
influential in ensuring the survival of a work of literature as the originals, the ‘writings’
themselves” (1990, 10). To study translation as an original act in itself is study that
“invests a non-negligible power in the rewriters: translators, critics, historians, professors,
journalists,” indicating a strong recognition for the agency of translation” (10).

In this anthology, some scholars propose the concept of “appropriation” to discuss
translation, emphasizing translation as a cultural product rather than a mere linguistic act.
For instance, Kuhiwczak (1990) analyzes the first English translation of Kundera’s novel
*The Joke* in North America and demonstrates how the novel is transformed into a
representation of human experience confined to Eastern Europe only rather than as an
observation on human experience in general, as the author has intended. He argues that it
is the English editors’ cultural assumptions that have misappropriated Kundera’s intended
meaning. Macura (1990) shows a different kind of appropriation when he analyzes how
translation can be appropriated into a cultural narrative to constitute national identity. He
studies an anthology of poetry in the Czech revivalist period and finds that the collection
displays a curious penchant for translating German to Czech, even though the former
language was more accessible than the latter to many readers. He explains that, in this
case, translation becomes a means by which a new nation “proves” itself through
showing how its language is capable of rendering what is rendered in more prestigious
languages. Therefore, he argues that translation functions as appropriation rather than
linguistic mediation. As this case shows, translation was “not seen as passive submission
to cultural impulses from abroad; on the contrary, it was viewed as an active, even
aggressive act, an appropriation of foreign cultural values” (68).
This idea of translation as an act of rewriting has indeed crossed disciplines to explain social phenomena of a much wider range and often enormously different nature than linguistics and literature. For instance, in sociology Callon (1986) proposes a “sociology of translation” as an analytical framework to study the role of science and technology in the formulation of power relations. The concept of translation, according to Callon, allows sociologists to approach power as a mobilization process characterized by an experience of displacement at the center. To adopt such a perspective requires one to identify, follow and describe the exchanges and negotiations among different levels of actors associated with a power chain, as “translation is a process before it is a result” (224). This approach certainly reveals the understanding of translation as an act of appropriation.

In anthropology, translation becomes both a material and metaphorical site for studying the construction of power and difference, especially in the context of inter-cultural exchange and contact. Maranhao and Streck’s anthology offers one such example (2003). The authors explore the role of translation in colonialism, the barriers to the translation of bodily experience, the textualist vs. contextualist translation of law, the issues of translatability and untranslatability of difference, and so on. Their discussions all construe translation as a significant site and process of cultural production. Elsewhere in anthropology, the concept of translation has also been applied to analyze social protest that integrates culturally heterogeneous resources. Anna Tsing’s work on environmental movements perhaps provides the best and one of the very few examples that invoke translation as a theoretical concept to explain protest activism by socially marginalized groups (1995; 2005).

In both her article “Transition as translation” (1995), which traces the spread of global environmentalism, and her more recent book-length study (2005) on the cultural, political and social frictions between global and local power and knowledge surrounding the Indonesian tropical forest, Tsing is committed to a project of “engaging the universals” (2005, 6). In these studies, she observes that protest mobilizations around the world rely on universalizing rhetorics of rights and justice. However, rather than engaging with the universals, such as feminism and environmentalism, as a debate about
origin, her research intervenes in the debate by investigating universalism as a knowledge that moves and mobilizes and produces a chain of “faithless translations” (255) when it touches ground with different contexts in its movement.

In her shorter article, Tsing draws on cultural theories of translation to urge both scholars and activists to try rethinking history, meaning and universalism outside the West and non-West binary. She argues that “in this sense of the term translation, there are no originals, but only a heterogeneous continuum of translations, a continual process of rewriting in which meaning—as well as claims of originality and purity—are made” (1995, 266). Therefore, to look at history, especially global and universal, as translation is both to unsettle the myth of the origin, most of the times a Western one, and to examine how it is picked up, practiced, deployed, refigured and appropriated at the different sites that it moves through. As Tsing has argued ingeniously, “universals are indeed local knowledge in the sense that they cannot be understood without the benefit of historically specific cultural assumptions” (2005, 7). Such a perspective contends that it is only through the mediation of translations within specific locations that the universals are given meaning and become what they claim to be. Indeed, by showing how environmentalism that ties together claims for democracy, citizenship participation, and free information develops into a global cause when it is picked up and employed strategically by actors in different locations, she demonstrates “how universalisms, ironically, are a flexible medium for translation” (1995, 266).

In many ways, Tsing’s studies also allude to the deadlock in current social movement discourses of feminism that revolves ceaselessly around “the contests between the West and its Other” (1995, 259). She points out that we must cultivate a critical distance from stories, oftentimes channeled through a common scholarly understanding, of feminism and environmentalism as intrinsically Western. She argues that such a “West-to-the rest formulation” for both critics of modernization and Western imperialism repetitively makes “the distinction between the site of history, the West, and the site of cultural difference, the non-West” its recurrent theme (254). She goes on to point out that such a story erroneously traces and represents the West as the historical origin of “insight and action” while it implies “elsewhere” as the cultural barriers to that original
momentum. According to her, the origin is not the only site of investigation, nor is it an extremely productive and valuable one. Rather, it is the interactions between the supposed “origin” and its “others” that deserve more critical attention. To look at such interaction as an ongoing process of faithless and appropriative translation is to blur the boundaries between the “origin” and the “others” and to study the formation of meaning itself. Garb, another feminist analyst who uses the perspective of translation to study environmental movements, argues that “these borrowings of bits and pieces of other people’s lives are not one-way affairs, but feed back and alter their originating contexts in concrete and often unexpected ways” (1995, 276).

To engage the universal as it is practiced locally as a study of translation is not to romanticize the translator’s “faithlessness” or to equate translation with resistance, although this is a fine line one has to tiptoe carefully around. The power that shapes the trajectory of the global and universals is a crucial factor to be studied along with the specific routes unfolding along this trajectory. For instance, Garb (1995), in her analysis of Western feminist scholar Vandana Shiva’s portrayal of the Chipko movement in India, shows how cross-cultural representations, even scholarly ones with progressive intentions, often mistranslate and fail to convey full complexity. Her critique is that Shiva’s portrayal of Chipko, in deliberate attempts to valorize women’s participation in environmental politics, produced a highly selective and celebratory account that actually failed to grasp the gender politics of the movement, created myths about Chipko as an icon of Third World environmental activism and reinforced the stereotypes of women as bearers of inherent connections to nature. Garb’s analysis describes Shiva’s work as translation because it introduces non-Western stories of women’s activism and environmental struggles to the West, creating new channels of communication and bridges for solidarity. However, her analysis is primarily meant to point out that translation is not simply a mechanical process of transmission, it is rather one of mediation. As a result, some meanings, ideas and images are preserved and amplified, while others are muted and even lost.

In her most recent study, Tsing (2005), for instance, shows how Indonesian environmentalists precisely placed their ability to work as activists into the contradictions
of a universalist vision of human rights; exposing these contradictions was grounds for their protest directed towards an international audience. Her discussion exposes the presence of power as well as the strategic subversion of such power in the act of translating the universal. Indeed, she argues that to acknowledge the susceptibility of universalism to translation does not mean that “people can do anything they want to, [instead] they must make these rhetorics work within the compromises and collaborations of their particular situations” (2005, 5). Therefore, in this study, she evokes “friction” as a metaphor to emphasize the “awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” embedded in the translation process, suggesting that friction is not a synonym for resistance, but “a reminder of the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form, and agency” (2005, 6).

Sally Engle Merry is a scholar of legal anthropology whose recent work also applies the concept of translation to the exploration and theorization of the global-local interactions in the production of universal knowledge. Her *Human rights and gender violence: translating international law into local justice* (2005) specifically investigates the global-local mechanisms in the establishment of human rights laws as a universal framework to address the issue of gender violence against women across the globe. She finds that localization is a key process to the dissemination and appeal of the human rights concept. It enables human rights ideas to take effect and have resonance by translating them into local terms and situating them within local contexts of power and meaning. To her, translation is what creates the interface between the transnational and local women’s movements against gender violence. To put it more precisely, she suggests that translation is the process through which transnational feminist concerns, such as gender violence, come to be expressed in specific local context. It is also through this link that local contexts and women’s struggles participate as sites and actors promoting transnational feminist ideas and practices. She particularly argues that the objective of her project is to highlight “the role of activists who serve as intermediaries between different sets of cultural understandings of gender, violence, and justice” (2), pointing to the local translators, rather than the global planners, as the genuine cause of the ripple effects on the human rights universals promoted by the international women’s movement.
The “traveling” and “translation” theories I reviewed above not only assert the “local” as an important site of examination about the “global.” More significantly, they reframe our understanding of both the local and global by suggesting that they are related to and shaped through each other. This relational concept not only shifts focus away from the preoccupation with origins, it also moves us beyond attention to location and place as global spaces only against the general background of globalization studies. That is, it places emphasis on the social, cultural and political acts of movement that construct the global and local into an interface and that also continually redefine their identities and contours. To quote Edward Said from his “Traveling Theory” (1984), discussed through his critical reading of the theoretical travel of Lukas’ *Class Consciousness* from one setting and time to another, “the particular voyage from Hungary to Paris, with all that entails seems compelling enough, adequate enough for critical scrutiny” (237). To document how the international women’s human rights agenda against gender violence travels to China and becomes connected to the local women’s movements is to place this traveling history at the center of critical inquiry. Moreover, as Maranhao and Streck have argued, “translation should not be regarded as a natural process; rather, the original should be understood from the perspective of the translation” (2003, xxi). To examine Chinese women’s domestic violence activism as a “translation” in its broad social political sense of the global women’s gender violence movement is not only to treat the global and local as a dialectic, but it is also to use the local experience as a reflexive perspective on the global. Both traveling and translation theories provide a creative and insightful metaphorical concept to guide our exploration of the global-local nexus to a focus on the actions, negotiations and transformations that constitute the links between global and local sites.

**Social Movement Theories**

Since my research concerns a social movement, I also draw upon a set of key conceptual tools developed by social movement theorists to assist with my analysis of women’s political mobilization against domestic violence in China. These include the concepts of resource mobilization, political opportunity, collective identity and framing.
Resource mobilization theory (RMT) proposes that the emergence of social movements is primarily an outcome of resources available to movement actors, instead of being a result of increasing social grievance (Jenkins 1983; Young 1997; Nash 2000). As Jenkins states, “mobilization is a process by which a group secures collective control over the resources needed for collective action” (1983, 532). Different theorists have identified a variety of resources that prove crucial to the formation of social movements, such as money, human labor, facilities, legitimacy and so on.\textsuperscript{19} McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977, 1987), who are usually credited as the two key proponents of RMT, particularly emphasize the significance of institutional resources, such as social movement organizations, to successful movement mobilization.

Political opportunity is one resource that is singled out and expanded into a largely independent concept by many social movement theorists. This concept analyzes political institutions and their structures as crucial factors for the construction of a social movement. The traditional concept of political opportunity structure is born out of an exclusive concern with domestic political institutions and processes, and therefore is focused on the state as the primary site of structural influence to a social movement (Tarrow 1996; Della Porta 1999; Charles Tilly 1978; McAdam \textit{et al.} 1996). Tarrow defines political opportunity as “consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements” (1996, 54). This concept not only emphasizes formal dimensions of political opportunity, such as institutions and policy, but it also stresses the pattern of conflict and alliance structures as a considerable contributor of resources or constraints to political actors. Kiresi (1996) conceptualizes political opportunity structure in terms of three broad sets of properties: the formal institutional composition of a political system, the informal procedures and prevailing strategies available to the challengers, and the configuration of power between the

\textsuperscript{19} Jenkins (1983) enumerates several classifications of resources deemed important to social mobilization. Jenkins (1982) distinguishes power resources from mobilizing resources, Freeman (1979) separates tangible resources from intangible or “human” assets, and Rogers (1974) discusses instrumental and infra-resources, the former defined as “means of influence” that can be used directly to effect change and the latter as resources that constitute “the preconditions or prerequisites without which instrumental resources are useless” (1452).
challengers and those they protest against. What these ideas have in common is that political opportunity should delineate a patterned power structure in which social movement activists are embedded and indicate how they are positioned within this structure in relation to the target of their challenge.

However, the acceleration of globalization and the proliferation of transnational political mobilizations in recent decades have drawn the increasing attention of social movement theorists to the international context of political opportunities. The rise of transnational political mobilization from environmentalism to global feminism in the late 20th century is increasingly recognized as forming a new political opportunity structure with implications for both globally and locally based actors (See Nash 2000; Smith et al. 1997; Della Porta et al. 1999). Kriesberg (1997) argues that transnational social movements and the organizations they mobilize through are important agents of global change and can influence global policy in several ways, including help mobilize support for particular policies, widen civil society participation in international policy processes, maintain attention on critical global problems, define social issues and set policy agendas, and monitor or implementing transnational policies. These discussions reveal a more dialectical perspective on social movements and political opportunities, as they suggest that political mobilizations not only benefit from political opportunities, they also can transform the opportunity structure and therefore become political forces to be reckoned with.

The concept of collective identity in social movement theories is a result of an increasing tendency among sociologists to view collective action as an interactive and constructivist process involving both structural opportunities and decision making by human agents. It explains how individual actors come to define themselves as members of a collective in pursuit of a common goal and, as such, provides a key concept for understanding “the means by which structural inequality becomes subjectively experienced discontent” (Taylor and Whittier 1995, 172).20 Mellucci (1995), a major theorist who has contributed to the conceptualization of collective identity as well as the so-called new social movement theories, argues that collective action needs to be

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20 For a review of this concept, see Polletta and Jasper 2001.
understood as “purposive orientation” organized by individuals acting collectively in negotiation with a range of opportunities and constraints, rather than as an automatic effort resulting from the actors’ structural position or as a ready expression of their pre-existing values and beliefs. Therefore, he argues, collective identity is a useful concept to analyze how individuals organize into a social movement community and make conscious choices in terms of action. Based on this perspective, he defines collective identity as “an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place” (44). He emphasizes that the concept should be interpreted as a process of interaction between the actors and the environment, rather than as a simple reaction of the actors to their structural constraints.

Finally, frame is a concept that explains how social movement activists create meaning for their cause, attribute a certain perspective to the experience they mobilize to address, and specify actions to be adopted in congruence with their understanding of the social problem at hand. The origin of this concept is usually attributed to Erving Goffman, who describes framing as “schemata of interpretation” that enables individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large (1974, 21). Snow and Benford, building on Goffman’s perception of the cognitive properties of frames, develop the concept of “collective action frame” to shed light on the interdependent relationship between action and beliefs in a movement. They argue that movement participants do not simply strive for a common framework to interpret problems, they also intend for such a frame “to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford 1988, 198) because frames can be construed as modes of punctuation, attribution and articulation. The concept of “action frame” renders explicit a frame’s purpose as well as its capacity to motivate action. A frame achieves this task when it provides a vocabulary of motive for potential actors through the processes whereby problems are laid out, described, explained and given solutions by a social movement (see also Snow and Benford 2000). In addition to “collective action frame,” Snow and Benford also
discuss the concept of “master frame,” depicting the latter as “generic paradigms from which specific action frames are derived” (1992, 138). Accordingly, master frames provide a much broader interpretive medium and may enable separate movements across different sites and times to associate with each other in what Sidney Tarrow calls “cycles of protest” (1989). In general, the “frame” concept suggests that social movements rely on an interpretive lens and motivational vocabulary to address social problems and engage in political action. As McCarthy et al. point out, “an essential task in [social movement] struggles is to frame social problems and injustices in a way that convinces a wide and diverse audience of the necessity for and utility of collective attempts to redress them” (1996, 291).

I do not intend my dissertation to be a systematic case study of social movement theories. However, since this research concerns the linkage between two social movements —local and global—the key concepts of social movement theories help me to locate, identify and discuss this linkage. At the same time, they also aid in my analysis of the formation of the Domestic Violence Network, the flagship organization of the women’s anti-domestic violence movement in China. My dissertation contributes crucial information on what resources, identities and framing strategies are created by the international women’s human rights movement for women’s mobilization within a local context and how these are used by the locally-based women’s movement, in the specific case of women’s recent political mobilization against domestic violence in China.

Organizational Framework

My proposition to interrogate the global-local linkage of ITG feminisms through the case of the contemporary Chinese women’s movement against domestic violence and within the larger context of the international women’s human rights movement is primarily informed by the locality concept, and the traveling and translation theories discussed above. My endorsement of a locational approach is based on my understanding that the global women’s human rights movement is not only formed through transnational advocacy networks, the United Nations, and the body of international legal instruments the U.N. promotes, it also takes place in local settings where the ideas and practices of
this movement accrue impact through local women’s activism. The local, therefore, is a site of global struggle and movement.

Moreover, I argue that the traveling and translation concepts, in particular, offer me an alternative perspective and approach to enter into the still ongoing debates about global, international, and transnational feminisms and to re-assess their conceptualizations of the global-local linkage. It allows me to explore and evaluate both the support for universalism by “global/international feminism” and its rejection from “transnational feminism,” given that the current women’s human rights movement against gender violence pivots on the concept of gender violence as a violation of universal human rights. My research follows Tsing’s call to “engage the universals,” as it examines universals in movement at a specific, historically situated location. It also endorses the idea that traveling and translation are the mechanisms that keep universals in perpetual motion. Moreover, they are critical processes through which meanings are produced and reproduced. As Garb states, “rather than seeing translations as occurring between existing spheres or movements, we should see these translations as one of the main ways in which such spheres and movements are constituted and constantly remade” (1995, 276). My dissertation is an attempt to understand the global women’s human rights movement against VAW from the perspective of one translation, i.e., the Domestic Violence Network in Beijing, the center of the women’s anti-domestic violence movement in China.

To study the global-local linkage between the international and Chinese movements against gender violence as a process of traveling and translation is to investigate where connections are made, how they are made and what meanings and outcomes are produced out of this process. Thus, the organizational structure of my dissertation will follow the formulation of the contemporary women’s anti-domestic violence movement in China, especially the formation of the Domestic Violence Network in Beijing, through its different developmental stages. To examine contemporary women’s mobilization against domestic violence in China across a chronological scale is to expose a full process of global-local interactions and to reveal the specific trajectories of traveling and projects of translation.
The obvious starting point of this chronology of global-local feminist interactions leading to the emergence of a Chinese women’s anti-domestic violence movement in recent years is the 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing. My dissertation includes periods before and after this conference to identify and examine four stages in the development of the movement. The first stage falls roughly between the late 1970s to early 1990s. It is a stage characterized by a reinvigorated women’s movement and both marginal and marginalized women’s domestic violence activism within the broader context of the Chinese state’s market reforms. The first stage is a critical stage where the global-local relations between China and the rest of the world, including in the field of women’s movements, began to transition from isolation to interactive.

The second stage corresponds closely to the preparation process leading to China’s hosting of the Beijing Conference in 1995. It is during this stage that significant political linkages were initiated and cultivated between the global and the Chinese women’s movements because of the Beijing event. The transformation of domestic violence from a profoundly taboo social topic to an area of concern openly acknowledged by Chinese policy makers and discussed at the NGO Forum is a remarkable outcome of the global-local linkage brought to Chinese women by the Conference. I will discuss the Beijing process as a particular political opportunity.

The third stage stretches the approximate in-between period from the time of the Beijing Conference to the early 2000s. It is a period during which the global-local nexus created by the Beijing process deepened and materialized into a specific political project, the mobilization of the Domestic Violence Network, a women’s non-profit organization committed exclusively to the issue of domestic violence and other forms of gender violence. The global-local interface manifested in the formation process of the DVN particularly highlights the economic structure underlying the transnational cause against VAW. This structure was created by the global presence of international donor agencies in many non-Western societies. I will discuss international donor agencies as a key economic resource that enabled mobilization of DVN. I will also address women’s “vocabularies of motive” in the organization’s mobilization process.
The fourth stage looks at the period between DVN’s establishment and 2006. During this contemporary stage, the focus of DVN’s anti-domestic violence agenda is to localize the gender and human rights framework into local understandings and policies about the issue of domestic violence. The global-local linkage between the international and the Chinese women’s movement started by the Beijing Conference is continued through the local movement’s active use of frames promoted by the global women’s human rights movement. My discussion will focus on the cultural and political processes of the “translation” of the gender and human rights frame through several projects.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I situated my dissertation project as an inquiry about the contradictory conceptions of the global-local nexus outlined by major feminist debates on the topic of global sisterhood, global feminism and transnational feminism. Discussions of the local as a global place in globalization studies, of feminism as a traveling project and of the usefulness of a “translation” perspective in studies of varied social interactions were presented to establish the conceptual framework for my dissertation. These concepts furnish the rationale and theoretical principles for my study of the global-local interface of ITG feminisms in the case of a local women’s movement. In addition, I introduced the concepts of resource mobilization, political opportunity, collective identity and framing in social movement studies as important analytical tools to my exploration of the specific linkages and interrelations between global and Chinese feminisms in the field of gender violence. Finally, I presented the organizational framework of my dissertation and identified four stages of global-local interactions I shall examine. In the next chapter, I discuss the first stage, when the linkage between global and Chinese feminism was highly ambivalent but was also about to change dramatically because of China’s decision to host the Beijing Conference.
CHAPTER 3

CONNECTING TRACKS: MOVING TOWARD THE BEIJING CONFERENCE

Introduction

China has crossed paths with the then emerging transnational women’s human rights movement since the United Nations Decade of Women. It was not only present at each of the three women’s conferences (Mexico city in 1975; Copenhagen in 1980; Nairobi in 1985) organized by the U.N. for the Women’s Decade, it was also a remarkably early signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).\textsuperscript{21} Indeed, the Women’s Convention is the first international treaty signed by China in the post-Mao period, marking it one of the country’s initial attempts to reconnect with the world after a decade of internal social turmoil and external political isolation caused by the Cultural Revolution.\textsuperscript{22} However, this trajectory of China’s intersection with ITG feminisms hardly touched any aspect of women’s movements in China, since its history of participation was only known to a few official delegates, hardly publicized inside China and therefore unknown to most Chinese women.\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{22} See Pei 2000, page 32. In the article, he gave lists of the international treaties China signed since 1980, with CEDAW as the earliest (1980).

\textsuperscript{23} One woman journalist, who later participated in the 1995 Beijing conference, recalled that, “Though the First World Conference on Women had been held in Mexico City in 1975, and the U.N. had accepted the proposal by (sic) the Conference that 1976-1985 would be the ‘UN Decade for Women,’ as journalists of China Women’s News, my colleagues and I did not even have this basic information. In our traditional minds, everything related to foreign countries should be the responsibility of the Foreign Affairs Department, and whether or not to make contacts, or how to make them, had nothing to do with our work” (See Xie 1995, 68). This account is cited from Reflections and Resonance, a collection of essays reflecting Chinese women’s experiences of participation at NGO forums during the Beijing process. Given that China
Later in the 1990s, it is through China’s preparations for and hosting of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in Beijing that a considerable number of Chinese women experienced their first personal and public encounter with ITG feminisms, as the Beijing conference also marks the apex of the international women’s human rights movement against gender violence. To many Chinese women who have participated in the process, this encounter signified a historical moment at which the Chinese women’s movement “connected tracks” to the international women’s movement (Hsiung 1998; Jin 2001; N.H. Zhang 2001). According to Wang, a Chinese feminist scholar, the Beijing process was nothing less than “a historical turning point for women’s movements in China,” as it generated a multitude of opportunities, resources and stimulating influences to the advancement of women’s mobilization as women (1996). It is also in the post-Beijing period that domestic violence began to emerge forcefully on the Chinese women’s movement agenda, suggesting a critical and particular influence of the Beijing process on women’s domestic violence activism in China.

In order to grasp the significance of the Beijing conference as a “turning point” in the development of women’s domestic violence activism in China, I argue that one first has to gain a contextualized understanding of this encounter. This chapter will provide vital historical information necessary to the assessment of the political impact of the Beijing process analyzed in the subsequent chapter. I will address three interrelated questions: 1) What circumstances enabled the historical encounter between Chinese women’s movements and the transnational women’s human rights movement in Beijing in 1995, and how do we understand China’s decision to host the Beijing conference within the country’s Post-Mao sociopolitical context? 2) What was the status of women’s movements prior to the Beijing process? 3) How was domestic violence addressed in China before the Beijing process?

*Women’s News* is owned by the state agency, the All China Women’s Federation, and represents the leading newspaper on policy and social news about women’s issues, Xie’s account is very telling about the extremely limited impact of China’s participations in the first three United Nations World Conferences on Women.
Chinese Women and Feminism?

On Jan 28, 1991, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote a letter to the then U.N. General Secretary expressing China’s interest in hosting the 1995 Beijing Conference. The letter stated that it would be a great pleasure for the Chinese government and people to organize the conference and its parallel NGO Forum. It remarked that China constituted an appropriate setting for the FWCW not only because it possessed the highest population of women on the globe, but also because “woman’s work” has historically been a top priority on the state agenda. Evoking China’s record as a recurrent participant at the U.N.-organized women’s conferences since the late 1970s and its commitment to the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies as a signatory party state, the proposal portrayed China as a devout, enthusiastic and exemplary champion of the global women’s cause (China Foreign Ministry 1998).

It was a peculiar and dubious move on the part of the Chinese government, given that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has historically endorsed a Marxist perspective on women’s liberation in denunciation of “feminism,” translated predominantly as “women’s-rightsism” (nuquanzhuyi) in the Chinese discourse and imbued with negative associations with Western-ness and bourgeoisie (Wang 1999). Perceived and stereotyped essentially as a Western capitalist product and a middle-class pursuit, “feminism” was determined not only to be ideologically incompatible with but also politically irrelevant to the socialist path of women’s emancipation in China. However, the history of Chinese women’s movements prior to the ascendancy of the CCP reflected many similarities in thoughts and activism with Western feminisms (Stacey 1983; Andors 1983; Fan 1996; Wang 1999; Judd 2002).

The woman question began to be discussed in public discourse, often by a group of reform-minded male intellectuals, in the context of China’s transition from a feudal monarchy to a burgeoning nationalist capitalist economy towards the end of the 19th century. The threat of imperialist powers, whose drugs and weapons forced the country into foreign invasion and occupation, also stimulated a wave of social movements aspiring to resurrect the nation from its “backward” status at the turn of the 20th century. Calls for democracy, social progress and liberation also included women’s oppression in social
debates, though many debates were focused on how to transform women’s consciousness as individuals (Ding 1998; Du 2001; Han 2005). It is against this background that the early communist leaders introduced Marxist perspectives and articulated a social understanding of women’s oppression by linking women’s emancipation to class struggles. Li Daozhao, a prominent communist intellectual and leader, distinguished bourgeois feminist movements from proletarian women’s liberation movements, arguing that the proletarian agenda not only aimed to liberate all women from patriarchy but also required all working class women to join in the struggle to overthrow class domination (1984). Within such a frame, women’s liberation was addressed and perceived as an inherent part of the much larger and important agenda of class liberation and national independence. Based on this understanding, Mao wrote that “the destruction of superstitious family beliefs and incorrect relations between men and women [,] will yet arrive as natural results of the political and economic struggles” (cited in Ding 1998, 66). Since its inception, the communist agenda on the “woman question” was fixed on a class-centered paradigm distinct from feminism.

Wang Zheng’s research reveals that the rise of the CCP to power and the enshrinement of Marxism as the party’s orthodox ideology within the context of China’s liberation struggles, which led to the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, was also a process in which “feminism” was screened out resolutely as a highly negative concept because of its association with the imperialist West. She points out that the erasure of “feminism” in the CCP discourse was essential to the legitimacy of its leadership and authority as “the liberator of Chinese women” (1999, 1). While the socialist revolution was upheld and prescribed as the only successful and righteous model of women’s emancipation in China, “feminism” was concomitantly depicted as a “doomed failure” and repudiated as a counterexample describing bourgeois women’s narrow pursuit of equal rights without a political or economic revolution (1).

Edwards observes that within such an overarching nationalist rhetoric, independent feminist expressions are often labeled as treasonous and selfish by the government, as they contradict the “grand narrative” and official discourse of women’s liberation in China (2000). Therefore, when Zhang Jie, an acclaimed Chinese woman
writer, was asked by a group of American women writers in a U.S. delegation whether
she would identify herself as a feminist writer given the focus of her writing on women’s
subjectivity, she replied that there was no such thing as “feminism” in China. This
transnational encounter took place in Beijing in the spring of 1988 and the awkward
moment enticed Shih, a diasporic Taiwanese intellectual and the American-side translator
on that occasion, into a critical reflection on the complex historical and ideological
construction of the “incompatibility” between China and feminism. As Shih rightfully
points out, this incompatibility is structured crucially by the historical forces shaping the
distinct history of a women’s movement in China (Shih 2004).

Given the CCP’s disapproval of “feminism” historically, the conjoining of
Chinese women’s movements and the global women’s cause through the Chinese’s
state’s hosting of the 1995 Beijing conference was nothing short of an ideological
oxymoron. It was almost unthinkable. Recalling her first-time encounter “face to face
with foreign women” in 1985, Xie Lihua, a senior editor of *China Women’s News,*
recalled her and her colleague’s absolute shock at the idea of women’s sexual rights, part
of a women’s movement agenda advocated by a delegation of Spanish women. She
evoked this memory to reflect the point that “It was impossible, at the time, to say that
the Chinese women’s movements should have contacts with the outside world. We did not
understand women in other countries and they did not understand us” (Xie 1995, 68,
italics mine). The intersection of Chinese women’s movements and a world of
“feminisms” was impossible to imagine not only because the state was looked to as the
absolute arbitrator of such an experience, but also because until the end of the 1980s the
state had been the major boundary separating the two. Why on earth, then, did the
Chinese state go out of its way to connect to “feminism” in the early 1990s? It is a
question fundamental to a critical understanding of the historical circumstances that both
construct the opportunities and impose the limits on the significant encounter between
Chinese women’s movements and the international women’s human rights movement
that I will discuss in the next chapter.

I propose that one should look both to the socioeconomic background
characterizing the post-Mao era and the immediate sociopolitical context characterizing
the pre-Beijing period for an adequate understanding on this important question. I argue that China’s decision to host the FWCW, despite its paradoxical appearance, is consistent with the country’s development policy since the introduction of economic reforms at the end of the 1970s. At the same time, it can also be read as an attempt on the part of the CCP to restore the legitimacy of its leadership from a state of crisis caused by the Tiananmen massacre in the late 1980s. Still determined to pursue economic reforms and desirous to be included as a valuable member of the international community, the Chinese government was compelled politically, economically and morally to redeem its image in the world. Its courting of the women’s conference reflected an opportunistic attitude in China’s approach to the reparation of its damaged reputation. The Beijing conference presented an ideal opportunity given the historical status of the women’s movement as a non-oppositional and collaborative partner of the CCP leadership in the history of the People’s Republic of China (P.R.C.). Moreover, the symbolic relation between the woman question and a nation’s degree of modernity provided useful political capital for the Chinese state to recuperate its international status. In the following section, I will examine the different aspects related to China’s decision to host the Beijing Conference.

Opening to the World: The New Ideology

“Connecting tracks” is a popular parlance in contemporary China, which gained wide circulation under Deng Xiaoping’s leadership, most prominently marked by its “open-door” policy. The object of “connecting tracks” is often referred to as “the international,” literally meaning the West and the “advanced” civilizations and technologies it represents. Min explains that the metaphor of “connecting tracks” is embedded in China’s imagination of itself as a longtime “exile” from the international community, who now wants to re-integrate and become a member of the global community (2003). One could argue that this phrase draws from the practice of railway tracks relayed for the purpose of directing the different trajectories of passing trains. Used as a cultural metaphor, it strongly implies China’s willingness to transform its socioeconomic trajectory and to merge into the global system. This popular colloquy
vividly encapsulates the core of Deng’s open-door policy, which, according to Keith, is a strategy of learning from the West to achieve development (Min 1999, 148).

In 1978, Deng, succeeding Mao and faced with a country still reeling from the disastrous effects of the Cultural Revolution between 1967 and 1976, introduced the plan of “Four Modernizations”—in agriculture, industry, science, and technology—to rebuild the state. This sweeping reform plan shifted the state agenda from a Maoist emphasis on class struggles to a Dengist emphasis on economic development, marking the official beginning of China’s globalization. The influence of this reform is revolutionary, as it enabled China to become “a serious competitor in the world economy and bring prosperity to greater numbers of Chinese than at any time since 1949” (Grasso et al. 2004, 241). Though primarily an economic reform, Deng’s plan for China’s modernization also brought significant political and discursive changes, especially in the arena of China’s foreign policy.

Within the Dengist state-building scheme, friendly rapport with the international community has been aggressively pursued and practiced as a necessary approach to implement China’s new priority—modernization. Hinton notes that as Mao’s “perennial glorification of actual or alleged ‘great upheavals’ at home and abroad has given way to preference for domestic and international stability as the condition most conducive both to security and to modernization,” China’s foreign policy also experienced a major shift from “eagerness for confrontation” to eagerness for cooperation (Hinton 1993, 401). The goal of modernization through economic development provided the ideological driving force behind the country’s opening-up to the rest of the world. In concurrence, Perry and Seldon observe that internationalization is a key element among the multiple processes unleashed by China’s reform efforts (2000). They point out that, prior to the 1970s, China was dominated by the rhetoric of a global proletarian revolution, which often portrayed itself as a victim of unfair international antagonism. With the market reforms under Deng, China began to perceive the international environment as one favoring “peace and development” and launched many legal and policy changes to enable its insertion into the market.
With economic development as a top priority and international cooperation as a necessary means to harness the financial resources of international trade and investment, especially with the Western powers, Deng’s policies unhesitatingly abandoned Mao’s isolationism and opened China to Western cultures. “Opening to the world,” as a consequence, was enshrined as the new official ideology. This frame of mind extends beyond Deng’s regime and continues to this day. Examined against this frame, China’s offer to host the Beijing conference can be understood as a political and cultural strategy for integration into the international community. To sponsor this global women’s conference is consistent with “open-door” rhetoric and policy. Obviously, “the international,” a synonym with the West, presents a powerful symbol of modernity that drives both China’s imagination and the practices of self-modernization. Therefore, to connect rails to international practices and trends, even though it can lead to a close encounter with “feminism,” can readily be rationalized and embraced as conforming to the open-door policy.

The Tiananmen Crush and Damage Control

Even though Deng’s open-door ideology renders Chinese women’s encounter with inter-trans-global feminisms a theoretical and political possibility, the Chinese government’s maneuvering to host the Beijing conference also has to be examined within the more immediate sociopolitical context marked by the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989. The Tiananmen killings happened in the context of the student-led pro-democracy movement that emerged in the mid 1980s. It is a movement that, disappointed with the lack of political reforms in comparison with rapid economic development, demanded democratic changes from the state. It advocated a Western discourse on human rights that emphasized citizen and individual rights (Guang 1996). This dissident movement culminated in a collective sit-in demonstration at Beijing’s Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, which was crushed violently by the government army. The bloody confrontation between students and the state plunged the communist regime into a profound political crisis. The fallout of this incident was firmly imprinted on China’s political landscape after 1989, as the state tightened its control over both social and political spheres in
general. After the crackdown, both Beijing and Shanghai authorities issued regulations requiring groups to apply five days in advance for permission for any public assembly, with the intention to prevent future demonstrations. The year 1989 also saw the passage of a new law imposing stringent requirements on social organizations in an effort to keep dissident activities on a tighter leash.24

The student pro-democracy movement was primarily blamed for the pollution of young minds by Western ideas. Shortly after the Tianmen massacre, on the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the P.R.C., Jiang Zemin, then General Secretary of the CCP Central Committee, delivered a speech to the nation and cast the bloodshed at Tiananmen as the result of “an acute opposition between the Four Cardinal Principles and bourgeois liberalization” (quoted in Sullivant 1995, 22). By portraying the pro-democracy movement as a “class struggle” between the Chinese nation and a Western bourgeois agenda, the state accused the protesters of being conspirators with “antagonistic foreign forces” aiming to sabotage China’s socialist cause; this effectively denounced the nationalist nature and legitimacy of the movement. With this discourse, China was imagined as unified in an arduous but lofty struggle against a hostile imperialist environment swamped with foreign forces trying to “isolate, blockade, and provoke our country” (quoted in Sullivant 1995, 23).

However, highly aware of the contradiction between his rhetorical stance and that of the open-door policy, Jiang distinguished between two opposing approaches to reform, affirming that reform and opening up to the outside world can only be justified in the service of socialist purposes, which means that the CCP’s “democratic dictatorship”25 must be upheld. The other approach, which Jiang characterized as a demand of “total

24 The law is called the Regulation on the Registration and Management of Social Groups. See Chapter 4, note 45.

25 Constitutionally, China is self-defined as “a socialist country under people’s democratic dictatorship led by the working class in coalition with the peasant class.” (P.R.C. Constitution, General Principle, article 1). It is a political system based in the classical Marxist theory of the state, which views class struggles as pivotal to the formation of social relations and regards the state essentially as an instrument of class rule. Communist society is envisioned as a single-class society where only one legitimate class exists, the proletariat. Therefore, democracy in the Marxian sense means class democracy and dictatorship of the proletariat, though dictatorship is only viewed as a transition form of the state before it reaches the highest stage of communist evolution, a society where no social strata exist, resources are allocated on the basis of needs and people contribute in fair proportion to what they are capable of producing. See Ou-Yang, 1984.
Westernization,” was capitalist and therefore essentially opposed to China’s socialist system. In the same speech, while Jiang acknowledged “peace and development” as a general trend of the international situation, he stressed the “outside world” more significantly as a threat—an enemy and foreign opponent to be guarded against. Patriotism was consistently called for and emphasized as the most important qualifier of a socialist national subject in the process of China’s reform period (quoted in Sullivant 1995). This speech and the preceding Tiananmen incident were unequivocal manifestations of the state’s ability and determination to control its “opening” to the international community. This circumstance also revealed that the aim of the “opening” project is to strengthen the hegemony of the state rather than to dilute or relax it.

The Chinese government’s violent response to the Tiananmen demonstrators provoked international furor and also led to expensive consequences, both politically and economically. Many Western governments not only issued statements of strong criticism and moral condemnation, they also adopted various diplomatic and economic measures to remonstrate the Chinese government’s behavior as an egregious form of mass human rights violation. They provided political asylum to the students on China’s wanted list, shut down high-level ministerial visits, and suspended or imposed sanctions on economic aid (Foot 2000, 113-149). The substantial decline in bilateral foreign assistance to China from $3.4 billion in 1988 to $1.5 billion in 1989 and $0.7 billion in 1990 can be interpreted as clear evidence of the economic cost of the Tiananmen incident (Donnelly 1998, 120). In addition, the Chinese government faced enormous pressure from international human rights groups and the U.N. to admit wrongdoing. At a U.N. sub-commission meeting on human rights in the wake of the incident, the commission passed a resolution without China’s votes to indicate its critical stance regarding the Chinese government’s behavior. 26

In such a charged atmosphere, China became a subject of international shaming. According to Kent (1993; 1999), despite its stubborn defense of its behavior with the

26 Though mildly worded, Foot argues that it was “the first ever resolution to criticize a permanent member of the UN Security Council for its human rights violations,” (2000, 119). The U.N. usually relies on public shaming as a means to inciting changes in unfavorable governmental behavior.
rationale that national stability is always more paramount than freedom of expression, China was largely defeated in its attempts to justify its behavior as an issue of domestic politics outside the purview of international human rights laws. Apparently, China was just beginning to realize that, by opening to the world for the purpose of economic development, it also opened more than just its economy. Its punishment by the international community for the Tiananmen crackdown taught the Chinese government a crucial lesson that globalization not only incurred extra-economic results, it also involved abiding by extra-economic rules, such as the human rights norm.

Given this context, China’s motivation to host the Beijing conference is more obvious as a strategic attempt at “damage control” in relation to its deteriorating international reputation than as a genuine aspiration to connect tracks to progressive international elements, least of all to the transnational women’s movement. Sponsoring the FWCW, like China’s adoption of international laws, including CEDAW, figures primarily as an instrument of the state’s foreign policy (McKenzie 1992). Dickson and Chao label China’s foreign policy as a reactive policy, pointing out that its pattern of behavior often reflects pragmatic responses to changing circumstances rather than a principled adherence to a set of core beliefs and goals (2001). When juxtaposed against the Tiananmen incident just two years before, the Chinese government’s 1991 appeal to host the Beijing conference strongly suggests the state’s pragmatism in foreign policy.

The Woman Question and the Nation

Blecher (2002) argues that the Chinese government’s need to legitimate itself after the Tiananmen bloodshed presented Chinese feminists with a precious opportunity, even though its decision to host the FWCW was predicated on both the perception of women’s issues as a safe topic and China’s own self-evaluation as a high achiever in this aspect. This mentality points to extra questions that deserve attention. Why women’s issues? Why were they deemed by the state as safe issues for engagement in a politically charged atmosphere? What does China’s choice of women’s issues to deflect international criticism of its human rights status reveal about the relationship between the woman question and the Chinese state?
As Hsiung and Wong point out, “the women’s movement in China has a history grounded in the context of anti-imperialism and the formation of a strong nation, and it was also generally thought of as a male-initiated one” (1998, 481). First of all, the status of women’s issues as a safe area has to do with the closely intertwined historical trajectory of Chinese women’s liberation and China’s independence movement in modern history. It is within the context of China’s nationalist struggles in the early 20th century that women’s issues were politicized as social issues and also became a cause linked strongly to the interests of the nation.

While the communist-led revolution fiercely rejected “feminism” as a bourgeois ideology, it acknowledged the “woman question” as an integral, yet subordinate component to the liberation of the proletarian class and emancipation of the Chinese people. As Zhang and Wu observed, “the liberation of women as part of the national struggle for independence was the dominant strategy of the women’s movement in pre-1949 China” (1995, 28). This collective and nation-centered parameter continued to characterize Chinese feminism in post-revolution China. The legitimacy of this approach is lodged in the undeniable fact that Chinese women are substantially liberated from patriarchal feudal practices and accorded constitutional rights giving them equal status with men as a result of the communist revolution (Croll 1978; Andors 1983).

The most evident and significant manifestation of the collective and, indeed, statist approach to the “woman question” is represented by the All China Women’s Federation (ACWF), a mass organization set up by the Chinese government at the time of the country’s liberation to co-ordinate and carry out “woman work” throughout the whole country.27 As a mass organization, it is directly led and closely supervised by the party through state funding, governmental control of registration and selection of leaders, and such control tends to be firmer the higher the rank of the ACWF organization in proximity to the central state. ACWF claims a broad membership across all sections of

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27 The Chinese communist party set up three mass organizations after it rose to power. Besides ACWF, there are the All China Federation of Trade Unions and the Chinese Communist Youth League. These organizations are intermediate sociopolitical institutions that are created to help the communist party to extend its leadership to the broader segments of the populace at the grassroots, called the “mass” in China. Each organization oversees large memberships and is also devoted to the political mobilization of their membership.
the female population in the country. It possesses a nationwide network of ACWF organizations linked through a hierarchical administrative system containing five rugs of authority, which include the national, province, prefecture, county and township on a scale of declining rank. According to recent statistics, there are altogether 52,807 ACWF organizations pulled from all the administrative levels below the national institution. In addition to these formal associations, women’s delegates and women’s committees are also spread across a myriad of other non-ACWF state agencies, usually at the community and lower administrative level within each province, prefecture, county and township. These ACWF representatives and apparatuses amount to hundreds of thousands across the country (C.R. Li 2005, 38). Party goals and policies are thus relayed and implemented to the mass society through this meticulously layered and politically ranked system. However, at each level, the ACWF organizations have considerable autonomy to design programs and address needs pertaining more closely to local circumstances.

Many scholars have noted the ACWF’s dual role as a government institution and women’s organization (Croll 2001; Howell 2000; Tsui 1998; Zhang 1996). According to Jaschok et al., ACWF is charged with “a historical mission of transmitting party-state policies to women in all sectors of society,” but simultaneously “it also represents a more dynamic organizational identity in its advocacy of women’s interests, lobbying for policy change and the improvement of women’s lives in response to needs expressed at local levels” (2001, 9). However, unequal power between the two roles often led to the privileging of state interests over women’s interests. Like other mass organizations, the ACWF was organized by the state more to relay party policies to the state constituencies than to reflect mass opinions upward. It is generally observed that ACWF’s historical alliance with the CCP and its dominant identity as the only authentic women’s organization across the country has largely prevented the emergence of more independent feminist movements in China (e.g., Howell 2000).

At the same time, the history of women’s liberation within the nationalist movement, the bureaucratic identity of the ACWF and its collaborative partnership with the state have combined to give rise to what Wesoky describes as a “symbiotic” bond between the Chinese women’s movement and the state (2002). She argues that symbiosis
often involves “a relationship of mutual assistance between partners of unequal size and strength” (21), emphasizing reciprocity and relational balance as the core features. Building on this view, I contend that since women’s movements in China have been historically carried out in a non-oppositional framework to the state, the state also views the “woman question” as a non-threatening issue.

Indeed, it is more than a safe issue. The woman question is actually an area where the Chinese government probably feels a significant sense of superiority over many other countries, given its formal endorsement, at least ideologically, of women’s liberation throughout the history of its regime. At the official opening ceremony of the FWCF, President Jiang Zeming remarked that “the Chinese government has always held the belief that equality between men and women is an important measure of a society’s degree of civilization….and equality between the sexes is implemented as a fundamental national policy of social development in our country” (1998, 19). By defining gender equality as an index of social civilization and affirming its importance as a development strategy, the “woman question” is both defined and contained by the Chinese state in the discourse on modernity. In efforts to repair its damaged international reputation after the Tiananmen conflict, one could argue that the state has intentionally marshaled the symbol of woman to represent its modernity and resorted to its “woman work” to demonstrate that it is civilized.

The link between women’s status and a nation’s progress toward modernity in China was positively embraced and pursued as early as the turn of the last century by nationalist movements. In discussion of male intellectuals’ perspective on women’s conditions during the so-called New Culture movement in the early 1900s, Zheng Wang pointed out that “the feminist movement was viewed by these men as a necessary

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28 The New Culture movement was a cultural revolution propagated by a group of male intellectuals critiquing the stifling constraints of Confucianism on the individual with Western Enlightenment theories of individual development. Central figures of this movement included both liberals who advocated democracy and science and communists-to-be who promoted Marxist thoughts. The magazine New Youth edited by Chen Duxiu is regarded as the cradle as well as the discursive battalion of this movement, as it formed the center of the social and political debates that constituted the New Cultural Movement. The liberation of the individual, as the primary concern of this movement, included liberation of women and workers. Women, indeed, were perceived as suffering the most in the Confucian system. Calls for women’s human rights and equality between the sexes were issued to attack Confucianism. For more information, see the chapter on the New Cultural movement in Svensson 2002.
stage in the development of human society. It was a sign of modernity. Gender equality, therefore, was a principle of modern society that was in direct opposition to the feudal principle of gender hierarchy” (1999, 13). This perceived relationship continued in the communist revolution and provided the underlining rationale for incorporating women’s issues into the revolutionary agenda. As Chun argues, in the history of China’s struggles for liberation from both external imperialist powers and domestic “feudal” tradition, women’s emancipation was synonymous with national and social emancipation and served as an indicator of modernity (1997). In the post-Mao era, when “self-modernization” was determined through Deng’s leadership to be the new nationalist principle, modernity was also prescribed as the new approach to the “woman question.”

In *Between Women and Nation*, Kaplan et al. contend that the “essential woman” marks an extremely versatile discursive category frequently employed by the state as “the national iconic signifier for the material, the passive, and the corporeal, to be worshipped, protected, and controlled by those with the power to remember and to forget, to guard, to define, and redefine” (1999, 10). Their discussion reveals that the image of “woman” is often required to perform in the image of the nation for various class, racial and gender purposes of the state. This element of “performativity” can also be observed in the context of China’s decision to host the Beijing conference, as the nation was obviously counting on the emancipated image of its women to perform its image as a modernized society on a comparable footing with other societies in the international community. In the field, I was also told by an interviewee that, to prepare the ACWF delegates for their participation at FWCW and the NGO forum, beauty workshops were offered as part of the state-mandated training to instruct women cadres in style tips and make-up skills, so that they could represent the best to the outside world. Though the interviewee brought up the anecdote to illustrate the general ignorance of the Chinese top leadership about the U.N. women’s conference, this detail suggests forcefully how the state had intended women to perform a spectacle of the nation’s civilization at the Beijing conference. Though the FWCW is a global event of women for women, the Chinese state largely perceived and constructed the event as a national project. Chinese women were expected to participate as representatives of the nation rather than on their own behalf.
Though the Chinese government’s bid for the hosting of the FWCW officially called on Chinese women to represent themselves as models of national development and modernity to the international world, the Beijing process happened to arrive at a time when Chinese women’s movements were beginning to question and criticize the gendered effects of modernity in China. Women’s movements, after a decade of stalled activity and silence due to the Cultural Revolution, revived with new energy, forces and dynamics in the post-Mao era. The late 1980s to the early 1990s, the period preceding the Beijing process, was characterized by vivacious women’s activism in response to a range of gender issues created and exposed by market reforms. It was also in this context that domestic violence began to catch nascent attention from these women’s movements. In the following sections I will provide a brief review of the status of women’s movements in China during the decade before the Beijing process and an examination of the issue of domestic violence against this background.

The Shifting Landscape of Women’s Movements in the Pre-Beijing Context

China’s socialist project of modernization through market reforms has generated mixed, profound and often negative effects on women. While some scholars observe that the reforms have created new economic opportunities and subject identities for women (e.g., McLaren 2004; Schien 1998), many are more critical than positive about the impact of the reform process on women’s lives, pointing to the resurgence of numerous forms of gender inequalities and discrimination in the reform era compared to the Maoist period (e.g., Woo 1994; Fan 1996; Lau 1999; Zhu 2002; Lin 2003). Reappearance of prostitution and concubinage, rising incidents of female infanticide, the growing trade of trafficking in women, declining rates of women’s political participation, high female unemployment and withdrawal of state protection of women’s rights in general are commonly cited as major setbacks of women’s status in the reform era.

In China, women scholars were particularly critical of the “women return home” policy of the 1980s, as it bluntly exposed the gendered bias of China’s development policy. In the 1980s and 1990s, disproportionate numbers of women were laid off or forced to retire prior to the legal retirement age in state enterprises as China’s labor
system went through structural changes and the economic boom slowed its pace. A public discourse developed that openly advocated “women return home” as an optimal means to control urban unemployment and was supported by many male reformers through official journals and newspapers (See Ding 1998; Z. Wang 2000). Zheng Wang (2000) discussed how this discourse signaled a serious challenge to Maoist gender egalitarianism in employment policies by casting women as an impediment to the country’s economic development and blaming their low productivity as workers. Gender stereotyping that perceives women as more “manageable” than men because of their domestic nature also was a significant rationale for laying off female workers. Wang found that women resisted both effectively and strongly the “domestication of their gender identities,” suggesting that the gendered layoffs, as a development policy, have generated profound ambiguities in women and also brought some of them to critical inquiries of their relationship to modernity (69).

Since the communist discourse champions a Marxist framework in which women’s liberation is promised as an automatic outcome of economic production, the social antagonism to women workers surfaced as an alarming phenomenon to the women’s movement. As a result, the issue of women’s employment and women’s relationship to production became the center of both ACWF-led and independent women’s movements during the 1980s. However, as market reforms both revealed and created many gender inequalities to the disadvantage of women, they also stimulated new awareness and initiatives in women’s movements in China. The period from the late 1980s to the early 1990s witnessed not only significant changes in the ACWF, the official women’s organization, but also the emergence of women’s popular organizing and pursuit of more independent feminist interests.

In her informative dissertation on the history of the ACWF, Nihua Zhang (1996) points out that as the ACWF resumed its functions in the 1980s after a prolonged paralysis during the Cultural Revolution, it began to emphasize more its role as the leader of a national women’s movement rather than as the administrator of “woman work,” showing its nascent struggle for more autonomy from the state and identification with women as its major constituency. The Fifth National Women’s Congress held in 1983
also brought the “woman question” back into public discourse as it acknowledged that women faced serious problems under transitioning socialism. Howell opines that, faced with the contradictory and gendered consequences of rapid socio-economic changes in particular, which have led to significant erosion of women’s social security and exacerbated discrimination, particularly in the workplace, “the ACWF has come under increasing pressure to represent its members’ interests and priorities over national and party policy” (2000, 131).

It is in this context that “safeguarding women’s rights and interests” became established as the new framework for ACWF activities. In the “women return home” debate, ACWF played the most vocal and prominent role in defending women’s rights to equal employment by asserting the necessity of women’s liberation to societal development (Z. Wang 2000). Encouraged by the national ACWF to “do concrete and good things” for women, many ACWF branches across the country also set up service centers and welfare programs to help women with employment and to address their various other needs (N.H.Zhang 1996, 464). To stem the growing tide of gender inequality surging out of the uneven processes of market reforms, the ACWF launched a nationwide campaign to stress the need to protect women’s lawful rights and interests, which marked a significant initiative independent of party leadership (X.J.Li 2003; N.H. Zhang 1996). This campaign stimulated the promulgation of numerous resolutions by local governments on the protection of women’s rights and interests. Ultimately, this initiative translated into the passage of the Law on the Protection of Women’s Rights and Interests in 1992 during the Beijing process, the first law in the P.R.C. entirely devoted to the cause of women (Edwards 2000; Lin 1997; Zhang and Wu 1995). As part of the legal initiative, the “women’s rights and interests” department was institutionalized in the organizational structure of ACWF to offer legal services to women. The mission of these “rights and interests” offices is to defend women’s legal rights and safeguard women’s interests, in accordance with the new emphasis advocated by the ACWF in the 1980s.

Indeed, the dominant demand on the ACWF agenda at the 6th Annual Congress of the federation in 1988, just before the breakout of the pro-democracy movement in 1989, was for organizational autonomy. In the early 1990s, due to decline in state funding, the
ACWF leadership also began to explore entrepreneurial strategies to support itself financially, a maneuver that “could potentially weaken its institutional obligation to comply with and prioritize party objectives” (Howell 2000, 131). Ideologically, the ACWF proposed a new principle of the “four selves,” namely self love, self respect, self dignity and self improvement, as a model for all women to aspire to (Edwards 2000). Zhang writes that “in essence, ACWF’s promotion of the four selves in 1983 was to make women resist feudal and bourgeois ideas” (1996, 466). No matter what the purpose of the “four-self” campaign is, this new principle emphasizes the importance of women’s independence and self-reliance. This new principle also reflects the ACWF’s own attempts to break away, albeit cautiously and slowly, from state control to become a more autonomous organization. Hsiung points out that the ACWF became more diversified in its perspectives on women’s issues in this period and “a rigid notion of the ACWF as nothing but a political apparatus of the CCP state “was no longer adequate” (2001, 438).

According to Jin (2001), ACWF’s transition was also helped by the appearance of popular women’s groups, which started to spring up in the 1980s and posed a great challenge to ACWF’s positioning as the only women’s organization in China. Many scholars, both Chinese and Western, assert that the rise of women’s popular organizing was the most remarkable feature associated with the formation of a new wave of women’s movements in contemporary China, as these groups began to shift the women’s agenda from a total alliance with the state prescribed by the goal of nation building to a nascent quest for self-realization and political autonomy (Lin 1997; Milwertz 2000; Hsiung et al. 2001; X.J. Li 2003; Blecher 2002). According to Milwertz (2000), this new wave also started out in reaction to the gender inequalities exposed by economic reforms, but gradually extended into various interpretations of and activism against gender inequalities. By “popular organizing,” she refers to all types of organizing initiated from below by the activists themselves, regardless of the group’s organizational structure, institutional affiliation and registration status. This definition highlights the fact that women’s activism in the popular sector may take diffuse organizational forms as a survival strategy in China. These popular initiatives ranged from discussion groups to telephone hotlines to radio talk shows, publication and translation projects. The types of
activism tended to fall into three areas: service provision, education and consciousness raising, and social and policy advocacy (Lin 1997; Milwertz 2000). Women scholars, researchers and intellectuals form a class that Blecher describes as “nonstate elites” and constitute the backbone of the popular sector of women’s activism (2002, 132). The rise of a women’s studies movement since the late 1980s, which sought to mainstream women’s issues as a public research topic and a new academic discipline, was also largely inspired by women’s spontaneous initiatives (S.P.Wang 1988; Hsiung 2001; Wu 2004).

Addressing the quandary faced by women under the pressure of economic forces, Li Xiaojiang, the founder of the first women’s studies program in China and a renowned leader of the contemporary women’s movement, called for the awakening of women’s collective consciousness as the “way out” for women’s liberation (1994). In part, she argued that the conflict between economic development and women’s development in the context of market reforms was largely intrinsic and inevitable because of woman’s inferior productivity due to her reproductive role. She did not question the gendered politics of development per se, instead she held the belief that material development would eventually benefit women’s interests as it would all human beings. However, she articulated an important viewpoint that an essential precondition to women’s liberation under any social and economic circumstances must always be “the subjective condition of women’s conscious desire to develop” (375). In a different article (2003), she reinforced the emphasis on women’s self-awareness, contending that a women’s movement has to be a movement of women for women and on women’s own initiatives. She views 1978-1992 as a historical period marking “a new era of women’s movements” in China. According to her, this new phase of women’s movements was “a product of as well as a breakaway from the national project of remaking women; [is] a genuine awakening of Chinese women’s consciousness and acknowledgement of the female subjectivity, a resolute rejection of tradition (including the tradition of state liberation of women), and a collective process of women being transformed from spontaneous to conscious agents in assertion and defense of their self interests” (395).
Li Xiaojiang’s review of women’s movements in China prior to the Beijing process suggests that, despite the gendered impact of modernity and considerable loss of state protection to women, the Marxist perspective that sees women’s participation in the economic realm as an adequate condition for women’s liberation is not totally abandoned. Indeed, Chinese women’s movements in the 1980s were preoccupied with the issue of women’s relationship to economic production. However, the meaning of women’s liberation has shifted significantly to an emphasis on women’s consciousness of her “self.” As Lin points out, while “women lost preferential treatment by the state, they also gained freedom and independence in their relationship to the state,” and this “space of contradiction” both stimulated and enabled women’s movements to “explore and renovate the meaning of liberation” (1997, 13).

Li’s stress on women’s autonomous consciousness as the most fundamental condition of women’s liberation was not only a manifestation of Chinese women’s subjective awareness that she herself called for, it also articulated a collective redefinition of women’s liberation by Chinese women themselves. Given the effective control of women’s agendas in Chinese history by a rhetoric in which the state is portrayed as the liberator of women and thereby justified in its domination over women’s gender interests, a redefinition of women’s movements to focus on women as the masters of their own welfare was a significant, revolutionary, shift. Discursively and politically, this redefinition signaled that women’s movements in China had embarked on a stage of “unmaking national women,” to quote Barlow (1994). It was a period when Chinese women’s movements began to challenge the statist hegemonic and top-down project of women’s liberation through articulation of their own subjectivities from various positions.

However, this increasing quest for autonomy pursued across both the official and popular sector of women’s movements in the 1980s should not be interpreted as an “oppositional” move against the state. Women’s attempts, both from the bottom up and top down, to take more initiative in defining and addressing women’s issues can be more appropriately described as a movement of “self-help” in a context of withdrawing state protection. Rather than making demands on the state, women’s movements engaged in critical reflection on the subject of woman’s “self” and were surrogates of the state in
many places to provide needed social services for women. Though Chinese women certainly harbor profound ambiguity and disillusionment with the processes and impact of the country’s economic reforms, they are not outright critical of the reforms nor have they denounced the reform agenda. Instead, women are still invested in the development paradigm, even though development for women is no longer perceived in purely economic terms.

One also has to remember that the state’s crackdown on the student democracy movement at the end of the 1980s created a coercive ambience in which all social sectors, including women’s movements, had to pledge their support to the CCP leadership. During the student movement, compared to other national mass organizations such as the All China Federation of Trade Unions that took an outspoken, supportive stance for the students, the ACWF maintained a neutral position and exerted the weakest demands on the state. In the wake of the crackdown, the ACWF underscored its steadfast political stance during the movement, such as appealing to the students to end their hunger strike and urging women to maintain social order, to indicate its allegiance to the CCP (N.H. Zhang 1996, 511-14). Though women’s movements were by no means oppositional to the state even before the Tiananmen incident, the breakout of the pro-democracy movement only further reinforced the incentive of non-opposition. The ACWF’s steady alliance with the state in this political turmoil also may have paved the way for the state’s motivation to host the Beijing conference.

**Domestic Violence: A Marginal Issue**

Since loss of job security was the most manifest impact of China’s economic reforms on women, women’s employment became the central issue of debates by women’s movements in the 1980s. Though other issues were also discussed, such as women’s participation in politics and media representations of women (Ding 1998; Dai 1995), such discussions often focused on women’s treatment in the public sphere. Though domestic violence certainly exists as a social phenomenon and has a long history in Chinese society, it hardly existed as a woman’s issue in public discourse before the Beijing process. The reason for the paradox can be attributed to the fact that, as Tang et
have argued, “violence against women is both condemned and condoned in Chinese culture” (2002, 975). They contend that while violence is generally disapproved as a form of aggression, given Chinese culture’s emphasis on harmony and personal self-restraint, it is generally accepted and less reprimanded as a practice against women because of the inferior status ascribed to women in general. A number of my interviewees also pointed out to me that though the concept of “domestic violence” is largely imported this phenomenon is actually acknowledged in Chinese parlance and simply described as “wife beating.” The fact that “wife beating” is a widely known term in Chinese language not only provides recognition of domestic violence as an existing behavior, it also is suggestive of the degree of normalization of this practice.

The Communist Party once mounted a campaign against domestic violence during the revolution as early as the 1930s and 1940s. It was derided as one of the “feudalist” oppressions against women. To support women’s liberation in the revolution, the Communist Party explicitly forbade men to beat their wives (Honig and Hershatter 1988, 273). This seems to be the only time in Chinese history before the 1990s that domestic violence was accorded public recognition as an oppressive practice against women. In the 1990s, though domestic violence occasionally appeared in newspaper reports and other public discourses, it was still a marginalized public topic and generated little attention to harms to women.

In their study focused on the issues of VAW in the P.R.C. in the 1980s, Honig and Hershatter (1988) found that though women were plagued by multiple forms of violence ranging from female infanticide and forced marriage to rape and domestic violence, VAW was hardly understood as a systematic manifestation of women’s gender subordination, except in the case of female infanticide. They also noted that though women seemed to be protected from domestic violence by criminal codes prohibiting maltreatment and injury, there were only limited circumstances under which wife abuse could be formally charged, such as if “it led to grave physical injury or death, or if they

30 See Chang 2003, 23, footnote 64, for some sources of public discussions on the issue of domestic violence in Chinese newspapers in early 1990s.
were discovered in the course of a campaign against special privilege or some other offense of concern to the state” (291-92). Therefore, cases of wife abuse were not usually reported to the police or public authorities unless they involved extreme cruelty, caused severe physical harm or indicated strong evidence that the abuse of power was deliberate in its intention to evade legal responsibilities (293). The authors also found that wife abuse was often explained as a mutual fight, since it was often perceived as a “domestic dispute resulting from both the husband’s and wife’s incorrect behavior, as deviant sexual jealousy and possessiveness on the part of the husband, or as the failure of a woman to bear male offspring” (295). Their research suggests that in the 1980s, the decade before the Beijing conference, domestic violence was not recognized as a social issue and less as one that affects women specifically. It was widely regarded as a private matter characterized by a certain degree of deviancy on the part of both spouses.

Gilmartin is another Western scholar who studied the issue of VAW in China around the same time as Honig and Hershatter. Drawing information from journals, newspapers and legal cases, she discovered that domestic violence existed as part of a broad spectrum of VAW in China (1990). However, her examination suggests that a fledgling “public interest” had begun to form with the belief that VAW signified a worrisome revival of feudalistic family culture and practices in the reform era. She opined instead that, rather than caused by a “resurgence” of feudalism, VAW actually revealed an increase in gender tension in post-Mao China resulting from the clash between women’s self-assertions and the unbroken tradition of male dominance. She particularly critiqued the state for the survival of VAW, arguing that the state’s failure to reevaluate its own gender biases and patriarchal beliefs, rather than any feudalistic “tradition,” was the cause of the continued oppression of women in post-Mao China.

Western scholars certainly are not the only ones concerned with violence against women. In China, though the term “violence against women” or “domestic violence” was hardly known yet, the ACWF and popular women’s groups were not unfamiliar with the various psychological and physical harms caused by VAW. Domestic violence was a common complaint voiced by many women who sought advice at the ACWF. The issue also came to the attention of the first women’s NGO in post-Mao China through the
women’s hotline run by the group. Sympathetic with the women victims they counseled but often lacking effective means to help, Chinese women cadres and activists who were exposed to women’s experiences of domestic violence began to bring the issue to the wider public in the hopes that society would understand and take action to address women’s predicament within abusive domestic relations.

In 1991, Pi Xiaomin, a woman lawyer working for the rights and interests department at a district-level ACWF branch in Beijing, published an article entitled “White paper on domestic violence” in the magazine, Chinese Women. This article is often looked to by Chinese feminist scholars as the first Chinese women’s declaration against domestic violence in indigenous discourse. In this article, Pi documented the stories of several women who were severely battered by their husbands, both to raise social consciousness on woman abuse in marriage and to demand social action to address this ignored problem. She began this groundbreaking article with the statement, “as a female legal worker, I do not tolerate domestic violence, the phenomenon of husbands’ beating their wives, and I appeal to the law to strengthen its protection for these women” (1991, 20). To write this article, she carried out a personal investigation across 10 sub-district residential committees under the administration of the district she worked for, discovering that wife beating was known to each of these areas. In a survey of 106 divorced women, she also found that 46% of the women cited relentless beatings from their husbands as their primary reason for suing for divorce. Later research also seems to affirm a high correlation between divorced couples and wife abuse (e.g. Xu et al 2001).

In the article, Pi exposed various risk factors associated with wife battering ranging from the husband’s alcoholism and extramarital affairs to financial stress on the

31 Subdistrict residential committees (jiedao jumin weiyuanhui) are public administrative governance bodies assigned to residential zones in urban areas of China. They represent the local municipal government at the grassroots level and are responsible for addressing a variety of needs in the communities they oversee. Their numerous functions include relaying state policies to urban residents, organizing legal education for the public, mediating disputes and conflicts among residents, implementing welfare and outreach programs within communities, carrying out census survey, reflecting residents’ opinions and complaints to higher authorities, providing community services to enhance residents’ quality of life, and so forth. Because of its unique role and its ubiquitous presence, such committees are often contacted and sought for ahead of the police or other state agencies by urban residents for a variety of issues related to the family, including domestic violence incidents. The residential committees often keep a record of the complaints lodged by the residents and intervene through both formal and informal means.
family, emotional break-up of the couple and complicity of the mother-in-law. More significantly, she forcefully repudiated the perception of domestic violence as a “domestic” matter, critiquing the law’s failure to interfere in the private sphere as a major contributor to both the social tolerance of husband violence and the extreme vulnerability of abused women within a marital context. In the end, she wrote, “I will appeal to the authority of law and public discourse to warn those brutal men in a loud and clear voice, ‘stop your hand! It is prohibited to beat a person!’” (1991, 22).

Linking domestic violence to lack of legal protection for women in the private sphere, Pi not only articulated an unequivocal social understanding of wife abuse, she also created a public discursive space to expose and discuss women’s experiences of domestic violence. The term “white paper” in her article’s title obviously was intended to solicit the serious attention that was often granted to formal, governmental policy documents. Though this discourse was a breakthrough in itself, as it catapulted domestic violence into a public forum, it nonetheless existed as a highly isolated and marginalized discourse. In my conversation with Pi, the author pointed out emphatically that domestic violence was not something she made up. It was a “bloody reality” she witnessed in her daily work as an ACWF lawyer working for the newly added women’s “rights and interests” department, where she received numerous women coming to ACWF for legal advice and quasi-psychological counseling on a multitude of issues. As a lawyer who represented many women in divorce proceedings, she recalled that domestic violence was involved in 70%-80% of the cases she handled after she was assigned to the job in 1985. It is her exposure to various forms of wife abuse and a large quantity of abuse-related divorce cases that made her realize the collective nature of domestic violence as a “women’s experience.” It is also her concern for the privatized nature of violence in the domestic sphere that propelled her to craft the Chinese term “jiating baoli”, which can be translated either as family violence or domestic violence in English.

Out of her frequent feelings of frustration with the lack of legal and social support for abused women, Pi attempted to raise media attention as early as 1989. However, her appeals were often met with disbelief. She recounted that in her encounter with several male editors at a mainstream Beijing newspaper, the editors asked each other jokingly,
“do you beat our wife?” as a way to dismiss her concerns. Since no one said yes, the male editors then came to the facetious conclusion that wife battering was non-existent. The mockery and denial did not thwart Pi. Afterwards, she dragged a journalist from that newspaper to her office to show him evidence. The evidence was a woman who was beaten black and blue all over the body by her husband because she was found to have danced with a man during her morning exercise. The journalist was dumbfounded and finally convinced of the fact that domestic violence did exist.

Indeed, the article did not get published easily, as it was rejected by all the mainstream journals, including China Women’s News, the nation’s leading journal on women’s news. An editor of the news journal China Women’s News, who also knew the author personally, revealed that the mainstream rejected Pi because they “did not have the guts to publish her.” This comment testifies to the enormity of social silence and the weight of negative pressure Pi was combating in her solitary fight to expose domestic violence to the public. It was also obvious that, before Pi’s article, domestic violence had hardly been described or recognized as a harmful social practice against women. Finally, Pi’s writing got published in Chinese Women, a state-owned magazine and a privately owned community newspaper, largely due to her acquaintanceship with the women editors working for both publications.

Pi herself also admitted that her article did not arouse much public attention. On the contrary, she thought that it was not until after the Beijing conference, in which context the Chinese government openly acknowledged the issue, that domestic violence began to accrue genuine attention. However, when asked whether she attended the Beijing conference, she laughed and explained that grassroots ACWF workers like herself definitely were not included in the Beijing “quota” system; neither did her supervisors, the chairs of lower ACWF branches, deserve a chance. She also revealed that her article on domestic violence attracted the earliest attention from abroad and brought several project funds to her from foreign donors, such as the Ford Foundation. However, her involvement with such West-funded projects around the time of the Beijing conference drew her the accusation of spying from the local judicial bureau. Her lawyer’s license was confiscated by the bureau and was only restored after many rounds of
negotiations. She told me that she was not an easily frightened person given her survival through the Cultural Revolution. According to her, she got her license back because she stood her ground and did not yield one inch to the wrongful accusations from the authorities.

In the early 1990s, domestic violence not only came to the attention of the ACWF through its work on protecting women’s rights and interests, it was also raised as a concern by popular women’s groups. In 1994, the Women’s Research Institute, a non-governmental organization, studied 60 domestic violence cases representing 30 urban and 30 suburban couples in Beijing. This survey, though not published until 1999, was based on the group’s observation that domestic violence was a serious and prevalent problem affecting a large sector of women (X.J. Wang 1999a). The study explored both possible causes of wife abuse and women’s responses to domestic violence. It exposed the myth that the phenomenon of domestic violence was only confined to illiterate and lower social classes by pointing out that many abusive husbands in their profile did not fit such descriptions.

The study found that urban women were more likely than suburban women to seek action to stop domestic violence, especially through divorce. However, the study also held the view that women were quite “passive” victims, and this passivity was analyzed as the outcome of women’s subscription to fatalism and internalization of the Confucian belief of women’s “obedience.” The cause of male violence against the wife was attributed both to deviant individual pathology and patriarchy as a remnant yet still powerful feudal concept. The patriarchy explanation was more readily applied to the rural abusers, as the countryside was viewed as more backward and traditional than the urban context. In conclusion, the article contended that it was not only urgent to educate men about women’s rights, but also important “to teach women to safeguard themselves and know their legal rights and interests” (X.J. Wang 1999a, 1503). This article’s perspective on wife abuse differed significantly from Pi’s, as it placed more responsibility on women

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32 This organization later changed its name to the Beijing Maple Women’s Psychological Consulting Service Center. In this chapter, I will refer to the group by its original name.
themselves to stop the abuse and framed women victims as a primary target group for legal education.

Founded in 1988, the Women’s Research Institute is often regarded as the first women’s NGO in China. Deeply concerned with the drastic regression of Chinese women’s liberation under “the shock wave of the socialist market economy” (Women’s Research Institute n.d., 2), its founder, Wang Xingjuan, started the organization from scratch when she was retiring from her lifetime career as a prolific and award-winning journalist and editor devoted to writing about women and young girls. Both perplexed and propelled by the contradictory and often negative effects of the state’s economic reforms on women, Wang set up the institute with a prioritized focus on women’s “survival” issues, such as employment and political participation. Funded by the Ford Foundation, the center opened its first nationwide hotline to offer needed advice and support for women callers in 1992. Like Pi, Wang’s funding relationship to Western donors also led to her being accused and investigated as a spy, especially since she was associated with a non-governmental initiative. However, it is through this struggling hotline that domestic violence was brought to the attention of Wang and her colleagues at the Research Institute.33

Wang told a story about how she gradually came to perceive “domestic violence” as a critical but barely recognized issue affecting women’s basic daily survival. She recounted that in its first year the hotline received a call from a journalist from a major newspaper in Beijing. Knowing the hotline’s commitment to women’s issues, the journalist referred to them a battered woman who was beaten severely and forced into the street by her husband who wanted to divorce her because she gave birth to a girl child. Escaping to Beijing from another province, the woman sought help and shelter from the newspaper. Unable to shelter the woman, the journalist who had contact with her dialed the hotline, hoping that Wang’s organization could solve her housing problem. Wang recalled that, “we told them all we had was a telephone hotline and one simple room, and to provide shelter for her was simply out of the question…but after we put down the phone, we felt really sad from the bottom of our hearts.” This incident was seared in

33 For the history of how the Women’s Research Institute was founded, see Milwertz 2002, 29-50.
Wang’s memory because of her inability to address the vital and urgent need for refuge for a battered woman in a state of crisis. This incident also stimulated the Institute’s attention to domestic violence as a significant “survival” issue equal to women’s employment and political participation. According to Wang, since 1993 they already began to collect statistics on the separate category of “domestic violence.” That battered woman’s experience also motivated the organization to conduct the investigation on domestic violence in 1994. They interviewed 60 women recruited from their hotline, through acquaintances, and from the people who came to the center asking for help (X.J. Wang 1999a).

To include rural cases in their sample, Wang contacted the ACWF of Pinggu county in Beijing. She revealed that the Pinggu ACWF was very suspicious of their research interest in domestic violence. “They thought you were trying to ride with the trend, they thought your real intent of researching domestic violence was to connect tracks with the international world!” noted Wang with a tinge of indignation in her voice. She pointed out that, despite the media exposure of quite a number of horrifying cases of woman abuse, which often involved physical mutilation, extreme cruelty and even murder, the larger society was not paying attention at all and simply dismissed such stories as rare exceptions. She cited the first nationwide survey on women’s status conducted by the women’s studies institute of the national ACWF to point out that actually domestic violence was already revealed in the official statistics. 34 She also suggested that the national ACWF actively contributed to the silencing of women’s experience of domestic violence by emphasizing only women’s achievements in China. Wang argued that, “those women leaders, when they were talking, they all said that women’s social status in our Chinese society is very high, domestic violence is not our women’s problem, it is not a problem!” She revealed that her organization’s request to organize a panel on domestic violence at the NGO forum of the Beijing conference was

34 The survey mentioned by Wang refers to a 1990 nationwide survey on women’s social status conducted by the All China Women’s Federation and the National Statistics Bureau. According to this survey, 0.9% of the women respondents reported constant beatings by their husband, 8.2% occasional beatings and 20.1% irregular beatings. The survey results are cited in M. Liu 2006, 289.
firmly turned down by Huang Qi Cao, the first secretary of the national ACWF. Wang disclosed that “we were told to shut our mouths on this topic.”

Though the issue of domestic violence already received attention from some Chinese women activists before the Beijing Conference and also had partially broken into public discourse, it was a highly sensitive issue and a suspect discourse situated at the extreme margin of Chinese women’s movements at the time. The official ideology of gender equality promulgated since the foundation of the P.R.C. was a hegemonic myth. It effectively dismissed and silenced women’s experiences that did not conform to the glorious picture of women’s conditions depicted by the state. In addition, the prevalent perception of domestic violence as a private individual matter also functioned to maintain the myth of Chinese women’s liberation focused primarily on the public sphere. The forbidden nature of “domestic violence” was only enhanced as China became involved in the Beijing process. The national ACWF’s injunction that Wang’s group should not speak about domestic violence in the NGO forum indicated the hegemony of the nationalist discourse at a tense moment. Domestic violence, obviously viewed as dirty laundry and an ugly contradiction of the myth of gender equality in China, was predictably deemed an inappropriate topic.

Pi’s and Wang’s independent investigations of domestic violence have shown that the issue was already brought to the attention of women’s movements in the 1980s. However, the mainstream focus on women’s public rights and the advent of the Beijing conference in a politically charged atmosphere following the Tiananmen incident significantly marginalized the topic of domestic violence. In addition, the private sphere of the phenomenon and the cultural normalization of VAW added to the invisibility of domestic violence as a condemnable practice harming women. At the same time, though Pi and Wang differed in their perspectives on domestic violence, both of them pointed to the law as women’s primary defense against wife abuse. Though Pi advocated state intervention while Wang seemed to recommend a more individualist approach, they both prioritized a legal framework of intervention and articulated the perception of domestic violence as a violation of women’s rights, which was indeed not too far from the human
rights approach promoted by the international women’s movement against gender violence.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I offered a contextual analysis of the Chinese state’s interest in hosting the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. My analysis suggests that the intersection of Chinese women’s and the transnational women’s human rights movements at the Beijing conference is not a direct outcome of China’s economic globalization, though Deng’s reform agenda certainly provides a crucial rationale and motivation for enabling this intersection. Rather, China’s decision to host the U.N. conference was largely contingent on both the state’s need to repair its damaged international image in the wake of the Tiananmen crackdown and the political bond between women’s movements and the CCP in China’s modern history. At the same time, I also showed that the Beijing process encountered Chinese women’s movements when their relationship to the state was most strained. The market reforms launched by the state caused fundamental changes in gender power dynamics in the post-Mao China, especially in the sector of labor participation. The state’s failure to adequately protect women’s interests during the reform processes only stimulated women’s movements to take more independent initiatives to address their problems. Women’s search for increasing autonomy from the state not only happened in the ACWF as it became more invested in representing women’s interests to the state, but it also became more manifest in the appearance of popular women’s groups in response to the surge in “women’s problems” in the reform period. Domestic violence came to the attention of both ACWF and popular women’s groups in this context, but remained an extremely marginalized issue. The discussions provided in this chapter are vital to an adequate understanding of the political impact of the Beijing conference on the dynamics of Chinese women’s movements, especially in relation to the issue of domestic violence, which is addressed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4

THE U.N. FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN BEIJING: WRITING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTO CHINESE DISCOURSES AND CREATING CHINESE WOMEN’S NGOS

Introduction

The Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) was convened in Beijing in the fall of 1995. However, the preparations for the Conference extended over several preceding years and consisted of a series of U.N. regional conferences, non-governmental organization (NGO) meetings and expert consultations. The Conference was composed of two interrelated sections, the Official Intergovernmental Meeting and a parallel NGO Forum. As the largest event of a series of U.N.-organized world conferences on women since 1975, International Women’s Year, the estimated number of registered participants counted around 50,000. The objective of the Conference was to assess women’s progress since the 1985 World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya. The Conference produced two significant outcome documents, the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, which examined women’s conditions worldwide, identified critical areas of concern, recommended strategies for action, and stressed institutional accountability for the implementation of recommended strategies (Anand and Tripon 1998; Cook 2003).

The Beijing Conference begins a crucial process through which Chinese women’s movements were initiated and incorporated into the discursive and activist communities of the transnational women’s rights movement. It is also a significant moment at and since which an interactive global-local linkage between Chinese and global feminisms began to take shape, especially in the area of women’s anti-gender violence efforts. This chapter will review and discuss both the Chinese state’s and Chinese women’s
participation in the Beijing conference and its preparatory activities. In particular, I will analyze how the Beijing process created two fundamental political opportunities for the facilitation of women’s domestic violence activism in China, especially in the NGO sector. First is the discursive breakthrough of the issue and term “violence against women” (VAW) into the State’s policy language and the global public discourse at the NGO Forum. Second is the increased social legitimacy and institutional space for women’s activism in the civil society sector. These are two essential and indispensable preconditions to the formation and evolution of the subsequent Domestic Violence Network’s anti-domestic violence agenda in the post-Beijing period.

The Beijing Conference as a Political Opportunity for Women’s Advancement

In social movement theories, the political opportunity structure is examined as an essential macro contextual factor that can both enable and frustrate collective action. The state used to be investigated as the primary or even exclusive site of structural influence on social movements. For example, Charles Tilly (1978) developed a typology of political regimes according to the degree of repression and facilitation they manifest toward various collective actors and actions by examining a quintessential state actor, the police. Tarrow (1996) discusses how the national-building process often means political opening. As states aggregate power and resources, movements also are more likely to target state authorities with demands for social change in existing societal arrangements. However, the acceleration of globalization and increase of transnational political mobilizations, such as the transnational women’s human rights movement, suggests the need for a more expanded notion of political opportunities that will go beyond state-centric conditions to explore the role of global forces in the shaping of local conditions.

Ferree and Tripp posit that the global women’s movement, which creates “webs of organizations, treaties and discourses that circle the globe” (2006, viii), can be construed as forming a transnational opportunity structure for feminist movements around the world. They argue that this transnational political context constitutes increasingly important venues for feminist activism around the world because it enables women to develop bonds across national boundaries, provides international discourses
such as the definition of women’s rights as human rights, offers new leverage to local activists, and produces and mobilizes new institutional mechanisms and resources for the fight against gender inequality on a global basis. As sociologists have pointed out, social movements not only rely on political opportunities, successful ones also make and expand opportunities that can potentially benefit other actors (see McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1996; Gamson and Meyer 1996). The U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, as a success of the global women’s movement, created political opportunities for the advancement of gender equality worldwide. In Wesoky’s words, the FWCF constitutes a “particularly important ‘movement-specific opportunity’” for women (2002, 113).

Margaret Galey, a former chair of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), points out that the Beijing Conference was a loud and steady declaration that “by the 1990s, women’s issues had become legitimate subjects on the agendas of governments and international organizations, and women participated in public activity as never before” (1995, 1). The Conference embodies an apex of more than two decades of transnational feminist networking. It is not only a continuation of numerous years of transnational feminist activism stimulated by previous world conferences on women, but also a particularly important milestone as it established “gender mainstreaming” as a global strategy for ensuring gender equality at the policy level.

Friedman argues that the most significant achievement of the transnational women’s rights movement in the 1990s was its success in “gendering the agenda” of other U.N. global conferences, which meant “mainstreaming gender analysis into areas considered ‘gender-neutral’ and prioritizing women's rights as integral to conference goals” (2003, 313). The mainstreaming strategy arose largely as a response of women’s movements’ profound disillusionment with the simplistic “integrationist” approach to advance women’s status prevalent in the 1980s, especially in the field of development. The gender-biased assumption, prevalent among many early male-dominated development agencies, that once women are incorporated into the development process their socioeconomic status will be automatically improved, is critiqued by feminist activists as being insensitive to the inherent structural inequalities between men and women (Tinker 1990; Sen and Grown 1987; Moghadam 1999; Bavnani et al. 2003).
Aspiring to move women’s concerns and interests from the margins to the center of institutional policies, women’s movements and policy agencies began to promote a gender perspective (Staudt 2003).

The Beijing Conference was particularly important as an agenda-setting context for gender mainstreaming because participating governments declared in consensus that “we hereby adopt and commit ourselves as Governments to implement the following Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all our policies and programmes” (United Nations 1996, 11). The Beijing process has mainstreamed the gender language in institutional policy dialogues and defined it a fundamental strategy to achieve gender equality.

Staudt (2003) discusses several advantages of the language of gender over that of women. Gender not only has the benefit of rendering visible the socially constructed meanings of male and female identities, shifting attention from women alone to gender relations and somewhat countering the disparaged political status of the women’s cause. It also calls for “broad accountability” rather than the previous “single advocacy office” approach (49). Her discussion suggests that the change of language both represents and enables a paradigmic shift of strategy in promotion of women’s rights from the former “integrationist” approach to a more “transformative” one (54). The gender mainstreaming strategy is purported to embed a gender perspective in all levels and processes of policy-making decisions. As ECOSOC has stated, “it is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated” (ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2, quoted in Staudt 56).

The institutional goals of gender mainstreaming and gender equality made central by the Beijing Conference constitute in themselves a political opportunity for women’s mobilization, as they spell out an institutional agenda focused on improving women’s status. Arnand argues that the Beijing documents depart from previous similar documents in that they, for the first time, define the action platform as “an agenda for women’s empowerment” (1998, 7). While the Beijing documents relegate the obligation to gender
equality primarily to institutional actors, especially the state, they also assert the important role of civil society actors in this cause. The Beijing Declaration states that “the participation and contribution of all actors of civil society, particularly women’s groups and networks and other non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, with full respect for their autonomy, in cooperation with Governments, are important to the effective implementation and follow-up of the platform for action” (United Nations 1996, 3). The specific acknowledgement given to civil society actors, especially women’s groups, articulates the understanding that women’s participation in decision making processes is fundamental to the promotion of their interests. Moreover, this acknowledgement provides women’s mobilization with significant potential leverage over the state and supports a political space for their activities.

The Beijing Conference’s call for gender mainstreaming also challenges the Chinese government to re-examine and re-conceptualize its own approach to women’s liberation. Du suggests that though China has promoted “equality between men and women” as a constitutional principle and national policy since the P.R.C.’s founding, it actually has adopted a male-centric view of equality and rendered the patriarchal rubric of the society almost invisible. She argues that “equality between men and women” has meant that while men are taken as “the normative yardstick and standard of equality,” women’s own “poor quality” is held as the main reason for their disadvantages (2004, 180). The “gender” approach advocated by the Beijing Conference, instead, inserts a feminist, structural analysis of women’s experiences of inequalities and compels the state to take institutional measures to implement equality between men and women. As a result, the Chinese state and the All-China Women’s Federation have made conscious efforts to connect with a gender mainstreaming strategy. In 1996, Huang Qicao, the first secretary of the national ACWF made the public statement that the gender perspective should be integrated into the mainstream policy making processes (Huang 1996). Most ACWF cadres also have welcomed the “gender perspective” as a useful perspective to explain the numerous discriminatory practices against women normalized by traditional discourse on women’s issues (Min 2003).
In the following, I will show how the Chinese state’s response to the Beijing Conference’s call for gender analysis and mainstreaming is mostly discursive. In particular, I will discuss how the state’s attempts to achieve discursive consonance with the global discourse of the Beijing Conference has helped to insert the naming of violence against women and the insertion of domestic violence into Chinese policy discourses. The fact that this naming took place at the state level of discourse makes it a fundamental political opportunity for women’s domestic violence activism later, as it enables subsequent discussions about and activism around domestic violence as an issue of gender inequality.

Naming Violence Against Women in the State’s Policy Discourses

The Beijing Conference process elicited extensive discursive participation from the U.N. state members during the entire process. Such discursive exercise was often designed to oblige the states to assess their current achievements of gender equality as well as to identify areas and strategies for further progress (Vajrathon 1998, 88). Although China adopted some material measures to demonstrate its support for the gender mainstreaming strategy, such as setting up the Committee on Women and Children of the State Council,35 passing the Law on the Protection of Women’s Rights and Interests (1992) and constructing a new building for the national ACWF, most of its responses were discursive. It was at the discursive level that the Chinese state constantly championed its endorsement for women’s cause. It was also at this level that the gender perspective of the Beijing Conference opened up the state’s public discussion and recognition of the issue of violence against women.

National Reports

During the Beijing preparatory process, the Chinese state prepared and disseminated two national reports; one was the White Paper on the Situation of Chinese

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35 This Committee was established in 1990. Though the Committee itself does not have the power to make policies or pass laws, it is a coordinating agency that has the authority to call on different state ministries to discuss policy issues. See Howell 2005, 63.
Women (1994) and the other was China’s Report on Implementation of Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies (1994). By compiling national reports in the context of an international conference on women, the Chinese state symbolically, but nonetheless politically, blurred the local boundaries of its “woman question” to external reviews and examinations. Though historically the state has been the only legitimate categorizer of the woman question in China, the practice of national reports for international monitors necessitated the expansion of discursive parameters of local definitions of women’s issues to incorporate global norms and discourses.

The White Paper on the Situation of Chinese Women acknowledged specifically that it was precipitated by the “greater world attention on the status of Chinese women aroused by the prospect of the Beijing conference.” This report presented a self-complacent and idealized overview of women’s social status in China to demonstrate the impressive scope of Chinese women’s liberation. In particular, it described women’s liberation primarily as a state achievement, portraying the state as a benign and progressive patron with a dedication to protecting women’s interests.

More significantly, the White Paper, as China’s national report to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women and the international community, provided important discursive space for redefining the Chinese “woman question” as a global question. The document explicitly stated that “China recognizes and respects the principle of sexual equality affirmed in the United Nations Charter” and presented the Chinese government vigorously as an active participant in international women’s activities. Though the majority of the report focused on emphasizing the state’s achievements on women’s issues, the report nonetheless participated as a concurring discourse in the larger global discourse on women and gender. The discursive and historical situatedness of this document within the broader context of global feminist discourse linked to the Beijing Conference had the effect of destabilizing the state’s monopoly on defining the woman question.
The government also disseminated *China's Report on the implementation of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies* (FLS). Though China attended the Nairobi conference and adopted the FLS in 1985, it was not until the Beijing process that the document became more widely known in China. China’s report on its own implementation of the FLS was not only presented to relevant international bodies, but was also publicized in full text to domestic audiences through *China Daily*, a major Chinese newspaper focused on national policies. This report reviewed women’s political participation, policy machineries, legal rights, economic status, health issues, education, violence against women, women and peace, and women and the environment. By looking into all the areas of critical concern identified by the Nairobi conference and outlining plans of action to both domestic and international audiences, the state openly introduced a global framework into its own rhetorical space, with all its unfamiliar vocabularies and issues.

The issue of VAW, which just began to be recognized as a fundamental obstacle to women’s development at the Nairobi conference, also became absorbed into the Chinese vocabulary through the Beijing process. In this report, the state declared that “to eliminate all forms of violence against women not only concurs with the need to enhance and develop social stability and unification of our country, it also supports the need to defend women’s human rights and raise women’s status.” It is also notable that the state not only recognized VAW, it also tied the issue to the human rights framework, though social stability was suggested as a more prioritized purpose. Though the report only devoted a cursory section to the issue and discussed only a single form of VAW, trafficking and selling of women and girls, the term “violence against women” nevertheless appeared in the official discourse, a significant breakthrough in and of itself.

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36 The FLS were adopted at the Nairobi World Conference on Women in 1985. They outlined a comprehensive institutional plan and framework for the advancement of women’s status. One scholar argues that the FLS are “a design for the women’s movement in the future” (Patton 1995, 61).

The Beijing conference produced two significant outcome documents, the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. According to Alvarez, the Beijing documents indicate a significant breakthrough in the mainstreaming of some feminist perspectives in institutional discourses. She contends that Beijing “brought to light the rapid absorption of the more digestible elements of feminist discourses and agendas by dominant cultural institutions, parallel organizations of civil society, political society and the state, and the international development establishment, all spheres in which feminists can be found today” (1998, 294-95). Gender discrimination and oppression were reframed as violations of women’s human rights. Violence against women was highlighted as one of the 12 areas of critical concerns for women globally identified in the Conference documents.

Though the Beijing documents are international and inter-governmental policy statements, they can also be examined as state discourses because they are not signed by an abstract “international” body, but by all the individual state parties that form a collective of signatories to these documents. Therefore, since China signed both the Beijing Declaration and Platform, the Beijing discourse also became China’s governmental discourse and acquired social and political functions. Even though Beijing documents are not legally binding treaties, I would like to argue that they still hold enormous discursive power as critical “framing” texts. A concept largely credited and linked to Goffman’s idea of “schemas of interpretation,” frame in general denotes a structure of meaning that functions to “organize experience and guide action” (Snow and Benford 2000, 614). Building from this interpretive scheme concept, social movement theorists develop the concept of “collective action frames,” which, according to Snow and Benford, are “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization (SMO)…” (614).

A crucial feature of collective action frames is that they are not “merely aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions but also the outcome of negotiated shared meaning” (Gamson 1992, 111).\footnote{Also see Snow and Benford 2000, 614, footnote 3. They distinguish schemas as individual beliefs and attitudes from frames as the “interpretive” framework capable of aligning different perceptions.} Therefore, to understand the Beijing documents
as collective action frames is to recognize that they not only perform all the “framing” tasks such as naming problems, mapping out solutions and calling for action. More importantly, as collective frames, they are the products of extensive negotiations among various actors on a global scale. As a matter of fact, the documents were adopted by consensus at the Beijing’s inter-governmental conference, where official delegates, including those from China, and representatives of various governments, regional commissions and inter-governmental organizations, gathered for plenary meetings. As products of this process, the Beijing documents carry legitimacy at both the local and global levels because they represent the institutional documentation of a global agreement drafted by locally based actors.

Snow and Benford (2000) identify three core framing tasks associated with a collective action frame. The first component, diagnostic framing, attends to articulating problems and attributing blame. The problem addressed by the Beijing documents, the continuation of previous similar documents, concerns the broad issue of “inequalities between women and men” (United Nations 1996, 7). Specifically, the Beijing Platform outlined 12 critical problems, one of which was VAW. VAW is defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in the public or private life” (United Nations 1996, 73). The Platform adopted a noutspokenly feminist perspective on VAW, noting that “violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women’s full advancement” (United Nations 1996, 75). However, though the enumerated contributing factors were miscellaneous, the Documents focused on the state as the primary responsible party for redress and action.39

39 In the chapter “global framework,” the Platform stated that “the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women is essential for the empowerment of women. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The implementation of this Platform,
The second framing task, “prognostic framing,” is about proposing solutions, plans and strategies to remedy or rectify the identified problem (Snow and Benford 2000). Indeed, the Beijing documents’ focus on the state as the primary accountable party already defined its institutional approach. To ensure women’s equal access to critical resources and opportunities that are fundamental to both their daily survival and collective advancement as a social group, the Platform called for a variety of state and inter-state policies and legal reforms to that end. To eliminate and address VAW, the Platform recommended legislation and law enforcement as the optimal strategies. It not only encouraged the state to ratify and implement all international agreements relevant to VAW, including CEDAW, it also asked the state to construct new laws and strengthen enforcement in this area.

“Motivational framing,” the third and final core framing task, “provides a ‘call to arms’ or rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive” (Snow and Benford 2000, 617). In other words, this task aims to create motives and impetus for action. The Beijing documents provided several “vocabularies of motives.” However, the human rights discourse, as “a new moral instrument,” was emphasized as the most paramount vocabulary of motive in demanding action with regard to women’s issues (Yoon 1998, 110).

In order to obligate the states to implement gender equality as a national policy issue, the Beijing documents championed the moral rhetoric of human rights, as the rhetoric calls for unconditional commitment to equality and is able to stand on its own when other motives failed. The human rights language enables gender equality to be

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40 In its mission statement, the Platform stated that it “reaffirms the fundamental principle set forth in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, that the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights” (United Nations 1996, 17).
framed as an interest to humanity rather than an interest to particular groups, communities or nations. More importantly, the universal rhetoric of human rights provides a powerful moral framework with enormous transnational legitimacy and resonance. The Beijing Declaration certainly did not forget to remind the audience that “the equal rights and inherent human dignity of women and men” are “enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Declaration on the Right to Development” (United Nations 1996, 7). This impressive body of international declarations and legal texts was cited as a higher standard of behavioral norms and codes of conduct by which all signatory state parties have agreed to abide over a long history of international interaction. At the core of these documents is the moral code of human rights that accords all human beings, including women, a group of non-divisible, basic rights that should be honored regardless of circumstances. With its emphasis on human rights, the Platform condemns VAW as a particularly egregious violation of women’s human rights that “both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms” (73).

The interlocked web of international documents, including the Beijing documents, actually derive their moral legitimacy and authority from state actors’ own consent to the human rights concept. According to Merry, these documents are primarily products of a “transnational consensus-building process.” She describes such process as “a transnational social space where actors come together simultaneously as locally embedded people and as participants in a transnational setting that has its own norms, values, and cultural practices” (2005, 50). She also observes that “word-smithing” is at the core of the consensus-reaching activity, depicting consensus-building as an essentially discursive practice. In other words, the consensual nature of the international documents, such as the Beijing ones, is the source of the authority of their defined norms. The fact that the Platform was saddled with state reservations, especially around the
definitions of gender, marriage and women’s sexual rights, was in itself a manifestation of the negotiated nature of the document.

Human rights has always been a sore spot in China’s state politics. It is an area where China feels constant pressure to change from the international community, and the economic and political punishment it received in the wake of the Tiananmen crackdown taught the Chinese government an important lesson on the punitive consequences of human rights violations. Keith (1999, 151) argues that, in adjustment to the international censure against the Tiananmen confrontation, the Chinese state has consciously adapted its human rights rhetoric to partially absorb the human rights terminology.41

Rather than rejecting the human rights concept, China emphasized its standpoint as a developing country and expressed an alternative understanding. In “Right to Development: A Basic Human Right,” one Chinese scholar argues that for a developing country like China, “the precondition of the right to development, if it exists, is the right to national self-determination rather than individual freedoms and democratic mechanisms” (Gu 1995, 19). At the 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights, the Chinese leaders espoused this view, arguing that “for the vast number of developing countries, to respect and protect human rights is first and foremost to ensure the full realization of the rights to subsistence and development.” 42 Such discourse clearly prioritizes national interests over individual interests, or to put it more precisely, it constructs individual rights primarily as a matter of national rights. The nation is defined as the fundamental denominator of individual identity. As C.Y. Li points out, “in the mainstream Chinese tradition, a person acquires moral worth by being a member of the moral community, not by merely being a member of the biological species” (2003, 301). Therefore, he suggests, “if human rights advocates want to sell this value into the Chinese culture, they need to persuade the Chinese people to accept it” (301).

41 China issued two human rights white papers in the 1990s, the 1991 White Paper on Human Rights and the 1995 Progress of Human rights in China. In 1997 and 1998, China signed two international covenants on human rights, the international covenant on social, economic, and cultural rights and the international covenant on civil and political rights.

42 See Chang 2003, 10, footnote 17.
I argue that the Chinese state’s unhesitant adoption of the Beijing documents, including their human rights framework, can be regarded as the effectiveness of a persuasive rather than a coercive approach to human rights, since the transnational consensus building process through which the Beijing documents were crafted is certainly more dialectical and persuasive than coercive. Such a consensual process seemed to work well in eliciting China’s consent to the Beijing discourse. By adopting the Beijing documents, the state acknowledged and validated the Beijing “collective action frame,” including its broad definition of gender inequality, the varied issues of critical interest to women, state responsibilities in taking actions, and the necessity to advance women’s status in compliance with human rights principles.

One could argue that the Chinese state’s adoption of the Beijing discourse on women’s rights is only lip service. However, even lip service generates both discursive and possibly material obligations, no matter how superficial. In his discussion of human rights as an international political norm, Donnelly argues that even though nations like China are cynical about the dominant human rights concept given its focus on individual rights and endorsement by the world’s developed countries, they still feel “the need to appear to be acting on behalf of human rights” and this need testifies significantly to the power of norms (1993, 39). He also points out that “even cynical use pays tribute to the moral imperative of a commitment to human rights” (39). The Beijing discourse, as a transnational collective action frame that also reflected Chinese policy makers’ participation and visions, expressed itself as the state’s position statement on a wide range of women’s issues, including the marginalized issue of VAW and the controversial rhetoric of human rights. No matter how shallow the state’s commitment to the Beijing plan, its own consent articulates and authenticates the global discourse as a local one, thus acknowledging formerly taboo issues like VAW with social recognition.


As a collective action frame, the Beijing documents were meant ultimately to elicit action, especially from the state. The Chinese government indeed took significant action in response, as it promulgated *Plans and Guidelines for the Development of*
Chinese Women (1995-2000) just before the opening of the Conference. It was the first state-issued policy plan designed exclusively to promote women’s development. The Plans and Guidelines was not only lauded as a policy guarantee for the protection of women’s legal rights and development needs, it was clearly read as “a necessary step to realize the promise committed by our country in relation to the relevant international conventions; (and) a manifestation of the genuine embracement of the FWCW by both the Chinese government and the Chinese people” (China Women’s News 1995, 787). For Chinese women, the Plan signaled a remarkable policy initiative by the state to translate its commitment to the Beijing documents into action.

The Plans and Guidelines outlined both strategic and concrete goals for women’s development. The strategic goal aimed at “enhancing the collective quality of women’s lives and improving the implementation of the laws that protect women’s equal rights in political, economic, cultural, social and family spheres, at the same time guaranteeing women’s full participation in economic and social development and in state and social governance,” demonstrating a commitment to promotion of gender equality. In particular, the Plans and Guidelines identified 11 specific areas to be addressed, many of which referred back to the 12 critical areas of concern laid out in the Beijing Platform, including VAW. The Plans and Guidelines expressed a broad concurrence with the Beijing Platform’s emphasis on state responsibility, declaring that “the implementation of the Plans and Guidelines is an important obligation to be adopted and fulfilled without ambivalence by all levels of the government.” The committee on Women and Children of the State Council was designated as the coordinator and supervisory unit of the Plans and Guidelines. Local governments, from the provincial and municipal to the county and township levels, were required to make their own plans, incorporate relevant goals and areas into the evaluation system of government work and allocate more funding for the “women’s cause.” At the nation state level, the Plans and Guidelines promised to set up monitoring mechanisms and collect gender-specific statistics in order to assess effectively the progress made by women.

The Plans and Guidelines adopted both the terms “violence against women” and “domestic violence” in its language. It expressed particular concern with the elimination
and control of “violent harms against women in the illegal activities of trafficking, sales and prostitution of women.” In a separate issue section entitled “ameliorating the social environment for women’s development,” the Plans and Guidelines recognized the need to “protect women’s equal status in the family in accordance with law and to stop domestic violence resolutely.” This statement then was followed by a series of discussions focused on the “family,” such as “stimulating cultural life in the family,” “facilitating a family culture that integrates the needs of the family, economics and social development,” and “facilitating the betterment of family, popular and social morality” (State Council of the P.R.C.1995). Though the Plans and Guidelines frequently referred to women’s rights, it evaded the term “human rights” throughout its discussions.

The Plans and Guidelines’ approach to violence against women and domestic violence was decisively narrower than that of the Beijing documents. It also revealed a lack of adequate understanding of the human rights framework as well as an avoidance of its rhetoric in its discussion of these two issues. The separation of violence against women from domestic violence as two distinct areas betrayed a public/private dichotomy in the state’s perceptions, which were directly challenged by the “women’s rights are human rights” perspective promoted by the Beijing documents. The Plans and Guidelines’ enumeration of trafficking, prostitution and sales of women as its recognized forms of VAW significantly pared down the broad definition of VAW provided by the Platform to a few criminal activities the state had already outlawed. Though the Plans and Guidelines incorporated the term “domestic violence” and addressed the issue, it indicated a primary concern with the integrity of the family rather than with the woman herself. The discourse of the Plans and Guidelines discourse manifested a strong tendency to couch human rights in terms of public rights. When it comes to the domestic sphere, the family is still accorded precedence over the individual.

However, despite its far from sufficient and desirable treatment of violence against women and domestic violence, the adoption of these terms by the Plans and Guidelines testifies to the considerable discursive influence that international norms, such as those laid out by the Beijing documents, can exert on the state. Though such influence is almost necessarily limited, even just at the discursive level, the repetitive appearance of
the terms violence against women and domestic violence in official state discourses is still extremely significant as a “naming” practice. According to Liz Kelly, “naming involves making visible what was invisible, defining as unacceptable what was acceptable and insisting that what was naturalized is problematic” (1988, 139). Feminist scholars often point out that patriarchal language, which essentially normalizes male aggression against women, constitutes a significant domain of women’s struggles against gender violence (Spender 1980; Dworkin 1981; Brennan 1995; Berrington and Jones 2002). The lack of “names” for the broad range of women’s experiences of abuse and violence, which frequently happen in familial contexts and intimate relationships, impedes women’s articulation of their experiences, affects the credibility of their claims and alienates them from the process of defining violence as both interpersonal and social injustice. Therefore, “naming,” far from being a mere linguistic act, is a critical step to the development of social definition and public consciousness.

Violence against women, an issue woven as a common thread through women’s lives across the globe, was born precisely out of such a feminist “naming” practice. In China’s case, this naming took place in the context of the Beijing process through a constellation of state policy discourses reviewed above. The fact that the naming was practiced by the state also lent crucial legitimacy to the international frame and terminology of “violence against women”, in which domestic violence is recognized as a significant issue.

Connecting Tracks to NGOs: The NGO Forum

China’s participation in the Beijing conference not only named the issues of violence against women and domestic violence in public discourse from the top down, but perhaps more importantly, the Beijing NGO Forum was an event focused on women’s mobilization that opened up crucial political space for women’s organizing in the civil society sector in China. Indeed, the handful of women’s NGOs that later formed the DVN all share significant ties to the Beijing process.
By the time of the Beijing Conference, the NGO forum had become a largely institutionalized part of the U.N. World conference on women. Compared with previous Conferences, the FWCW provided more extensive and formalized institutional linkage between the NGO Forum and the inter-governmental conference than prior conferences. It was the first time in the history of these Conferences that five regional NGO forums were organized parallel to the official preparatory committee meetings during the preparations. As a result, not only more NGOs participated, but they were also more integrated into the preparatory process of the Conference. A Nijeholt et al. note that “different from the Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) conferences at which women’s movements had participated almost exclusively in the NGO fora and made little effort to work with official representatives, the Beijing Conference witnessed an unprecedented high level of interaction between the women’s movements, NGOs and governments” (1998, 34).

A number of scholars have linked the mainstreaming of the concept of NGO in China to the Beijing process in particular (B.H. Liu 2001; N.H. Zhang 2001; Wesoky 2002; Milwertz 2002; Huang 2004; Howell 2005). Before the Beijing Conference, “NGO” remained a largely alien term and concept in Chinese society, because NGO hardly existed as a legal or social category in the country. Indeed, it is often debated


44 The five regional preparatory conferences were held in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and North America, the Arab Region, and Africa. These Forums produced NGO amendments to the Platform for Action, which were then, also for the first time, compiled into a single global document and presented as NGO’s collective suggestions for the revisions of the Platform (Walker 1998; Yoon 1998). In the preparation process for Beijing, women’s caucuses were held at every regional meeting (Walker 1998; Stephenson 1995).

45 Though the P.R.C.’s Constitution (1982) hypothetically ensures citizens “freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession, and of demonstration” (article 35), these rights are nonetheless subjected to pre-conditions stipulated in the general principles of the Constitution. Given that fidelity to the official ideology and state leadership provides the only guarantee to the citizen’s enjoyment of a full range of rights in China, including their rights to associate “freely,” non-governmental organizations, a concept building on a remarkable or at least distinguishable demarcation between the state and civil society, was an extremely unfamiliar one in mainland Chinese society. In addition, the Chinese government also passed the Regulation on the Registration and Management of Social Groups in 1989 to specifically regulate “social groups.” This Regulation, enacted in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown, only imposed more restrictive rules on autonomous organizations. It certainly reinforced the constitutional requirement of patriotism by prescribing the “country’s unity and harmony among different ethnic communities” as a
among scholars whether the notion of “civil society” is applicable to China, given the domineering presence of the state in Chinese society.\textsuperscript{46} According to Howell, White and Shang, civil society represents “an intermediate associational realm situated between the state on the one side and the basic building blocks of society on the other (individuals, families, and firms), populated by social organizations which are separate, and enjoy some degree of autonomy from the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values” (1996, 3). Such a Western framework depends considerably on the measure of civil society as distinct from and even oppositional to state interests. Civil society research in China, on the contrary, has frequently identified the lack of distinction, weak assertion of autonomy, and interdependency as unique characteristics of the state-society relationship in China. (Wakeman 1993; Howell \textit{et al.} 1996; Brook and Frolic 1997; Migdal 2003).

While autonomous women’s groups already appeared prior to the Beijing process, their organizational forms hardly fit into a single profile or conformed to the Western model of a NGO. In addition, the ACWF was still regarded by the State as the sole authentic women’s organization, and its dominance figured as a powerful barrier to alternative forms of women’s organizing. Milwertz (2002) adopts the concept of “popular organizing,” which emphasizes the origins of the initiatives rather than their autonomy from the state, as the criterion for defining NGOs in the Chinese context. This concept refers to all types of initiatives started “from below by the activists themselves” rather than “restricted to certain politicians or parties” (24). It also bypasses the fact that the so-called non-governmental women’s groups in China may be “institutionally affiliated to, registered with or set up within an established party-state organization” (25). I also adopt this concept of “popular organization” in my discussion of Chinese women’s NGOs.

general principle to be followed by all social groups. Practically, it required all social groups to be legally registered, which means they not only had to apply to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, a state bureaucracy, to obtain legal status, but they also had to show approval from a “sponsoring unit,” which usually means government institutions or a subsidiary unit authorized by the government. Western commentators contend that these requirements were obviously installed to place social organizations under more state surveillance. Also see Human Rights in China 1999.

Some disapprove and object to applying the concepts (e.g., Wakeman 1993; Dean 1997), some take a modified approach (e.g., Frolic 1997; Des Forges 1997), and others claim to discern Western style autonomous social organizations throughout China’s history (e.g., Brook 1997).
argue that the NGO impact of the Beijing Conference is most significant where it was able to mobilize spontaneous and autonomous initiatives from below, as it is these efforts that have provided the essential foundation for the later DVN.

**Beijing’s NGOization Effects on China: From Top Down as well as Bottom Up**

The responsibility to host the Conference, including its parallel NGO Forum, obliged both the Chinese government and participants to learn about NGOs. Discursively, the state deliberately absorbed and mainstreamed the concept of NGO into its own language by declaring the ACWF as the largest women’s NGO in China, despite its historical role and political nature primarily as a “mouthpiece for CCP directives” rather than as an advocate for women’s interests (Edwards 2000, 65). This redefinition marked nothing short of an extraordinary effort by the state to connect tracks to global discourses, especially given the enormously dubious nature of NGOs in China and particularly in the post-Tiananmen period.

Aware of the discrepancy between the ACWF and the prevalent international NGO model, the Chinese discourse appropriated the concept by emphasizing NGOs as collaborative partners of the state. In a 1995 publication on the NGO Forum of the FWCW, women’s NGOs in China were defined as “a form of autonomous organizing carried out under the leadership of the Chinese CCP and in accordance with the socialist principles” (Du 1995, 17). In addition, the relation between NGOs and the government is portrayed as one of “mutual support and close collaboration” (17). Many Chinese women scholars are also quite supportive of the re-categorization of the ACWF as a NGO. Zhang, in particular, criticizes the Western model’s focus on independence from the state as a

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47 During preparations for the Conference, the China NGO Organizing Committee organized several informational workshops to educate state officials, ACWF cadres and approved participants about NGOs (see Guan 1998).

48 In the Chinese report on the implementation of the Nairobi Strategies, the state recognized the role of NGOs in promoting women’s progress and redefined ACWF as the country’s largest women’s NGO. At the NGO consultation meetings in 1994 and the NGO forum on Women and Development in the Asian and Pacific Region in 1993, the ACWF also self-identified as a NGO in public (see Q.C. Huang 1998a and 1998b).
form of “autonomy fetish.””⁴⁹ She calls for a more contextualized and historicized conception of NGOs, arguing that the ACWF not only qualifies as a NGO given its wide connections to local communities and its “multifaceted subjectivity,” but its proximity to the state also carried a prominent advantage over the autonomous NGO model (2001, 169). Liu, a scholar affiliated with both the ACWF and a non-governmental women’s health group, describes both the ACWF and popular groups as NGOs. She specifically points out that Chinese women’s NGOs must make efforts to build up a “collaborative” rapport with the government and to transcend the misconception of NGOs as “anti-government,” “politically untrustworthy” and “in need of surveillance” (2001, 155). Although whether or not ACWF constitutes a NGO remains the subject of continuing debates, these discourses show that through the Beijing process, the NGO concept obtains tremendous legitimacy and becomes quickly adapted to the state-centric perspective in China.

In addition to the discursive change, new women’s NGOs were also established out of the contingent need associated with the State’s responsibility to host the NGO Forum (Howell 2005, 60). While these NGOs were mostly professional associations, such as the China Association of Female Judges and the Capital Association of Female Journalists, and largely came into being through state initiatives, their formation nonetheless expanded institutional space for women’s organizing and enabled more women to be involved in the NGO exchange activities both before and at the Beijing conference.⁵⁰ Many of these groups staffed the China Organizing Committee for the NGO Forum, which took charge of selecting and screening Chinese participants. The number of women’s NGOs also tells the difference. Whereas China’s presence at the NGO Forum during the previous Women’s Conferences was almost negligible, the Beijing Conference showed a record number of 49 registered Chinese Women’s NGOs.

⁴⁹ She cites the “autonomy fetish” critique from Bishwapriya Sanyal (1997), see N.H. Zhang 2001, 62. ⁵⁰ Many participants at the NGO Forum were associated with these organizations and they were also authorized by the state to organize sub-forums to speak about women’s issues in China.
who organized about 44 workshops at the NGO Forum. Chinese participants also numbered approximately 5,000.\(^{51}\)

More important than the discursive importation of the NGO concept was the fact that China’s preparations for the NGO Forum catapulted Chinese women into the “transnational public sphere” of women’s NGOs. Building on Jurgen Habermas’s seminal concept of public sphere (1989), which describes a terrain of public opinions and politics made possible by the separation of civil society and the state with the ascendancy of capitalist commercial economy in 17\(^{th}\) and 18\(^{th}\) century Europe, Guidry \textit{et al.} propose the idea of the “transnational public sphere.” They depict this sphere as “a space in which both residents of distinct places (states or localities) and members of transnational entities (organizations or firms) elaborate discourses and practices whose consumption moves beyond national boundaries” (2000, 7). They also point out “this transnational public sphere offers a place where forms of organization and tactics for collective action can be transmitted across the globe” (7).

Feminist discussions of global women’s movements point to transnational feminist networks as the public sphere where women convene, dialogue and develop strategies to promote women’s causes. Some authors highlight the proliferation of international women’s NGOs as an important reason for the emergence of transnational networks (Sgoutas 1998; Fraser 2001). Keck and Sikkink (1998) specifically argue that the construction of VAW into a global issue is the outcome of a “transnational advocacy network” which is knitted by shared beliefs and intense information exchange. What is novel about such a network is “the ability of nontraditional international actors to mobilize information strategically to help create new issues and categories and gain leverage over much more powerful organizations and governments” (2). Bunch and her colleagues, as key activists in the organization of the global women’s human rights movement, state that “the chief impact of the global campaign lay in opening spaces for women from different racial and ethnic groups, countries, classes, and occupational

\(^{51}\) At the Mexico conference, China did not participate in the NGO forum at all; at the Copenhagen conference, China designated 2 representatives on its official delegation team for the NGO forum; at Nairobi, China selected 5 members and organized the first forum on Chinese women at the NGO site. See Guan 1998, 5-9.
backgrounds to meet on a consistent and continuous basis” (2001, 226-227). They point out that transnational feminist networks have served productively “as nodes of information, capacity building and leadership development” (227). Ferree and Tripp (2006) argue that the loosely connected network structure is replacing the conventional, hierarchical international organizations as the more conducive modality for transnational mobilization. All these discussions have indeed portrayed the global women’s movement as a vibrant transnational public sphere where women form a global “community” across national boundaries through strategic networking, planning and information exchange. Some feminist scholars have also begun to theorize transnational feminisms as constituting “transnational feminist public sphere” (Lara 2003; McLaughlin 2004).

One could argue that the “sisterhood” politics championed by the transnational women’s rights movement embodies the ideal of a “transnational feminist public sphere.” However, critics object to this “global sisterhood” model suggesting that it deceptively glosses over the power cleavages intrinsic to the formation of this often romanticized notion of a transnational public sphere (e.g., Ahmed 2000; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 1991, 1993). Stephenson (1995) cautions specifically against the idealization of women’s NGOs, which presume alliances with the less privileged. She points out that most women’s NGOs with an active international presence “reflect rather than counteract the prevailing hegemonic structures of the world system, coming primarily from rich Western nations” (136). The Beijing Conference, despite its celebrated status as a global women’s convention, also exposes the hegemonic silences and power tensions within the international women’s movement, especially with regard to lesbian visibility (Day 1996), indigenous rights (Beaucage 1996; Sillett 1996), economic inequalities between the North and the South (Thobani 1996), and racism (Dutt 1996). The inherent power dynamics of global feminisms at the Conference also propelled Hsiung et al. (1998) to raise concerns about relationship building between Chinese women activists and international feminist groups. Their discussion of Chinese women’s experience with the Beijing process indicate that “the voices of women activists in China were often suppressed and marginalized by both the CCP state and the Western feminist/activist groups who claimed the authority to speak for Chinese women” (490). Li Xiaojiang, a
famous women’s studies scholar in China, has openly challenged the central tenets promoted by Western feminisms, including the “sisterhood is power” slogan, which she repudiates as denying the women’s liberation experience in China that mobilized both men and women (1999, 275).

I brought attention to these feminist “discontents” to acknowledge the larger power structure that also marks and situates Chinese women’s entrance into the transnational public sphere of women’s NGOs mobilized by the Beijing Conference. Though Chinese women, as a social collective, might be marginalized sisters in the global feminist community, one should not forget that, compared to their numerous domestic sisters who had no access to this transnational public sphere, those Chinese women who had the opportunity to participate in Beijing were distinctively privileged. Indeed, the same “reflection” used by Hsiung et al. showing Chinese women’s skepticism of the global sisterhood also presents accounts showing many Chinese women participants’ uncritical acceptance of the sisterhood ideal.52 For example, one woman wrote:

I saw a very eye-catching picture in the Forum with the caption: “As a woman, I do not have a country. My country is the entire world.” At the reception I heard women from all parts of the world repeating one sentence, “Think globally, act locally.” I was deeply moved and inspired by the strength and force carried forward by the women’s movements” (B.H. Liu 1995, 154-55).

Another woman described Chinese women’s voices as a “note” in the “magnificent melody” of a global fight for gender equality (Zhu 1995, 126-127). These narratives strongly suggest that participation actually inculcated a sense of global sisterhood in many Chinese women, despite the enormous ideological, political and cultural differences between Chinese women and their counterparts from other countries. I would like to argue that a sense of sisterhood is present in many women’s reflections on their Beijing experiences because the experience of exposure to and immersion in a

52 Hsiung et al. drew on many accounts from Reflections and Resonance, a collection of Chinese women’s reflections on their participations in miscellaneous international preparatory activities for the Beijing Conference’s NGO Forum. The book was commissioned by the Ford Foundation, and it funded many of the authors’ international trips.
transnational public sphere of women’s NGOs was extremely empowering. Also, though Chinese women participants were mostly from the social elites either because of their professional affiliation or educational background, this privilege was productive in that it wielded an enormously galvanizing impact on women’s civil society organizing and translated into a crucial institutional opening for women’s NGOs in China.

Thanks to the Beijing Conference, many Chinese women were able to participate in NGO meetings for the first time either through the regional NGO meetings abroad or at the Conference’s NGO Forum at Huairou. It was the first time that many Chinese women were ever able to transgress both the geographical and discursive boundaries of the nation, even though those who participated were definitely small in number. Many participants reflected on how the issue of VAW was brought to their attention, often for the first time, because of their NGO experience in this process. Several women who went abroad for NGO preparatory meetings visited rape crisis centers and women’s shelters (Ge 1995; Lin 1995). One woman attended the “Women, human rights and violence” seminar organized by the Center for Women’s Global Leadership and another participated in a VAW forum at the Nordic Forum in Turku. She was amazed that VAW found concern among women all over the world (Liu, B.H. 1995). Liu Meng, a later DVN activist, wrote her reflections about her participation in a VAW forum. It was in this context that she began to connect the issue to China, realizing that “violence against women is nothing new to us; wives are often beaten when they give birth to a girl or when their husband has a lover, drinks too much or is unsuccessful in his career; women are also abducted and raped” (1995, 269).

A more significant outcome of the Beijing process is that it effectively, though temporarily, removed Chinese women from their national contexts and embedded them into a global community of women’s movements and NGOs. The immersion in this transnational public not only exposed Chinese women participants to NGO practices, it also helped transmit the non-governmental organizational forms, goals and skills of NGOs to many Chinese women, inspiring some to form their own NGO projects and groups after this exposure.
The “non-governmental” forms of the NGOs mobilized by the Beijing Conference, with their emphasis on civil society initiatives, women’s leadership, democratic participation, non-hierarchical culture, and social outreach activism, were perceived by many Chinese women participants as the most eye-opening, proactive and transformative aspect of their experience during the Beijing process. Many experienced a feeling of “cultural disorientation” when they initially participated in NGO forums. One woman journalist I interviewed at DVN revealed that, on the eve of the Conference, she and her colleagues were transported in a truck to Huairou for a “rehearsal” for a Women and Media NGO forum. She recalled that they were totally clueless about how they were supposed to act and that “after waiting pointlessly for quite a while, (we began to complain that) ‘ah, why is there no one to take charge of us?’” She pointed out that as most Chinese were accustomed to a social life organized by government and hierarchical leadership, they were literally at a loss when such a structure was removed. Though this NGO “shock” caused some initial feelings of disorientation and discomfort, many Chinese women participants actually derived inspirational models of organizing and activism from this “shock.” The same journalist mentioned above described Chinese women’s Beijing experience as an encounter between “mental puppets” and “the beautiful landscape” of NGOs. She firmly declared that “I feel that we only have so many women’s NGOs in China after the FWCW. Without the Conference, Chinese women would not have the opportunity to go abroad and she would not have been able to see so many fresh things!”

Indeed, all of the women’s NGOs that formed the Domestic Violence Network have significant ties to Chinese women’s NGO experience at Beijing. They include the Center for Women’s Law Studies and Legal Aid Services of Peking University, The Beijing Maple Women’s Psychological Counseling Center, the East Meets West Translation Group, the Women’s Media Watch Network, and the Department of Social Work of China Women’s College.

The Center for Women’s Law Studies and Legal Aid Services, Peking University (known as the Women’s Law Center) was established in December 1995, shortly after the commencement of the Beijing conference. Claiming itself as “the first non-profit popular
organization specializing in providing legal aid and conducting research for women” (Women’s Law Center 2006, 20), the Women’s Law Center focused on establishing a NGO model of legal aid in protection of women’s rights and interests. The founder, Guo Jianmei, participated in Beijing’s NGO Forums as a member of the ACWF-sponsored China Association of Female Lawyers. This experience drastically changed her life trajectory “in the blink of a few days,” to use her own words. After more than a decade, she still recalled the impact of her NGO experience at Beijing with vivid expressions and discernible excitement. She described the sensation of “being ignited by a spark,” the spark being “the passions about the NGO, the feeling of a dynamic spirit and brimming passions, including their sense of obligation for women’s rights, and the combative nature of the NGO people…its ability to fight. And their (women’s) enthusiasm….” After the Conference, Guo made a momentous career change decision. She quit her job with a state institution and changed lanes to the highly unconventional and difficult track of an NGO. Since the Chinese government also had just set up the legal aid system in 1994, the Women’s Law Center was definitely a first of its kind. As any NGO in China, the Law Center had to find a sponsor to make it a legal entity. Drawing on her previous institutional and personal connections to law as a legal scholar and lawyer herself, Guo’s Law Center obtained the sponsorship of the Department of Law at Peking University. At its inception and for a long time afterwards, the Center was tightly packed in a one-room office borrowed from the University, which served multiple functions as a consultation center, dining room, and training space.

The Women’s Media Watch Network (Media Watch) is, similar to the Women’s Law Center, a direct outcome of the Beijing process. Formed by a group of women journalists at China Women’s News, the ACWF-owned national newspaper, the Media Network was stimulated by the Beijing Platform’s recommendation on mainstreaming a gender perspective in the media and call on women’s groups to monitor the process. It was formally established in 1996 as an independent project affiliated with the Capital Women Journalists’ Association, one of the NGOs established by the state just before the
Beijing Conference. The idea of Media Watch materialized from a lunch chat among several women journalists who were already involved in the NGO preparatory activities for Beijing. One of the founders, Guo Yanqiu, recalled that as she and her colleagues exchanged complaints about the blatant commodification of women’s sexuality on virtually all magazine covers, someone raised the idea of setting up a “monitoring” group, which immediately resonated. In a published account, the activists of Media Watch stated that their motivation was to turn “personal discontent with the state of affairs into collective, progressive action for change” (Cai et al. 2001, 209). The purpose was also “to articulate women’s voices in the media, and expand women’s power to discourse” (Guo 2001, 120). In addition, Media Watch also represents an explicit NGO initiative as the aim is also to organize “in a manner that would emphasize non-hierarchical relationships and mutual cooperation, and with a structure that was totally open” (Cai et al. 2001, 213). Like Women’s Law Center, Media Watch embodies Chinese women’s attraction to the NGO model as a means for women to organize and have a public voice. Unlike the Law Center, Media Watch assumes a more open and decentralized form of organization, hence the title “network.” It does not have a fixed location, nor does it provide concrete services. Its main activities are discursive and focused on monitoring media images of women in mainstream print and television programs through writing, reporting, critical analysis and education.

The East Meets West Feminist Translation Group (EMW) is a small independent women’s reading, discussion and translation group set up by a group of Western and Chinese women in Beijing when the country was preparing for the Conference. Ge Youli, a member of EMW, wrote in an article about the group that their purpose was to “help bridge the cultural and terminological gaps” existing in “theories, concepts and approaches adopted by the Western and Chinese women’s movements due to different social, cultural and political structures” (Ge and Jolly 2001, 63). However, the group seems to be geared more towards introducing Western feminist ideas to Chinese women.

53 One of the initiators of the group, Xie Lihua, a senior editor and activist who was already involved in NGO initiatives at the time, actually served on the executive committee of the Capital Women Journalists’ Association, thus making it relatively easy for the Media Network to obtain legal sponsorship of the Association.
Only those who could speak English were able to participate and the group has only translated feminist writings published in the West from English to Chinese, many of which were taken from the U.S. magazine *Ms.* Among the different subjects translated by EMW are sexuality, women’s reproductive rights, women’s struggles between work and childcare, and violence against women. Unlike either Women’s Law Center or Media Watch, EMW is not formally registered or affiliated with any sponsors. Ge describes EMW as “a fluid, vibrant and live grouping, moving between organization and disorganization, even existence and hibernation, and with a fluctuating membership often consisting of who turns up on that night” (61). The spontaneous and decentralized structure of the EMW obviously emulates the non-hierarchical model of women’s NGOs. Its lack of registration provides the women members with an autonomous space for association and constitutes a shield against governmental interference, as it operates on the margin of the state’s surveillance mechanisms. It is EMW’s grassroots initiative and independent status that makes it a women’s NGO. Though EMW was not able to participate in the NGO Forum at the Beijing Conference as an organization due to lack of legal status, most of its individual members were in attendance. Many EMW members are also involved in other NGOs, such as the Women’s Law Center, the Maple Counseling Center, the Media Network and the China Women’s College, indicating how women’s NGOs in Beijing are closely intertwined.

Another cohort of key activists I interviewed at DVN is based in the Department of Social Work of China Women’s College. As an ACWF-sponsored college, it expanded exponentially from a professional school for a small group of ACWF cadres to a higher education institution able to grant both undergraduate and graduate degrees. This change was due fundamentally to the Beijing process, as ACWF used the occasion effectively to raise funds as well as to promote the status of the College. Because of its special

54 The original predecessor of the College was the New China Women’s Occupational School founded by a group of women leaders in the communist party in 1949. In 1984, this school was upgraded to the Management College for Women Cadres of the National All China Women’s Federation. As such, it has remained a small institution focused on training ACWF women cadres and improving their administrative skills in ACWF woman’s work. As an ACWF-owned institution as well as the only higher education institution accepting primarily female students in China, the China Women’s College embodies a quite explicit institutionalized agenda of improving women’s social status. See China Women’s College website.
institutional identity, during the Beijing process the College became a major participant in the NGO Forum.\textsuperscript{55} In particular, the Department of Social Work of the College shares close liaisons with women’s NGOs.\textsuperscript{56} Not only have several faculty members in this department volunteered for miscellaneous women’s NGOs in Beijing, the Department also set up a NGO center called “the Women Consulting and Developing Center” during the Beijing process, which mainly provides over-the-phone consultation to women seeking advice on family and marriage problems. I would argue that the Department of Social Work of the College approximates a women’s NGO space not just because it established a NGO within its institutional space. Originally called the “Woman Work” Department, its change of name to “Social Work”\textsuperscript{57} represents a significant and deliberate move away from the ACWF- and state-centered model of addressing women’s issues. Instead, the NGO-model of serving women is emphasized. One DVN activist from the Department, Jiao Yang, states that “social work” redefines “woman work” as a service with the “goal to serve women and women’s development and focus on women as the primary target population.” Moreover, social work stresses sensitivity to women’s needs, endorses egalitarian relationship with women and also aims for empowerment of women. Such emphases on service to women, regard for women’s own needs and the goal of empowerment are consistent with the philosophy and visions adopted by many women’s NGOs. Therefore, one could say that the NGO ideology has formed an important part of the institutional culture of the Department of Social Work at China Women’s College, making it a women’s NGO space.

\textsuperscript{55} The Women’s College organized a panel on “women and education” at the Huairou NGO Forum. As a result, many women faculty members of this College participated in the Forum.

\textsuperscript{56} Li Hongtong, the chair of the Social Work Department, has a history of participating in women’s NGOs. She was among the first group of volunteers sitting on the first hotline of Wang Xingjuan’s Maple Counseling Center. Under her leadership, the Department also collaborated with the Jinlun Family Center, another Beijing-based women’s NGO, to provide psychological counseling services for women. Later, when she became chair of the Social Work Department, she set up a similar counseling service program inside the Department to offer women help (Information gathered from interview with Li Hongtao). Also see Milwertz 2002, 59-62.

\textsuperscript{57} This department title change seems to be influenced by several faculty members’ educational experiences as social work majors in Hong Kong in the 1990s.
The Beijing Maple Women’s Psychological Counseling Center (Maple Center), originally known as the Women Research Institute, had an active presence at the NGO Forum. It organized an independent panel on the theme of “women’s groups and social outreach” at the Forum and discussed the Center’s experience as a NGO. Wang Xinjuan, the founder and leader of the organization, proudly claimed that “we were the only real popular organization on behalf of China” at the Forum, referring ostensibly to the fact that most Chinese “NGOs” participating at Beijing were set up by the government or were affiliated with the ACWF. In her speech at the Forum, Wang appealed to the state for more recognition for “popular social organizations” like her group, arguing that they constituted an important social force in addressing the needs of “vulnerable groups of women” and that they also brought useful policy suggestions to the government (1998, 313-15). The Maple Center’s dynamic presence at the Beijing Conference, however, simultaneously invigorated and jeopardized the organization, demonstrating how the NGO sector was still extremely precarious despite the state’s seeming acknowledgement during the Beijing process.

The positive outcome of Maple Center’s participation in Beijing was that, in 1995, it obtained consultative status with the U.N. and, as a qualified NGO, it was able to participate in official conferences. Wang took advantage of this status and conveyed the NGO concerns to the Chinese government, including suggestions that legislation be enacted to protect women from sexual harassment and domestic violence (Beijing Maple Center 2005, 10). However, since the Conference brought a lot of foreign attention to the Maple Center, including visit requests by the Swedish Prime Minister and the U.S. First Lady Hillary Clinton, it generated suspicion at the Public Security Bureau. As a result, in 1996, the original sponsor institution of the Maple Center terminated its affiliation with the organization. As the Center was then accused of being an “infiltrating site of capitalism,” Wang recalled how she became “stigmatized and ostracized. No one wanted to have anything to do with me” (Milwertz 2002, 42). However, convinced that the NGO was a good and valuable cause, Wang persisted. Knowing that she would not be able to register as a social organization, she registered instead with the Bureau of Industry and Commerce as a service enterprise and changed the Women’s Research Institute to the
Beijing Maple Women’s Psychological Counseling Center. It was not until the late 1990s that the state finally withdrew its accusations against her when the government called on “social organizations” to step in as welfare providers (Saich 2004, 18). If it were not for Wang’s indomitable belief in the cause and righteousness of the NGO as a form of social organization, the Maple Center probably would exist today. The Beijing Conference, as a transnational mobilization of women’s NGOs, undoubtedly shaped and strengthened Wang’s pursuit of NGO organizing in important ways.

This face-to-face contact with and exposure to women’s NGO activism is crucial because it inspired Chinese women’s popular NGO initiatives mobilized from below during and after the Conference. The non-governmental and democratic mode of organizing has led to a re-conception of the state-society relationship; some Chinese women participants took to NGO organizing in assertion of the legitimate role of civil society actors in social life. Particularly, participation in the transnational public sphere of women’s NGOs seems to have kindled and expanded Chinese women’s political demand for institutional space of to organize to promote various gender interests. My contention is that if Chinese women have not had this level of participation in NGO forums during the Beijing process, the impact of the FWCW would not have been as groundbreaking. Though the state seemed to have acknowledged the legitimacy of NGOs rhetorically and even sanctioned the establishment of a few, the state’s suspicions and control of this sector far exceeded its recognition and support. What is groundbreaking about women’s “popular organizing” during this process is that they were the trailblazers and it was their initiatives that had plied open a fundamental institutional space for women’s civil society future organizing. While the state’s NGO rhetoric and contingent policies might be essential precursors, it is women’s courageous foray into the field of NGO organizing that has made the Beijing process into a concrete political opportunity for NGOs.

Breaking Taboo and the Domestic Violence Discourse at the NGO Forum of the Beijing Conference

During the Beijing process, the Chinese government also exercised extensive discursive and political surveillance, especially with regard to the NGO Forum. The state
not only screened the participants, all Chinese NGO panels were also subjected to a “rehearsal” process overseen by the ACWF prior to the conference to make sure that the discussions would focus on Chinese women’s achievements rather than problems.\textsuperscript{58} Some popular women’s groups were silenced and driven away from the Conference because their research was critical of women’s status in China and therefore deviated from the rhetoric demanded by the State.\textsuperscript{59} The most controversial and notorious attempt to control NGOs by the Chinese government was its relocation of the NGO Forum site from Beijing city, the site of the official conference, to Huairou, a suburban town 41 miles away from the city.\textsuperscript{60} Indeed, when Huairou was proposed to be the new NGO site only 5 months ahead of the conference, it was hardly equipped to handle the NGO meeting.\textsuperscript{61} The abrupt nature of the decision and the remote location of Huairou betrayed the Chinese government’s deep-seated ambivalence towards NGO activities.

At the Forum, the State also deployed numerous surveillance mechanisms particularly to monitor Chinese women’s activities. Not only were public security forces and plainclothes police installed everywhere, student volunteers were also utilized to spy on any slander against the state (Hom \textit{et al.} 1999, 224). The media also covered little of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item See Chow 1996 and Hom \textit{et al.} 1999, 211.
\item The first women’s studies center in China, which started as a popular women’s initiative within a university in the late 1980s and was renowned as the pioneer of the Chinese women’s studies movement which took off later, was shut down during the Beijing process because its discussion of women’s problems in China was viewed as contrary to national interests. See Hsiung 2001, 445. A prominent Chinese woman scholar and activist wrote an open letter to the authorities indicating that she refused to participate in the NGO Forum in protest of the state’s exclusion of her voice and investigation of her and other women’s popular groups. Despite her extensive research on Chinese women, none of her publications were included in the state organized publication exhibit on women, as she was criticized as “a proponent of bourgeois feminist movements” (Hom \textit{et al.} 1999, 232).
\item Though the government explained that the relocation was due to technical issues, there was speculation that it might have to do with an unpleasant encounter between the state leadership and a group of German feminists before the conference (Blecher, 2002, 134).
\item To prepare for more than 30,000 visitors and 2,700 meetings, Huairou faced the impossible task of taking down 804 collapsed constructions, putting up 63 new buildings, renovating the entire transportation, telecommunication, electrical, water supply and sewage systems and planting 230 trees, among other things—all in 150 days. It has been estimated that this amount of work would take 10 years at a normal pace (Du 1995, 18-19).
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the activities at the NGO Forum. To both Western and Chinese participants, the Chinese government’s intention to circumscribe and control the NGO Forum was obvious. As Wang commented, “the decision to isolate the NGO forum expressed not only the Leader’s determination not to let this event disturb China’s political status quo but also the state’s suspicion and hostility toward women’s spontaneous activities” (Hom et al 1999, 221).

Despite the Chinese government’s efforts to contain the NGO Forum, the state also had to make accommodations and concessions. Originally, the Chinese government decided to organize only thirty closely-monitored panels. With increasing exposure to and knowledge about the NGO Forum, the China Organizing Committee adjusted its original plan not only to expand the number of panels, but also to include “prohibited” topics such as domestic violence and the participation of some popular women’s groups. In the end, forty-seven panels were presented by Chinese women and covered issues such as women that had not been discussed in public before, such as women and human rights, violence against women, and women and environment (Hom et al. 1999, 216-217).

Wang Xinjuan, director of the Maple Center, revealed that the Chinese NGO Committee supervised by the ACWF simply had to make concessions on the topic of domestic violence. The reason, she explained, was because it was an international issue many countries had already talked about and it was also identified in the Beijing Platform for Action as one of the 12 critical concerns (from interview). The fact that VAW had already emerged as a high-profile international concern at the time of the Conference definitely compelled state recognition of the issue, no matter the reluctance of the State. As a result, violence against women, including the issues of sexual harassment, kidnapping and trafficking in women, prostitution, rape and domestic violence, was discussed quite extensively at the Chinese panels organized for the NGO Forum.

Domestic violence was addressed across several Chinese panels at the Forum, including the panels on “Fighting violence against women,” “Women’s groups and social outreach,” “Marriage, family and the conflicted female role” and “Women and human

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62 In general, the Chinese media were focused on asserting and showcasing women’s lofty status rather than on discussing the conference agendas beyond a cursory level (Rega and Rodriquez 1999).
rights.” Through these public presentations, Chinese women participants, mostly lawyers, legal scholars, researchers and some NGO activists, sought to condemn domestic violence as a harmful practice against both the woman and family, to bring social awareness about domestic violence in China and to appeal for more effective institutional measures and resources to address the problem. In this discourse collectively constructed by Chinese women participants at the NGO Forum, the human rights framework was evoked to redefine woman abuse in the domestic sphere from a culturally acceptable and invisible phenomenon to a violation of women’s rights and therefore a crime, a public issue and social problem. However, domestic violence was by no means criticized as a violation of women’s individual human rights alone; it was equally a threat to the family and social stability. This simultaneous emphasis on human rights and community cohesiveness marks a significant adaptation by Chinese women of the transnational feminist human rights framework.

In the Chinese discussions about the issue, little empirical research was presented to shed light on the scope, prevalence and forms of domestic violence against women. The Maple Center cited the 1992 national survey on women’s status63 and a 1991-1992 study that found domestic-violence related divorce suits made up a quarter of a total of 3300 divorce cases processed by the intermediate people’s court of Beijing city. The Center reported 97 calls from abused wives between September 1, 1992 and August 3, 1993. They found the husband’s patriarchal mentality, possessiveness, suspicion of the wife’s fidelity, brutal personality, his own extramarital affair and desire for a divorce as the primary causes of domestic violence against women (Tong 1998, 342-44). Chen’s discussion drew on a 1991-1992 family survey conducted across 6 provinces and cities in the country, which revealed battering among 1.57% of the urban and 4.68% of the rural women respondents (M.X. Chen 1998, 282). Zheng used statistics from an anonymous ACWF branch and the figures showed that out of the 3,899 “domestic violence disputes” processed by this ACWF in 1993, 61.5% were cases of “spousal abuse.” Extramarital affairs, alcoholism, gambling habits, and patriarchal attitudes were cited as the main triggers of “violent incidents” in the family (1998, 416-17). Li reviewed a 1994 “marital

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63 For information about this survey, see Chapter 3, note 34.
quality” survey of 2,400 respondents in Beijing city, which discovered 21.3% of husband-to-wife beatings and 15.2% vice versa (1998, 280). However, it was not clear how frequent and serious these “beatings” were to the male and female respondents respectively. The inconsistency and limited scope of these findings have to do with the fact that there was hardly any research designed to understand the issue of domestic violence in China at the time of the Conference. Findings also suggest that domestic violence was not too serious a problem in China, though it definitely existed.

Despite insufficient research, all Chinese panel speakers denounced domestic violence firmly as a form of violence against women with multiple harmful impacts on the woman, family and society. While domestic violence was recognized as a serious abuse of women’s human rights, it was also deemed a disturbing factor to the integrity of the family and fundamental social order. In the “Marriage and Family” panel, Chen Mingxia, a senior legal scholar64 who later became a core activist of DVN, emphasized domestic violence against women as a serious infringement on women’s bodily rights. She pointed out that society should dispel the notion of domestic violence as a private matter but “emphasize violence against women as a violation of women’s fundamental human rights—the right to her own body. Therefore woman beating is a political and public issue that deserves social and legal intervention” (M.X. Chen 1998, 284). However, she also contended that VAW not only violated women’s human rights, it was also “harmful to the family, the most significant obstacle to the development of an organic and harmonious family and seriously threatens social stability and development” (283).

In the “violence against women” panel, while the human rights perspective was stressed, other perspectives were added to justify the depiction of domestic violence as a public harm. Shao Wenhong was a speaker who strongly supported the human rights framework. “Human rights,” contended Shao, “refer to the rights related to a person’s need for livelihood and development” (1998, 412) and VAW embodies “the “most brutal trampling on women’s human dignity, bodily rights, right to life and right to freedom” (1998, 413). To other speakers, the victim of domestic violence is not just woman. Liu

64 She participated in the Forum as a representative from the Law Institute of the China Social Sciences Academy.
Zhumei argued that the harm of domestic violence was manifold. It was not only detrimental to the woman’s physical health, emotional integrity and personal dignity, but was also harmful to “family happiness,” “healthy development of the children”, “social stability,” and “woman’s liberation and the evolution of human civilization” (1998, 20-21). Though she admitted that the history of the patriarchal family in the Chinese society was primarily to blame for VAW in the domestic sphere, her discussion still suggested wife abuse primarily was a result of “marital and family conflicts” (421). Wu Miaohua argued that China should pay attention to domestic violence because “it seriously violates women’s bodily rights, freedom and human dignity and causes families to break up” (1998, 423). Though women are acknowledged as the most immediate victims of domestic violence, family and society are suggested to be equally if not more devastated.

In the “women and human rights” panel, though domestic violence was analyzed with a firm focus on the human rights perspective, it was hardly discussed within the context of China. Rather, it was depicted as a global problem that affected other countries and cultures more seriously. Zhan Jie’s discussion about women’s human rights and rights in the family is such an example. Her central argument was that women’s rights in the family should be respected, promoted and protected as human rights, as they all pertain to women’s basic rights to life, development and bodily security. Domestic violence, within this paradigm, was discussed as a particularly insidious violation of women’s human rights in the family. She pointed out that it was because “women constituted the predominant victim of domestic abusive behavior, it not only violated and destroyed women’s but also their children’s well being and basic rights” (1998, 490). To illustrate her point, she used figures from many countries that showed a much higher prevalence rate of VAW than China’s.65 This juxtaposition made China look much better than the other countries in terms of domestic violence incidence. Another speaker, Huang Lie,66 made a similar argument that domestic violence should be regarded and intervened in as a human rights violation rather than an issue of “family problems or personal

65 The figures she cited show 1.5% incidence of wife beating in the urban areas and 4.68% in the surveyed rural area (Zhan 1998, 490).
66 Huang later joined DVN. She also participated in the Forum as a researcher affiliated with the Law Institute of the China Social Sciences Academy.
conduct” (1998, 470). However, she used U.S. data to show the epidemic nature of domestic violence. These speakers’ perfunctory discussions of violations of women’s human rights in China, as in the case of domestic violence, might have to do with the rarity of research on the issue in China. However, it also might be an intentional avoidance of a human rights critique. Whatever the genuine reason, the discussions’ detachment from China’s domestic violence situation considerably compromised the association of the human rights perspective with the issue.

Most discussions also proposed suggestions to prevent, address and intervene in domestic violence; they mainly advocated tough laws, social outreach and education. Most appealed to the state for institutional and legal measures with the priority to be the protection of women’s rights. However, many participants also called for measures to strengthen the family as an important means to stem domestic violence, indicating that the human rights frame was not interpreted as giving precedence to individual rights over the family and community. Chen Mingxia stressed state intervention as the most essential way to protect women’s “rights.” She argued for explicit prohibition of domestic violence in China’s laws, education of law enforcement personnel and promotion of mediation in domestic-violence affected families (1998). Zheng Zhaofang, in addition to appealing for strengthened social and legal protections for women, asserted the importance of “stepping up the development of socialist spiritual civilization” through “improving the family” (1998, 418). Wu Miaohua’s suggested solutions were to “ameliorate the family environment” and “improve communication and harmony among family members,” among other things, such as enhancing social control mechanisms, involving law enforcement in domestic violence cases, and raising women’s self-protection awareness (1998, 424). In the “social outreach” panel, the Maple Center called on the state for more domestic violence-sensitive laws and procedures. As a NGO, it also requested the state to develop more crisis intervention service resources for women victims, such as shelters (Tong 1998, 344-45).

The discourse reviewed above indicates the NGO Forum at the Beijing Conference became a historical and politically significant moment in China. It impacted the transitioning of domestic violence from an obscure and often silenced topic to a
partially accepted and legitimized issue for public discussion in China. It also suggests that the human rights framework highlighted by the transnational women’s movement during the Conference certainly had a considerable and important impact on Chinese women’s efforts to raise social and state awareness about domestic violence against women. It enabled Chinese participants to focus public and state attention on the problem through re-defining domestic violence as a human rights violation and thus lifting the veil off privacy associated with the family sphere. However, the human rights frame’s construction of the issue as a matter of fundamental individual rights does not seem to be sufficient to justify public attention in the Chinese context. Equal emphasis has also been placed on depicting domestic violence as a serious harm against family integrity, health of the future generation, community harmony and social stability in order to highlight domestic violence as a “public crime.” Biddulph and Cook (1999), in their study on the criminalization of kidnapping and trafficking of women in China, contend that the construction of VAW into a serious problem in China depends essentially on the reasoning that such behavior causes harmful and destabilizing effects on the society, such as disintegration of families, disharmony between communities, organized crime, etc. They suggest that it is the perception of VAW as a form of public harm that most significantly warrants and motivates state action. In relation to domestic violence, the Chinese participants also seemed intent on demonstrating the issue as a social harm through expanding outside the human rights framework and including the stakes of the community as a legitimate ground to call for a range of social action, especially since most demands were directed toward the state.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzes how the issues and terminology of violence against women and domestic violence were named into state policy and NGO public discourses in China during the Beijing process. It also examines how the Chinese state’s and women’s participation in the process has led to the emergence of a few precious Chinese women’s NGOs that later would enable the formation of the DVN in the post-Beijing context. I discuss both the discursive breakthrough and the institutional opening for women’s
organizing in the NGO sector as the two most essential political opportunities to the subsequent women’s civil society domestic violence movement represented by the DVN. In the next chapter, I move on to discuss how the DVN, building from the political opportunities earned through the Beijing Conference, came into being.
CHAPTER 5

WOMEN’S NON-GOVERNMENTAL ANTI-DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACTIVISM, INTERNATIONAL PHILANTHROPIC CAPITAL AND THE MAKING OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROJECT

Introduction

In June 2000, the “Domestic Violence in China: Research, Intervention and Prevention” Project was launched in Beijing. The Domestic Violence Project mobilized a diverse group of women scholars, professionals and activists associated with a network of women’s NGOs and academic institutions researching, advocating and providing social services for women in Beijing. Essentially, it was an informal but strategic alliance in the women’s NGO sector among the Women’s Law Center, the Maple Women’s Psychological Counseling Center, the Women’s Media Watch Network, and the China Women’s College and a number of individual scholars and NGO activists. Though the initiative was entitled a “project” and funded as such by its international donors, the project also developed as a non-governmental organization. Its formation embodied the materialization of a social movement against domestic violence in China. As Barbara Ryan argues, “a social movement is a social construction, a reflection of the society it exists in at any particular historical juncture. Social movements are, in practice, a collaboration of people hoping to achieve the same goal” (1997, 68). The Domestic Violence Project spelled the conscious efforts among a couple of key Beijing women’s

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67 See Domestic Violence Network, Newsletter 1, 2000a. I will use the abbreviation Domestic Violence/DV Project in this chapter.

68 It is also clearly regarded and discussed as a NGO by commentators, see for instance, Keith et al 2003, which uses the Domestic Violence Project as an example of the new “popular organization” to explore non-governmental organizing in contemporary Chinese society.
NGOs and feminist activists, who had a significant degree of participation in the Beijing Conference, to organize collective action against domestic violence against women.

In this chapter, I will examine the global-local intersections in the mobilization process of the Domestic Violence Project. I argue that the Project is an outcome of two different but closely intertwined mobilization processes. One was women’s general mobilization to the violence against women (VAW) frame proposed by the transnational women’s human rights movement through the Beijing conference. The other was women’s specific mobilization to the Ford Foundation’s funding proposal for a local women’s anti-VAW non-governmental organization. While the previous chapter analyzed how the Beijing Conference transformed the political opportunity structure to the benefit of civil society actors concerned with advancing women’s issues, this chapter focuses on the resource mobilization and collective interest aspects related to the emergence of the specific DV Project.

I argue that the DV Project is predicated on the availability of organizational and economic resources. Indeed, to support and cultivate women’s anti-gender violence activism in the NGO sector in China, the international donors played an extremely significant role in mobilizing resources for local women activists. At the same time, I also contend that the presence of resources is not a sufficient explanation for the formation of the DV Project. Indeed, the Project has to be understood as a product of collective identity that anchors and congregates a group of commonly shared concerns and interests by those who chose to participate. In this respect, I explore women’s varied motivations for participating in the Project as a way to address the global-local power relations between the international donors and Chinese women activists as well as to understand women’s agency in this process. In general, my argument is that the DV Project is best described as a product of interactions between the local women’s NGOs and the global funding agencies. To attribute the emergence of this organization to either global or local factors underestimates the nature of the Project as an outcome of interaction between the two.
Resource Mobilization

A major theory that explains the formation of a social movement is the resource mobilization theory (RMT). According to RMT, “social movement activity can be explained as the product of an increased flow of resources from elites to social movement organizations” (Young 1997, 49). This vein of explanation holds the availability of resources, such as legitimacy, money, human labor and facilities, as the most significant catalyst to the formation of movements. It argues that movements emerge calculatedly when sufficient resources are accumulated and the larger social environment is perceived to be ripe, rather than being catapulted by a sea change in the level of social grievance (Jenkins 1983; Young 1997; Nash 2000).

Mayer Zald and John McCarthy (1979; 1987), specifically, have argued that organizational resources play a major and increasingly critical role in the formation of social movements. They point out that contemporary social movements, especially those arising in advanced industrial Western societies, have shifted considerably away from the informal, grassroots model of organizing and become much more reliant on centralized, formally structured movement organizations as a more effective way to collect resources and mobilize action. Such social movement organizations are often professional organizations, which are usually characterized by paid staff, small membership and outside leadership. In relation to feminist movements, Ferree and Martin (1995) point to the importance of feminist organization, arguing that feminism, as a social movement, is both enabled and sustained by the proliferation of women’s organizations advancing a variety of women’s gender interests across different social spheres. Rather than discussing “feminist organizations” as a particular type of organization, they evoke the term to identify the structural relationship between these organizational resources and the women’s movement. They state that, “feminist organizations are…a form of movement mobilization in the present and a resource for feminist mobilization in the future” (11). The collection of studies presented in their “Feminist Organizations” anthology have all testified to the vital and vibrant role played by a diverse body of feminist organizations in the initial and continuing mobilization of feminist movements against gender inequality.
on multiple fronts, many of which are working in the field of anti-gender violence activism (Ferree and Martin 1995).

Philanthropic foundations also constitute a significant resource for movement mobilization. These organizations are not only reservoirs of staggering financial assets, they have also played an increasingly active and central role in supporting social institutions and advancing social and political causes. The concept of “social change philanthropy,” proposed by Faber and McCarthy in their introduction to *Foundation for Social Change*, derives from an important underlying observation that economic patronage offered by foundations assumes a critical relationship in many social movements. In the United States, though only a tiny percentage of foundation grants are channeled to social change initiatives, funding for the social movement sectors still experienced an exponential growth from $11 million in 1975 to $88 million in 1990 (Faber and McCarthy 2005, 12). The anthology documents and discusses foundations’ extensive involvement in social movements working on a variety of social justice issues from environmentalism and anti-racism to poverty and community revitalization. Outside of the U.S., several studies have indicated that foreign donors constitute an important force in NGO development in non-Western and non-democratic societies (Mendelson and Glenn 2000; Richter 2002; Bagic 2006; Sundstrom 2006). These studies suggest that foundations are a crucial institutional force to be taken account of in social movement resource mobilization studies.

**Post-Beijing: The Global Frame of Violence Against Women and Local Women’s Non-Governmental Activism**

Though known as the Domestic Violence Project, the organization can indeed be regarded as a mobilization to the broader frame of violence against women, which traveled to China and became known to most Chinese women activists and scholars primarily through the Beijing Conference (Chapter 4). The Project’s initial fundraising proposal to the donors not only addressed domestic violence as an issue of violence against women as was defined in the 1993 U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. It also clearly
indicated that the Project’s scope of interest was not restricted to the issue of domestic violence only, but rather it intended to combat a whole range of gender violence, though domestic violence would be its focus.

In a statement about its goals, the proposal stated, “We hope to realize such goals as establishing a nation-wide network devoted to combating violence against women, enhancing the awareness of the public on the violence and possible measures in combating the violence, and working out a set of theoretical elaborations on violence against women suitable to Chinese culture and social background” (the Chinese Project Group on Domestic Violence 2003, section 3/A). To justify its proposed plans, the Project connected itself explicitly to the global campaigns against violence against women since the United Nation’s Decade for Women, and particularly to the Beijing Conference, which, according to the proposal, “made Chinese activists of women’s movement a real part of the international efforts in this respect” (section 3/C). The Project also proclaimed its ultimate vision as one to “create a world free of violence for women” (Domestic Violence Project, Newsletter 1, 2000b), clearly echoing the anti-VAW slogan promoted by the 43rd U.N. Commission on the Status of Women in 199969.

I argue that the ultimate formation of the Domestic Violence Project is primarily predicated on the mobilization of feminist organizations in the NGO sector in response to the issue frame of VAW after the Beijing Conference.70 Therefore, I will conduct a brief examination of feminist activism against gender violence, especially domestic violence, across a group of women’s non-governmental organizations in Beijing. This mobilization was manifested primarily in three forms: social services and advocacy for women victims of gender violence, discursive activism focused on feminist critique, and coalition building among women’s NGOs.


70 By feminist organization, I do not mean to explore or emphasize a common set of organizational features and structures that can be defined as feminist. Rather, I am referring to feminism as an ideology “directed to ending male domination,” according to Jane Mansbridge’s definition (1995, 33).
Women’s movements against gender violence often originate in and also aim to provide social services for women victims (Schechter 1982; Campbell and Martin 2001; Chao 2005). In the anti-rape and battered women’s movement in the U.S., the appearance of community-based social service agencies pioneered the feminist cause and also carved out important space to develop feminist social action agenda (O’Sullivan 1978; Sullivan and Gillum 2001). Such social service organizations operate as sites of radical feminist protest as their overarching goal is to transform the unequal social structure responsible for the oppressive experiences of the individual women they serve (Collins and Whalen 1989; Fried 1994).

Most women’s NGOs I have encountered in China are involved in both social services and public advocacy, which are pursued simultaneously and as two closely intertwined agendas. This double trajectory indicates that social services are strongly linked to social change initiatives among these NGOs. Most of them also address a broad spectrum of women’s issues, ranging from employment and reproduction to rural women’s land rights and female-headed single families. However, The Beijing Conference has clearly resulted in an increase of awareness to the particular issue of gender violence, as the women’s NGOs contributed significant resources and energy to addressing the issue of domestic violence after the Conference. Two prominent examples are The Beijing Maple Women’s Psychological Counseling Center (the Maple Center) and The Center for Women’s Law Studies and Legal Aid Services, Peking University (Women’s Law Center).

The Maple Center, originally known as the Women Research Institute, was one of the first and earliest women’s NGOs in China to address the issue of domestic violence. Whereas before the Beijing Conference, domestic violence was not a particularly striking focus with the Maple Center, after the Conference, domestic violence obviously gained a much prioritized status in Maple’s activist and service interests. Since 1995, the Maple Center has separated out a statistical category for DV in its phone logs to collect the number of hotlines calls reporting DV experiences. Figures show that on average DV-related calls represent only 1% of all the calls, although this percentage has climbed to
3.3% in the more recent year of 2002 (Yang 2003, 225). Though the statistic is low, the Center’s commitment to retain and increase public attention to the issue is high. In addition, it also pays particular attention to the issue of sexual harassment (the Beijing Maple Women’s Psychological Counseling Center, 2005).

In its provision of psychological counseling to women both over the hotline and in face-to-face consultation, Maple has gradually adopted a “gender” perspective after the Beijing Conference. Director Wang Xingjuan, once has pointed out that “the traditional ideology takes the view that in the case of domestic violence the woman is too fierce; she is always jabbering away, and finally the husband becomes anxious and impatient and has no other option than to hit her. In other words, it is the woman’s own fault if her husband beats her. We do not agree with this. Regardless of how much a woman talks, it is wrong for a man to hit her. This is woman’s awareness” (cited in Milwertz 2002, 38). In a recently updated handbook written by the Center for women’s hotline counselors, the Center has explicitly promoted the “gender” perspective, arguing that “only with the assistance of a gender perspective can we truly understand women’s unequal status in the family and recognize domestic violence against women as a manifestation of gender discrimination” (Yang 2003, 226). It also points out that the ultimate goal of using the gender framework is to “realize gender equality” (31). In various research and articles disseminated by the Maple Center, gender stereotyping, victim blaming, patriarchal attitudes, social tolerance for wife abuse, cultural justification of male violence against women, and lack of social and legal support for battered women are presented as the fundamental causes of domestic violence (Wang et al. 1998; Tong 2002; Wang and Wang 2002, 2004). Clearly, the Maple center challenges domestic violence as an issue of gender injustice.

Not merely providing services, the Maple center also utilized the research information obtained through its hotline service to influence policy making. It raised attention to the gendered dynamics of domestic violence by focusing social awareness on the issue of “wife battering” (Wang et al. 1998). In 1996, Wang Xingjuan, founder and director of the Maple Center, wrote up a report and submitted it to the Work Committee on Children and Women under the State Council in 1996, based on its analysis of caller’s
complaints between 1992 and 1995. In the article, Maple questioned the ambiguity of
existent laws on abuse towards family members and raised the issue of wife abuse,
suggesting a clearer definition and practical legal procedures to offer genuine protection
for women (X.J. Wang 1996). As the amendment for the country’s *Marriage Law* was
underway in the late 1990s, Wang again appealed to the government for women’s legal
protection from domestic violence (X.J. Wang 1999b, 2000).

The Women’s Law Center was established by Guo Jianmei, a young woman legal
scholar, right after the Beijing Conference. Guo’s participation in a number of legal
forums during the Beijing process exposed her to the issue of DV. The prominent status
of violence against women and domestic violence and their political saliency as serious
violations of women’s human rights on the international women’s policy agenda both
transformed and raised Guo’s own consciousness. It actually convinced her that domestic
violence is “not merely spousal fight, but a human rights issue” (from interview).

This new consciousness fostered by the Beijing Conference certainly became
reflected in the attention devoted to the issue by the Women’s Law Center after the
Conference. The Women’s Law Center represented dozens of litigations for women
victims of domestic violence abuse. In court, the Law Center has fought for women’s
right to monetary compensation for mental abuse and physical injuries inflicted by their
battering spouses, even though such claims were often rebutted when the marital
relationship was not dissolved. The Center has defended battered women who killed their
abusers relying on the “battered women syndrome”\(^{71}\) theory translated from abroad to
bring the context of woman abuse into legal consideration and to strive for a minimal
sentence for the woman. It has endeavored to hold batterers legally accountable by
persisting and persevering despite the widespread apathy to wife abuse among both the
police and judges. And, it has also been sensitive to the principle of respecting women’s

\(^{71}\) In 1995, an article published in *China Women’s News* introduced the concept of the “battered woman
syndrome” to Chinese audience. The author, Chen Min, was exposed to the theory when she studied law as
a graduate student in Canada. After she came back to China, she became involved in NGO voluntary work.
She is also affiliated with the Domestic Violence Project. When I was doing my fieldwork, she was running
a support group for battered women in Beijing. See Chen 1995, Chen Min Interview 2006.
own will, recognizing that women did not necessarily want to terminate their marriages even though they desperately wanted the abuse to stop (Women’s Law Center 2003).

In the process of offering legal counseling and defense for women victims of domestic violence, Guo and her colleagues were constantly battling dominant social perceptions of DV as a nonsensical, trivial matter. To contest this perception, the Law Center activists argued that domestic violence was rooted in a patriarchal ideology that empowered men and denigrated women. It constituted “an important means to conflict resolution in maintenance of the husband’s authority and power in the family” (Women’s Law Center 2003, 25). They also linked the issue to the negative impact on women’s economic status caused by the market economy, revealing a multi-faceted understanding of the social causes of domestic violence.

Initially, the Women’s Law Center was focused on providing legal aid and representation for individual women. Over the years, the Center came to realize that the individual cases of violations of women’s rights reflected upon women’s status as a collective. Compelled by this understanding, the Center has increasingly shifted its priority from individual legal aid to public advocacy and strategic litigation, aimed to “promote the protection of women’s diverse rights as a group through influence at the level of legislation and policy making” (Women’s Law Center 2003, 33).

A number of other women’s NGOs also provide hotline service and legal counseling, including the Jinlun Family Center,72 the Women Consulting and Development Center opened by the Department of Social Work at Women’s College, and Shanxi Women’s Marriage and Family Theory and Research Association.73 These organizations and initiatives have not only provided valuable services to women victims of domestic violence neglected by social institutions, they also acted as public voices for women in resistance against the power structure that both tolerated and perpetuated the violence against them.

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73 This is a non-Beijing women’s NGO. In May 2001 it opened a special line for domestic violence counseling. See Shanxi Women’s Marriage and Family Theory and Research Association 2006.
**Discursive Activism**

Discursive activism is a common and fundamental strategy of movement mobilization, as culture often constitutes the central sphere of social contestation (Swidler 1995). Numerous studies also show that discourse, such as stories, performed crucial motivational and mobilizing functions in social movements (e.g., Davis 2002). Mansbridge even argues that the women’s movement is an essentially discursive entity more than an aggregation of organizations or individual activists (1995, 27). Katzenstein, in her discussion of women’s discursive activism in the Catholic Church, argues that discursive politics “seeks to reinterpret, reformulate, rethink, and rewrite the norms and practice of society and the state” (1995, 35). Women employ discursive activism not only to challenge patriarchal social beliefs, but also to mobilize those who share the same visions.

In the post-Beijing context, discursive mobilization was also a significant component of women’s non-governmental anti-gender violence activism. The purpose of such discursive politics was to develop a counterdiscourse to the dominant cultural narratives of minimization and victim-blaming. Social service-oriented NGOs, as I have shown in the previous section, are also important sites of such discursive politics. Here, I will concentrate on one non-social service NGO, the Women’s Media Watch Network, as it represents an organization specializing in and focused on discursive activism.

The Women’s Media Watch Network was another women’s NGO mobilized directly by Chinese women’s experiences of participation in the Beijing process. The core Media Watch activists are a group of journalists working for *China Women’s News* (CWN), the official print discourse of the ACWF. This institutional positioning has, indeed, been used strategically by Media Watch’s activists in promotion of their discursive activism against domestic violence. As a result, CWN also becomes an important discursive space in women’s mobilization against gender violence.

Guo Yanqiu, one of the founding activists of Media Watch, suggested that it was indeed her profession, as a long-time chief editor of the “Family and Marriage” column at CWN, that raised both her awareness to domestic violence and nascent feminist
Her exposure to the gender frame at the Beijing conference, in her words, was “a moment of awakening.” She argues that, “It makes me realize what it means to see the world through women’s eyes and what is gender awareness…whereas before we depended on sort of a natural subconscious instinct.” This new “gender” awareness has indeed guided and framed the discursive activism undertaken by both Guo and her CWN colleagues in their double roles as both governmental journalists and non-governmental Media Watch activists.

In 1994, the International Family Year, CWN became one of the first mainstream newspapers to name and discuss DV in public. In 1995, when Guo Yanqiu was the associate director of the “Family and Society” section at the CWN, she set up a hotline at the newspaper and invited Pi Xiaomin\textsuperscript{75} to provide legal counseling to women callers. In parallel, she also opened a new column entitled “the State shall Establish Rule of Law in the Family”\textsuperscript{76} in her own section to provide a public discourse for reflections on the issues women callers relayed to the hotline.\textsuperscript{77} In 1996, Media Watch journalists launched a serial feature report entitled “Declaring War Against Domestic Violence” on CWN, pushing the issue to the forefront of public attention. This media campaign was a response to a horrendous 1996 domestic violence case in which a woman was thrown out of a window from a six-story-high building and killed by her ex-husband. CWN not only reported this incident, but also organized a forum that collected a group of similar cases to expose the severity of woman abuse, collected relevant legal and social information to help women, and invited both readers and experts for their opinions on the causes of and

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\textsuperscript{74} She helped with the publication of the “White Paper on Domestic Violence” in 1991, the groundbreaking article representing the first public denouncement against DV as a harmful practice against women. In particular, she suggested that the 1990 Gu Chen incident provoked profound feelings in her about the issue of domestic violence, making her ask what caused male violence against women in “what was supposed to be the most intimate relationship” between men and women. Information gathered through interview.

\textsuperscript{75} Pi Xiaomin is the author of “White paper on domestic violence.” See Chapter 3, 81-84.

\textsuperscript{76} Guo decided on this name because she wanted the public to fully understand not only that domestic violence was not a private matter, but also that it was deeply connected to the state’s legal system and institutional culture.

\textsuperscript{77} To pay for the phone line and Pi’s labor, Guo raised funds from entrepreneurs and advertisers. The hotline did not last long, as Guo found that the constant pressure to raise money was just beyond her limits. Therefore, the hotline was discontinued due to lack of funds. Guo Y.Q., interview 2006.
strategies to prevent and eliminate DV. In reflection, Media Watch activists pointed out that rather than simply showing sympathy for the victim or lamenting the weak character of the woman, as was often the case in most domestic violence reportage, CWN maintained its focus on exploring the social mechanisms of DV (Guo and Cai 2000, 170).

_Rural Women Knowing All_, another NGO magazine and project run by CWN journalists[^78] is also a significant site of feminist media activism against DV. Song Meiya, a senior journalist of CWN who has joined the DV Project from the beginning and served as the executive chief editor of _Rural Women_ for several years, became aware of domestic violence among rural women because of her work for this magazine. After receiving many letters from rural women readers who wrote poignantly about their victimization by domestic violence, Song commented that she simply could not be blind to the issue, as “it just kept crashing on our office desk every day!” (from interview). Deeply troubled by these letters and empathizing with each woman’s outcries for help, Song opened a serial discussion forum on _Rural Women_ entitled, “When your husband Raises His Fist to Your Face, What are you Supposed to Do?” Featuring different women’s personal stories and intending to help rural women to brainstorm ways to cope with the violence, this forum lasted three years (1996-1998) and was regarded as the first continuous public discussion addressing the issue of DV in the Chinese media (Rong 2006, 189). Later, _Rural Women_ applied for funds from the Ford Foundation to carry out research specifically focused on the issue of DV among rural women. Song conducted the research and based on a sample of 300 questionnaires she distributed across three different rural counties in different regions, she found that more than 40% of the women interviewed admitted to being beaten by their spouse[^79].

[^78]: _Rural Women Knowing All_ is the first magazine published for rural Chinese women readers. Xie Lihua, a senior China Women’s News editor co-founded this magazine with another woman activist in Beijing. Rather than just a magazine, _Rural Women_ is more accurately described as a NGO initiative and has since developed into a parallel club for migrant women workers from rural areas, offering literacy training, practical employment skills and other programs aimed to improve rural women’s status in the larger development scheme (Milwertz 2002, 93-114).

[^79]: Information gathered from interview with Song, but this research was also published, see _Rural Women Knowing All_ magazine research team 1999.
In an article entitled “Eradicating Domestic Violence: How Should the Media Keep the Alarm Ringing?,” two Media Watch journalists pointed out that “while it is the 94 International Family Year that brought the issue to the horizon of Chinese news media, it is the 95 World Conference on Women that awakened China’s media’s gender consciousness, guiding domestic violence reportage from its point of departure to a new height” (Guo and Cai 2000, 168). They found that domestic violence coverage in CWN increased exponentially from 2 in 1992, 9 in 1994, to 66 in 1995 and 75 in 1996. In comparison, the number of reports by CWN adds up to far more than the total number of reports in other surveyed mainstream newspapers over the same years, revealing the pioneering role played by CWN in raising public awareness about DV (169).

This article also represents Media Watch’s gender advocacy in its anti-DV media activism. It constituted a conscious effort by Media Watch to intervene in media representations of DV with a gender perspective. The two authors, Guo Yanqiu and Cai Yiping, argued that the “mass media is not a mere ‘objective’ reflection of reality, it actually participates in the formation of people’s perceptions about the world. The ‘eye’ of the media—the way and standpoint of reportage, has an influence on people’s social cognition” (2000, 169). Based on this argument, they called on media workers, the intended audience of this article, to pay attention to their framing angles on the issue. They collected different reports on the issue from a variety of newspapers and analyzed how they often embodied and supported social attitudes that minimized, normalized and sensationalized woman abuse in the family. Guo and Cai particularly critiqued both the explicit and implicit discourses of “woman blaming” in journalistic reportage. They pointed out that such reportage not only stemmed from and reinforced unjust stereotypes of woman being dependent, subservient and infantile, it also “ignored the main culprit of the source of this conflict—the abusive men who produced domestic violence” (173).

They emphasized that rather than women’s “backward mind,” it was the society’s backwardness in perceptions and interventions that created the major obstacle for women to escape and confront DV against them.

Guo Yanqiu and other Media Network activists also played a significant role in breaking public silence on violence against women in the 1998 riots against ethnic
Chinese communities in Indonesia. She recalled that there was a widespread silence across the mainstream media at the time, probably due to restrictions imposed from the authorities. However, the Media Network took great courage in going against the current and organizing the meeting “Women Intellectuals of the Capital Support Chinese Women Victims in Indonesia” in Beijing, where a group of women convened and condemned the sexual violence against diasporic Chinese women in the ethnic riots. Guo revealed that their organizing was motivated by the belief that “we should make our voice heard in the media. We have the obligation to communicate our discursive support for our own sisters to the public. It was a gesture of humanitarian spirit from us. Because when we were in movement, many international women’s groups supported us, so we also should respond to them as well.” Their organizing not only openly challenged the state silence about the issue as well as its silencing of media discussions of VAW in the Indonesia mayhem, it also referred its motivation to the spirit of sisterhood promoted by the global women’s campaigns at the Beijing Conference and intended itself as an expression of gender solidarity for their Chinese sisters in Indonesia.

Though Media Network is not the only women’s NGO involved in discursive activism, it is one of the few pursuing conscientiously and deliberately an essentially discursive politics. This strategy certainly has to do with the professional identity of Media Network, but it also indicates the importance of discourse as a terrain of power. Examined within the larger context of women’s mounting protest against gender violence in the NGO sector, China Women’s News and its related discourses have mobilized crucial discursive resources.

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80 In 1998, economic crisis triggered several popular protests across a number of areas of Indonesia. Between May 14 and 15, 1998, the riots escalated into a pogrom of looting, arson and sexual violence targeting ethnic Chinese as the scapegoat for the economic problems experienced by Indonesians. It was also alleged that during the riots many ethnic Chinese women were raped. Human Rights Watch reported more than 100 cases of rape of Chinese women between May 13 and 15 in the Jakarta riots. See Human Rights Watch.

81 Also see Cai et al. 2001, 222-223.
Coalition Building

In 2000, Beijing +5, held by the United Nations to appraise and review the global implementation of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and progress of women’s interests, provided a significant momentum for coalitional efforts among women’s NGOs in Beijing.\(^\text{82}\)

Between October 13-15, the Women’s Law Center, the Department of Law of China Women’s College and the Professional Committee on Women’s Health and Development of the China Psychological Health Association\(^\text{83}\) organized a three-day conference to discuss the subject of domestic violence prevention and intervention. It invited numerous professionals, scholars, lawyers, judges and ACWF cadres from the nation in the hopes to stimulate action (Rong 2006, 193). Though this collaboration was not to form coalition per se, it did suggest mounting attempts at collective efforts spearheaded by women’s NGO.

At the same time, several women’s NGOs also formed an ad-hoc alliance, named the Working Group against Domestic Violence, to participate in the Beijing +5 process as a NGO representative on the Chinese side. Composed mostly of women’s NGOs in Beijing,\(^\text{84}\) the ad-hoc group completed a review of both governmental and non-governmental actions taken against DV in China after the Beijing Conference so as to reflect on the implementation status of the Beijing Platform in the specific area of VAW.\(^\text{85}\) The review was used as a platform of dialogue with the state, as the group proposed a list of suggestions to the government aimed to enhance the institutional initiatives against domestic violence.

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\(^{82}\) It was held as a special session by the UN in 2000 and the formal title was “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century.” See United Nations 2001.

\(^{83}\) This is a non-governmental group focused on promoting women’s health. The group was established in 1993.

\(^{84}\) The Working Group was made up of the Maple Center, the Women’s Law Center, The Counseling and Developing Center at China Women’s College, and Shanxi Women’s Marriage and Family Theory and Research Association, the only non-Beijing organization.

\(^{85}\) They compiled their reviews into a brochure and disseminated the information at the meeting. See China Working Group of (sic) Domestic Violence, 2000. The brochure was printed in both English and Chinese.
This coalition building process can be described as resource mobilization for women’s anti-domestic violence activism. The formation of the anti-domestic violence ad-hoc was directly driven by the goal shared by a number of concerned women’s NGOs to focus their resources on the addressing of the issue in the high-profile policy arena of U.N. conference. As a result of this coalition, albeit a temporary one, significant organizational, intellectual, research and human resources were mobilized to highlight domestic violence as a critical issue area to Chinese women at Beijing +5.

The Beijing+ 5 review process provided a focal point for the coalition of different women’s NGOs devoted to the elimination of domestic violence through their activism. Though this coalition was formed for the contingent purpose of Beijing +5, it nonetheless constituted an important step for women’s mobilization against domestic violence in Beijing, as it consisted of mostly Beijing-based NGOs. Later, it was partially through this momentum and ad-hoc structure of the Working Group that the Domestic Violence Project was able to mobilize into existence.

**International Donors and the Mobilization for the Domestic Violence Project**

In this section, I will discuss the specific mobilization process for the Domestic Violence Project. I argue that international donor agencies, particularly the Ford Foundation, played an active and critical role in this process. The Foundation not only provided the economic resources that enabled the formation of the DV Project, it also, to a considerable degree, mobilized this process with its funding initiatives promoting a remarkable focus on the issue of violence against women and especially of domestic violence among local women’s NGOs.

**International Money and Domestic NGO**

The status of the DV Project as a grant-based program co-funded by the Ford Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Oxfam Novib and the Norwegian Center for Human Rights at the University of Oslo (NCHR), points to the economic power of the international aid organizations as an indispensable resource to the formation of this Project. It is these foreign donor agencies that
underwrite the DV Project’s fundamental economic and organizational viability, making international funding a particularly critical and indispensable resource to be examined and discussed.

To understand the importance of the resource of foreign funding to the DV Project, one first has to grasp the economic resource structure of most Chinese NGOs. One of Chinese NGOs’ outstanding features of is their extreme, if not exclusive, economic dependence on foreign donors, especially institutional ones. One wall in the central space of the Maple Center’s office was studded with numerous paper printouts of the different names of donors as a gesture of grateful acknowledgment. The donors are certainly a diverse group, ranging from foreign embassies, such as the Embassy of the United States and Australian Embassy, to philanthropic foundations, such as the Ford Foundation and the Turner Foundation, to multilateral agencies, such as U.N.DP and International Labor Organization, and to both Northern and Southern NGOs, such as the American Club and the Vietnam and South Korean Women’s Delegation. Though there are some domestic donors, most of the donors are based in the global North, reflecting a profound economic difference between the North and the South. This wall visually maps out the economic structure of all the women’s NGOs I interviewed in my fieldwork, since all of them operate predominantly on project-based grants given by international donors.

A combination of factors creates this economic structure. First, domestic philanthropic organizations are largely a blank field in China. There is not only a lack of philanthropic tradition in general, there is also a lack of cultural acceptance of the concept of charity and of supportive legal infrastructure to encourage philanthropic donations (Y.Zhang 1996). Second, state funding for NGOs are extremely limited, since the civil society sector is still viewed with strong suspicion by the state (Saich 2004). Saich points out, “although keen to mobilize private resources, they (senior CCP leaders) prefer that the sector be developed within a highly restrictive legislative and organizational framework that ensures CCP and state control” (17). From 1996 to 2002, there was actually an 18% drop of registered “social organizations” due to more restrictive registration requirements and an extensive review in the late 1990s that led to
the closing of many organizations (17). The precarious political status of civil society NGOs renders the state almost an impossible economic resource for them.

The third factor is that, while the Chinese state tries to contain the NGO sector within a marginal space, the international aid industry is funding the growth of the civil society in China effusively. Foreign assistance from Western countries to non-Western or the so-called Third World nations is primarily an economic investment in the promotion of Western democratic values (Carothers 1999; Carothers and Ottaway 2000; Henderson 2003). Sundstrom’s study of international aid to the NGO sector in post-communist Russia highlights the strikingly unanimous focus on NGO advocacy shared by different donor as an aid strategy to boost civil society (2006, 33). Moore (2003) opines that, in the instance of U.S. democratic assistance to foreign countries, there is strong indication that civil society forces are perceived as “as a powerful vehicle for democratization by exerting pressure against the state from below,” largely because of the Poland example (147).

The United States, as a major Western power, continues to be the largest contributor of assistance to civil society (Sundstrom 2006, 36). From 1999 to 2003, the U.S. government has provided more than $39 million in aid money to strengthen democracy in China and the amount increased significantly over the years (United States General Accounting Office 2004, 2). Moore’s (2003) analysis of the U.S. China policy in the area of human rights and democracy advocacy shows that since the Clinton administration, the U.S. has gradually shifted from a top-down to a bottom up strategy in China assistance. Moreover, this approach is marked by increasing involvement of many U.S. NGOs, such as the Ford Foundation, to influence change from the bottom. The Ford Foundation obviously shares the vision with its government, as its Chinese program lists civil society as one of its main program areas. The program states explicitly that its grant-making activities for “civil society” in China are aimed at “helping China’s experts and specialists in Beijing and elsewhere develop a sound regulatory framework for civil society – one that enables civil society organizations to play the role that they should, helps increase public understanding and confidence, and provides a solid basis for healthy growth” (Ford Foundation China Program website).
The missions of other DV Project donors, including SIDA, Oxfam Novib and NCHR, all indicate a manifest interest in promoting democratic values through either human rights and/or civil society projects in China. SIDA, a government development agency, explains that “the main aim of Sweden’s development cooperation with China is to promote the influx of new ideas and speed up development in the fields of human rights, equality, justice, democratisation and environmental protection” (SIDA website). Since SIDA has a strong tradition of channeling its resources to NGOs, its aid agenda to China reveals a similar interest as that of the U.S. in promoting democratic values through the civil society sector. Both Oxfam Novib\textsuperscript{86} and NCHR\textsuperscript{87} are focused on social justice and human rights. One study on the interactions between aid industry and civil society projects in several developing countries finds that, though the amount of money allocated to promote civil society organizations usually just occupies a minuscule percentage of the aid industry, nevertheless, all donors surveyed are invested in the idea of strengthening civil society as a way both to facilitate development and to advance democratic causes (Van Rooy 1998).

Within such a local and global context, many Chinese NGOs can only turn to international donors for economic support and most of foreign donors concentrate in Beijing, China’s capital. The Ford Foundation, whose China Program Office is located in Beijing, has provided considerably funding for numerous local women’s NGOs, in the form of seed money, project grants, travel grants, fellowships, and donated subscriptions among others. As one of the earliest foreign foundations established in China, the Ford Foundation has developed a congenial and partner-like relationship with many women’s NGOs in Beijing. This relationship, largely an outcome of the Foundation’s economic patronage of the Chinese NGOs, also yields extra-economic results, the most important of which is the Foundation’s significant ability to shape the political interests and agenda of the local activists through its funding activities.

\textsuperscript{86} Oxfam Novib is a member of Oxfam International, an international NGO committed to finding solutions to poverty and other social justice issues. See Oxfam Novib website.

\textsuperscript{87} NCHR is a Norwegian human rights NGO focused on national and international human rights research, education and development. See NCHR website.
International Aid and the Issue of Violence Against Women

Many international donors in China have funded women’s NGOs generously to address the issue of gender violence, especially domestic violence. The prioritized status of VAW as a funding category with international donor agencies, to a large extent, testifies to the impact of the transnational women’s human rights movement against violence against women. The success of the transnational women’s movement’s framing of VAW as a critical global women’s human rights concern resulted in the mobilization of significant funding resources from many donor agencies to the issue. Numerous U.N. specialized agencies, such as the United nations development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), have doled out funds for this issue as a commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Platform, in which VAW was outlined as one of 12 areas of critical concern (United Nations 2001, 88-91). At the same time, philanthropic foundation is also a significant donor in funding for VAW, especially at the civil society level. The U.S. Ford Foundation is a particularly remarkable player in this field.

In 1991, the Women’s Program Forum of the Ford Foundation sponsored a daylong international seminar in New York, entitled “Violence Against Women: Addressing a Global Problem.” The seminar featured a diverse group of donors, researchers and activists sharing the consensus that VAW was a harmful practice with global dimension. The featured speakers included several prominent feminist figures leading both the transnational and domestic anti-violence movement in the U.S., such as Charlotte Bunch, Susan Schechter and Elizabeth Schneider (Ford Foundation 1992). This seminar not only indicated Ford Foundation’s acknowledgement of VAW as an important women’s issue, it also highlighted the Foundation’s political alliance with feminist movements. Susan Hartman actually argues that the Ford Foundation “constituted an important ally to feminists” since the second-wave women’s movements in the U.S. (1998, 135). It not only provided substantial economic contributions to feminist projects, it was also politically committed to advancing many mainstream feminist goals.

In Beijing, the Ford Foundation started to fund women’s “domestic violence” research and activism when the issue was hardly out of closet in China. In the early 1990s,
it funded a Beijing women’s NGO to set up a women’s domestic violence shelter, when the local activists were hardly equipped with adequate knowledge or any know-how skills. It never really took off, due to a combination of reasons. The most important reasons included rejections by a number of state institutions whose sponsorship was sought by project activists, the activists’ lack of experience in running a shelter, and the failure to give substantial help to women victims given the absence of policy infrastructure to support such service (Milwertz 2002, 64-65). The premature nature of this “shelter” initiative in China suggests that it was more an outcome of the Foundation’s presumptions, due to the prevailing model of domestic violence shelters in the West, than it was a product of the local activists’ own interests and experiments. Another activist reveals that after the Beijing Conference, some European donors also offered to fund shelters. As someone who has participated in the writing of the proposal, she points out that since a shelter was of little viability, that project was aborted as well (Liu interview 2006).

Another more common type of funding activity with regard to the issue of domestic violence is what I would call the “international pedagogical trips,” where Chinese women’s NGOs, activists or scholars were sent to Western countries to learn about the “advanced” model of DV legislation, interventions and outreach services. Implicit in the design of such exposure tours, I would argue, is the ethnocentric

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88 See Milwertz 2002, 64-65. The Ford Foundation granted $10,000 to the Jinglun Family Center, an NGO started by a woman researcher with a focus on counseling services, to fund a domestic violence shelter project. Several China Women’s College professors were involved as well. Zhu Dongwu, now a Domestic Violence Project activist, recalled that “no one really knew anything about what a shelter was about at that time!” (interview).

89 For example, Pi Xiaomin, the ACWF lawyer who wrote the “White Paper on Domestic Violence” in 1991, began to receive invitations from the U.S. foundations to visit their country in the 1990s. When she finally traveled to the U.S., it was on such an exposure tour where she went to 7 states she herself selected and met with a spectrum of actors involved in DV intervention, which included women’s NGOs, prisons, shelters, churches and law enforcement (Pi, telephone interview 2006). Both the Maple Center and the Women’s Law Center also have been funded for similar trips. Wang Xingjuan, the director of the Maple Center, reported that she has been funded for such trips to the U.S. as early as 1992 (interview). Guo Jianmei, the director of the Women’s Law Center, has been exposed to DV intervention in Canada, the U.S. and Britain during her international travels. In the late 1990s, the Cultural Committee of the English Embassy funded her on two major trips to England to learn about the specific issue of DV (interview). Most respondents who have traveled on such trips are extremely impressed by the extent of institutionalization of DV intervention in the Western countries.
perception of China’s lack of DV awareness, policy and interventional agencies as a sign of “otherness” and “backwardness.” The almost excessive eagerness of the developing nations to “teach” Chinese women NGOs and activists about their domestic violence “management skills,” channeled through funding initiatives, implies domestic violence policy as a symbolic difference that distinguishes the “advanced” model of development from the backward model. To address this area of difference essentially becomes a way to establish that difference as well, especially since this perception of China’s “lack” sometimes also exists side by side with many Western nations’ sense of “achievement.”

Though the international donors’ economic support for Chinese women activists’ engagement with the issue of VAW reflects and reinforces an imperialist world view, it has the effect of strengthening local activists’ allegiance to the transnational feminist cause against VAW in the post-Beijing context. In particular, the cumulative experience of exposure to social policy and interventions against DV in other countries seems to have inculcated a sense of agency in local activists. Gamson (1992) points out that a frame of agency manifests as a consciousness that perceives the status quo as alterable through means of collective action. He argues that a frame of agency “empower[s] people by defining them as potential agents of their own history, they suggest not merely that something can be done but that ‘we’ can do something” (1992, 7). One might even say that the pedagogical tours are organized by the international donors for motivational purposes, as what local activists are exposed to on such journeys is a formula of action that is meant for adoption and replication by these activists.

*Ford Foundation and the Domestic Violence Project*

The Domestic Violence Project initiative was mobilized precisely through such an international pedagogical trip organized by the Ford Foundation. In the late 1990s, the Ford Foundation selected six women activists in Beijing and funded them to attend a

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*One DV Project activist stated that at an international conference on violence she attended in the U.S., she was told by both European and U.S. scholars that spousal violence has been “resolved” in their countries. She recalled this “discovery” with a sense of enormous humiliation, as it clearly suggested to her that “China is lagging far far behind” in comparison with the developing nations. See Xia Y.L in appendix B.*
regional conference on violence against women in India. This group included several women’s NGO activists, such as Director Wang of the Maple Center, Ge Youli,91 a East Meets West Translation group member, and Chen Mingxia,92 a renowned legal scholar who was involved in grassroots legal aid programs focused on assisting women. All these women and NGOs have received major funding from the Ford Foundation to support their previous activism and were friends with the Foundation. The Foundation also handpicked each candidate for this trip based on its knowledge of these women’s abilities and activist interests. Zhang Lelun, an ex-program officer at the Ford Foundation who organized the trip suggested that they were looking for the right “people” for an anti-gender violence program they wanted to fund.

Woman program officers’ advocacy in the Ford Foundation with regard to the issue of VAW played a key role in setting the ultimate Domestic Violence Project in motion. Zhang, the Ford Foundation’s ex-program officer and a diasporic Hong Kong Chinese woman working and living in the U.S., revealed that to fund a special program focused on addressing the issue of gender violence was not an idea directed from the top executive leadership within the Ford Foundation. Indeed, it was her and her American colleague’s idea. Both were stationed as program officers in Beijing at that time, Zhang working in the area of “law and rights” and her colleague on “sexuality and reproductive health.” When I asked her why the issue of “domestic violence,” she replied, “I think it is just natural, isn’t it? This is a common problem that cuts across every society, and I know that in Europe, the U.S. and Canada….it is a prevalent concern among women, a ‘hot’ issue, therefore concerned experts, activists and government programs have emerged in many countries sooner or later…you just cannot not engage it.” Though Zhang contended that it was just “natural” for her and her colleague to have an interest in funding women’s activism in this area, their interest can be largely attributed to the influence of the transnational feminist campaigns, which created the global consensus on VAW as a significant concern to women.

91 See Chapter 4, 116-117.
92 Chen is a legal scholar of the Law Institute, China Academy of Social Sciences. Since 1993, she has been conducting research on women’s rights in China and also helped to establish a grassroots legal aid program in Qianxi County, Hebei Province. See Chen 1999.
Also, her and her colleague’s shared investment in a DV initiative underscored their sophisticated understanding of the issue as a multifaceted problem. Their vision was to mobilize an interdisciplinary project in Beijing to address the issue, which they knew existed in China. At the same time, they also intended to strengthen NGO’s capacity building and public governance through such an agenda. Zhang stated that “speaking from the perspective of the Ford Foundation…one of the goals in the making of such a project was to promote equality for women. In addition, we also wanted to help more people to strengthen law and governance….therefore this was an issue about the implementation and exercise of citizen rights.”

As a matter of fact, there was no already staked-out money for the DV Project. Zhang and her colleague not only had to apply to their own agency for funds for this initiative, they also mobilized other international donor agencies into cooperation through personal relations and diplomatic negotiations. One woman who worked for the Ford Foundation but later joined the NCHR brought the latter organization to the donor’s table. Zhang and her colleague capitalized on their own personal relations with other officers and the Ford Foundation’s diplomatic relations with other international agencies to raise funds. Zhang stressed that since this project involved different donor agencies, one of which was a governmental development agency (SIDA), it was not an easy job to reconcile different interests or to coordinate procedures of inside grant applications among this diverse group of donors. However, the fact that different donors collaborated in spite of the technical difficulties not only attested to the two Ford Foundation women program officers’ firm commitment to help build the DV Project, it also indirectly proved the popularity of “violence against women ” as a funding category among international donors. One could argue that international resource mobilization among the international donors, with the Ford Foundation as the coordinator, was an integral process to the formation of the DV Project. The extraordinary efforts devoted by the Ford Foundation and the other donor agencies to the realization of an anti-domestic violence agenda in Beijing have guaranteed the DV Project the most fundamental resource, money.

From the perspectives of local activists, the internal process of resource mobilization among the donors was not well known. However, to some of the “insiders”
with close relationships to the Foundation, its funding interest in a collective NGO-initiative in the area of VAW was apparently suggested to them. Ge Youli, who acted as the translator on this trip, recalled that Ford’s program officers had a talk with her before the trip to expose her to their larger agenda. She interpreted this conversation as a suggestion that “you should do something.” Ge became involved in women’s NGO activism since the Beijing Conference through the East Meets West Translation Group (EMW). Her fluency in English obtained her frequent opportunities to travel abroad as a translator for non-English speaking women’s NGO activists on various trips funded by the donors. Her participation in EMW and her later professional career at the U.N.DP also gained her many personal and institutional relationships with the major international donors in Beijing, especially the Ford Foundation, since one of the founders of the EMW later became a program officer at the Foundation (Ge and Jolly 2001). Describing herself as a long-term “beneficiary” of the funding and traveling opportunities granted by the international donors, she revealed that the hint from the Ford Foundation really jolted a sense of “guilt” and “obligation” in her heart. She felt that after so many years of “taking,” it was time to give something back. Therefore, she stated that she went on the trip with a “task” in her mind, as it seemed to her that the Foundation was staking its hopes for “something” to happen in the area of women’s anti-violence activism on this specific group of people selected for the trip.

It is this sense of “having to do something” that motivated Ge’s adoption of the Ford Foundation’s agenda and made her a key figure in the mobilization of the DV Project. Once committed to the idea, she began to look consciously for a partner in the group, someone who not only shared her commitment but one who could also be counted on as a leader. Thus, she found Chen Mingxia, a women’s rights legal scholar. As a scholar of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Cheng was active in NGO activism but not associated with any particular NGO. At the Beijing Conference, she participated in the NGO forum and spoke about the issue of domestic violence against women in China. As a human rights legal scholar, Chen firmly believed that violence against women was a serious violation of women’s human rights. Recalling her experience on this particular trip, she stated:
“at that conference in India, although we accommodated at a palace...what we learned was about women’s subordination and oppression, about the grave violations of women’s human rights. Therefore, we felt that China faced the same problem as the rest of the world....we always speak of protecting women’s rights and interests, but how to pay some genuine attention to address these 12 areas of critical concerns [is the issue]. There has not been any focused attempts to address the issue of violence against women yet, and that’s why we thought about doing something about this subject.”

As Ge and Chen shared a room on the trip, they engaged in numerous discussions about the possibility of mobilizing a DV Project. Thus, a vague sense of “having to do something” merged into a consensus of “doing something” between at least Ge and Chen.

After the trip, Ge conveyed the funding interest to a wider group of women’s NGOs with which she was familiar, particularly at a 1999 domestic violence conference held at the Women’s Law Center by the ad-hoc Working Group against Domestic Violence before Beijing +5. This meeting was one of the first on-the-table initiatives in a series of formal and informal, large and small meeting-discussions that followed, which finally led to the formation of the DV Project. What is remarkable is that by the late 1990s, both women’s NGOs and their international donors seemed to have converged in their perceptions about the need for a collective initiative committed exclusively to the issue of domestic violence. Guo Jianmei, director of the Women’s Law Center, stated that she initiated this conference right after she came back from a “domestic violence” exposure tour from abroad. Though she did not yet know about the Ford Foundation’s funding agenda, she organized this conference, along with other NGOs on the ad-hoc Working Group, exactly to propose and promote collaborative efforts among local women’s NGOs and activists to address the issue. She pointed out that she broached the idea of developing a “network” at the conference, which she defined as “coordination and co-operation” among a variety of “anti-domestic violence organs and organizations,” including women’s NGOs, the ACWF, the police, the criminal justice system, the medical facilities, shelters, lawyers and injury appraisal centers in the Chinese context.

93 Guo J.M, interview. The conference was also mentioned in Rong 2006, 193.
She derived this idea from the multi-agency collaborative model of domestic violence intervention she and many other NGOs observed in other countries.

Starting from this meeting, women’s NGOs, activists and scholars in Beijing began a heated and prolonged series of discussions about the possibility of inter-organizational collaboration on the issue of domestic violence, through which a wider consensus was mobilized. However, in this process, activists like Ge Youli and Chen Mingxia who were more closely related to the Ford Foundation’s agenda through the India trip, became conscientious in their efforts to advance the idea. In the process, Chen also emerged to be a leading coordinator of this initiative. After numerous rounds of discussions and negotiations in conferences, at meetings, and over the phone among a diverse groups of activists associated with different NGOs in Beijing, the majority of whom were journalists, scholars and researchers, a meta-project developed. Different ideas became a collection of project proposals to the donors. As Chen was focused on drafting and revising the proposals, Ge helped translate these proposals into English and communicated with the donors. The project was named “Domestic violence in China—research, intervention and prevention.”

My analysis shows that the formation of the DV Project was dependent on a range of organizational, discursive, human, and economic resources. At the same time, it also indicates that the commitment of economic resources by the donors was a particularly significant facilitator and catalyst for the specific mobilization of the DV Project, which related directly to the Ford Foundation and other Western donor agencies’ funding initiatives. This mobilization process between the Beijing women’s organizations and the international funding agencies operated largely within what Bagic describes as the “donor-recipient” paradigm, which encompasses both the economic and social interrelations between the two sectors. Bagic suggests that though the categories “donors” and “recipients” often invoke connotations of donors as the “givers” of “financial or some other kind of support” and recipients as the “takers” who are only “using ‘donor” resources,” the interrelations between the two are far more complex (2006, 142). She points out that the donor-recipient paradigm, rather than a purely economic one, is situated within a web of social relations, such as those between the local and the global,
the margin and the center, the linguistically and culturally proficient and those who are not. My findings support her argument, but I want to point out in particular that the economic structure of the donor-recipient relations generates significant extra-economic meanings. Indeed, this economic power structure both implies and facilitates social relations. The donor’s act of giving is embedded within a sense of expectation that the one who takes can be solicited to give back one day. On the other hand, the recipient’s act of receiving from the donor fosters a sense of accountability to the one who gives and obligates the recipient, in a quite voluntary way, towards giving rather than just taking. Though this dynamic is closely tied to the economic relationship between the donors and recipients, it cannot be reduced to an economic relationship only. Instead, we should perceive the donor-recipient interrelation as a dialectical and ongoing-process that is constantly structured through reciprocal expectations of “giving” and “taking” from both the donors and recipients.

To apply this view to the mobilization process of the DV Project is to be aware that though the international donors played a definite role in influencing the formation of the Project, they did not impose the agenda. Rather, through miscellaneous funding initiatives for local activists to learn about domestic violence interventions abroad, they have gradually and effectively moved local activists toward consensus on taking necessary and immediate actions against the issue of VAW.

Collective Identity, Organized Interest and Local Activists’ Vocabularies of Motives for Participation

While resource mobilization is critical to our understanding of the DV Project’s founding process, to regard the Project only and entirely as a result of resource availability disregards the subjective dimensions of the mobilization. The presence of resources alone would not have translated automatically into the DV Project; perceptions also mattered. It takes human interpretation to construct resources into opportunities. In other words, the participants have to perceive the DV Project as a sensible, legitimate and even desirable way of using the available resources. How participants make sense of their action is at least as important as how much of a resource they have recruited. Without
people’s willingness to take action with the resource for the designated purpose, a resource will remain inert and inactive.

The human perception component is very important in the context of the DV Project’s mobilization given that gender violence was still an unconventional and therefore controversial issue at the time. During the project’s mobilization process, the salience of the issue of VAW to Chinese women’s movements was a major source of tension among local activists. Some local activists and scholars opposed to developing a project focused specifically on the issue, especially since the suggested amount of investment by the international donors was perceived as a threat to funding resources for other women’s issues. These local activists opposed DV by contending that other problems, such as poverty, education and employment, needed more critical intervention than “violence against women.” Though some opponents also participated in the initial mobilization for the DV Project and possibly contributed their ideas as well, many withdrew their support and participation eventually. In this respect, it could be said that the transnational feminist frame of “violence against women” unwittingly inflicted a divisive effect on local women’s activism.

This phenomenon was not unique to China. In the context of the Russian women’s movement, Hemment (2004) observed similar questioning by local activists when Western aid agencies prioritized the issue of VAW on their funding agendas and encouraged the development of crisis centers across Russia. She argues that the ubiquity of the issue in Russia testified primarily to the political influence of transnational feminist campaigns and the work of international donor agencies. Her critique is that the frame of VAW succeeds partially through obscuring local perception of needs. However, I would argue that her discussion falsely invokes local needs as a largely unified and homogenous entity, as she suggests that the cleavage of perceptions about what constitutes women’s needs is a line dividing local activists and international donors.

What I find in my research is that local perceptions of needs are not unified. The tension among local activists during the mobilization process for the DV Project exposes the limitations of the dichotomy that pits local “needs” and “interests” against global ones.

94 Information gathered from interviews with B.J. Chen, Y.Q. Guo, H.T. Li. and Q. Zhang.
More significantly, participant activists and NGOs in the DV Project articulated multiple perceptions of “local” needs and interests. They cited a diverse range of reasons for participating in the DV Project. In the following, I will examine these reasons as “vocabularies of motive” to highlight the DV Project as an outcome of collective identity and organized interest as much as it was a product of an aggregation of resources. This is to further my argument that, despite the significant influence of global actors in the mobilization process for the DV Project, it has to be recognized as an expression of local agency as well. But first of all, I would like to explain some relevant concepts.

Collective identity is a concept developed largely to address the inadequacy of the resource mobilization theory, which implies a strongly instrumental and rationalistic premise about social action.\(^9^5\) To the so-called new social movement theorists\(^9^6\) whose work popularized the concept of collective identity, collective action is an interactive and constructivist process involving both structural opportunities and decision making by human agents. Collective identity explains how individual actors come to define themselves as members of a collective in pursuit of a common goal and as such, provides a key concept for understanding “the means by which structural inequality becomes subjectively experienced discontent” (Taylor and Whittier 1995, 172). Mellucci (1995), a major theorist in this field argues that collective action needs to be understood as “purposive orientation” organized by individuals acting collectively in negotiation with a range of opportunities and constraints, instead of an automatic effect that can be readily located in the actors’ structural position or as the simple expression of pre-existent values and beliefs. He defines collective identity as “an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place” (1995, 44). What the concept of collective identity argues is that social movement formation is also result of the subjective interpretation by the involved social actors, rather than of structural opportunities or resources alone.


\(^{96}\) See Nash 2000, 131-144 for a review of the development of the so-called new social movement theories.
Related to the concept of collective identity is the idea of “organized interest.” To recuperate the much critiqued and abandoned concept of “interests” for analysis of women’s political organizing, Jill Vickers (2006) argues that we have to distinguish women as an essentialist ontology from women as a political category. She points out that while treating women as a universal category of being invokes a problematically universalizing discourse of interests, viewing women as a political construct instead, especially in context of political activism, allows one to recognize “interests” as a product of strategic organization. She argues that “women as an organized interest involves some women constructing a solidarity around specific issue or issues by foregrounding shared interests, goals or identity. If women aggregate their issues and goals within a coalition, or more permanently in an organization, and articulate their projects in the name of women, they may become an organized interest” (7). I invoke this concept to dispute prevalent perceptions of interests as a naturalized entity. To view interest as an outcome of political organization is to refuse to impute interests to any pre-fixed identity or social locations such as the local/global paradigm. The concept also suggests “interests” as an important product of collective identity building and negotiation.

Finally, I propose that the reasons revealed by the participant activists’ and NGOs’ joining the DV project should be looked at as “vocabularies of motive.” John Mills (1940) proposed this concept to bring attention to the social processes structuring the language of motives. He points out that though human agents always attribute motives to themselves, motives do not originate in or belong as fixed property to any individual, rather, they manifest a social process through which an interpretation of conduct is processed and achieved. He particularly points out that “when an agent vocalizes or imputes motives, he is not trying to describe his experienced social action. He is not merely stating ‘reasons.’ He is influencing others—and himself. Often he is finding new ‘reasons’ which will mediate action. Thus, we need not treat an action as discrepant from ‘its’ verbalization, for in many cases, the verbalization is a new act” (907). This concept suggests that, articulated in the context of a social movement, motives could be understood as verbalization of collective identity and organized interest. Therefore, to explore activists’ avowed motives for participating in the DV Project.
provides an important means to understand the Project as a collective and organized initiative. The diverse reasons cited by individuals should not be examined as a constellation of individual interpretations. Rather, they are “socially situated clusters of motive” (Mills 1940, 913), and indicate linguistic traces of the collective subjective process of interpretation undertaken by local agents in the building of the DV Project.

Why Domestic Violence?

During the mobilization process of the DV project, debates arose as to whether to focus on “violence against women” or “domestic violence.” Though it is unclear how the participants had arrived at the consensus to focus on the issue of domestic violence alone, many activists believe that it was a strategic choice based on practical assessment of the political environment and risks. “Domestic violence” is accepted as an appropriate and wise choice, because its ostensible focus on the domestic sphere makes it less politically sensitive and therefore easy to gain social and political approval. One activist quite bluntly points out that the Project settles on the issue of domestic violence “because it does not involve politics, it does not touch the state, it is about a problem between men and women. Once you touch state issues, or economic and development issues, let me say, such as employment, we always encounter enormous difficulties….domestic violence is just a family issue….it does not impact either state interests, or state’s economic interests, or its political interest…..In our work, once you are talking about state, politics and economics, we’re finished, it’s so difficult!” (DVN activist A interview)

In other words, choosing DV rather than VAW reveals a deliberate strategy of the women’s NGOs and activists in Beijing to “depoliticize” and “privatize” the issue as a strategic approach to gain political support and legitimacy for women’s anti-gender violence activism.

This reveals that women’s non-governmental organizing in China, in order to survive and continue in an institutional context that still places civil society organization under considerable surveillance, has cultivated a strategy of “depoliticization”. Rather than taking such discourses at face value, one has to be aware of the political context in which it is situated. It is also important to remember that many women’s NGOs are
indeed addressing a variety of issues facing women caused by unequal state policies in political and economic spheres. Rather than avoiding politics, they are actively involved in a resistance politics. The above statement does not mean that this woman activist indeed views domestic violence as just a “domestic” or “private matter”. On the contrary, the goal to challenge such perceptions has motivated the DV Project in the first place. To focus on “domestic” violence is possibly perceived as preempting of the political stakes that might be involved in agitating against the “public” forms of VAW. However, it also reveals a prevalent perception among Chinese women activists of “politics” as referencing by default “state politics.” To avoid offending and openly challenging the state, “depoliticization” is deployed as a strategy, quite ironically, for political mobilization. The decision to focus on domestic violence, in spite of the fact that all the participating NGOs address a broad range of gender violence through their activism, shows exactly this strategic consciousness.

**Research Interest**

Many scholar activists in the DV Project cited the research value of “domestic violence” as a sociological and legal topic significantly motivating their participation in the Project. Zhu Xiaoqin, a legal scholar of international laws and director of the organization’s documentation center, points out that she is attracted to the Project because domestic violence is a “new field” that offers many legal angles to explore. “Because it is new, no one has done it before, that’s why my interest is piqued.” Cheng Mingxia, a human rights scholar, reveals the goal of the Project conforms to her own ideal as a legal scholar, which is to “make law serve reality, and to integrate theory and practice in legal research.” Jiao Yang, a social work professor at the China Women’s College, though hesitant at first, nevertheless decided to join the Project because of its connection to her own profession. To her, the Project is “a field of practice” for social work. She feels that the participation benefits both her scholarship and teaching, as “the practice can supplement my teaching and the teaching can also help me to reflect on my practice.” Li Hongtao, chair of the Social Work department, professes that “I never enjoy doing pure academic research alone at school too much, I mean those text-based research.
I prefer doing practical things. Therefore, when I become the Chair, I made a lot of efforts to integrate practical experience into classroom teaching.” To her, the Project offers such an integrative approach to research.

The issue of domestic violence attracts many research scholars as a new research area and many also perceive their participation in the DV Project as an enhancement to their academic career. In addition, since “domestic violence” concerns a social justice issue, it also gives a sense of “action” and “purposefulness,” which are regarded as a good complement and change from the traditional “textbook” approach. Professional benefits and rewards, such as new research topics, potential publications, improved knowledge and hands-on experience, figure as an important incentive for participation among most of the scholar activists.

**Moral/Principled Interest: Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Issue**

Among the key DV Project activists I interviewed, there is a common perception of domestic violence as a serious violation of women’s human rights. The rights frame inculcates a sense of injustice and, therefore, to oppose the issue becomes a matter of right and wrong. It provides a powerful counter-rhetoric and motivation for the participants especially when they face criticism accusing them of neglecting women’s more practical “needs.” Indeed, the DV Project activists insist that to protect women’s human rights is to protect their most basic and fundamental needs as a human being, such as women’s needs to live a life free from both physical and mental harm.

Chen Mingxia recalls that when some activists expressed disagreement with the Project’s initiative by citing women’s education as a more important issue, she and other activists argued that while education was certainly important, when a woman was beaten, she would not be able to concentrate on her education. Guo, director of the Women’s Law Center, argues that though domestic violence might not be as visible or perceived to be as serious as rape or murder, it nevertheless can put a woman’s life in critical danger. She emphasizes that domestic violence is a human rights issue because it prevents a woman from living like a human being in both small and big ways. Tian Xiaomei, a Women’s College professor, states that she agrees to participate because it concerns “the
most basic human rights” and therefore worth some sweat. She also believes that the Project will be beneficial to women.

These arguments among activists in support of their rationale for rallying to the VAW frame stress violence as first of all a direct assault against women’s personhood and, secondly, a significant obstacle to women’s pursuit of other needs. Indeed, human rights are regarded as a fundamental principle, the satisfaction or lack of which is a significant measure of the welfare of a human being in all his/her other aspects of needs. From such a view, violence against women requires intervention not because it is the most urgent or important issue. Such perceptions are not necessary, because it is a need that should not be neglected simply in principle. The human rights principle makes women’s need to be protected from violence an important need to address regardless of circumstances.

_Strategic and Practical Interest_

Another common view among the key activists of the DV Project is that to address VAW is not an end to itself, but a strategic means to promote the larger agenda of gender equality. VAW is not viewed as an isolated issue, but a manifestation and product of unequal power relations between men and women. While some local activists object to the DV initiative on the ground that it disregards other more important or practical needs of women, many participant activists insist that addressing domestic violence is not only a response to women’s concrete needs, but also a means to enhance women’s gender status. Such a view suggests a political consciousness about the distinction posited by Molyneux (1985) between women’s practical and strategic interests. Molyneux defines “strategic gender interests” as those associated with women’s social positioning determined by their gender attributes, while she refers to “practical gender interests” as those arising from the concrete conditions of living experienced by women as a result of their gender identity. The DV Project activists’ emphasis on their strategic visions indicates that they not only regard the Project as an issue-only initiative, but more as a strategic intervention to achieve a more ambitious scheme. What seems to be impressively motivating about the issue of domestic violence is that it not only addresses
women’s practical interests of living a violence-free life, which are historically denied and neglected, it also offers an extremely powerful framework to challenge the gender status quo, especially given its articulation in global policy documents.

Feng Yuan, who directs the gender training sub-project, argues that the DV Project not only carries out anti-violence work, it also stresses the need to intervene from a gender perspective. She asserts that the goal is surely to address the practical needs of women victims, but in order to achieve this goal, they are also trying to transform a social paradigm of gender inequality that breeds and encourages VAW. Li Hongtao, who serves on both the community intervention and gender training sub-projects, voices a similar opinion. She acknowledges that the controversies about the Project stem from the perception that it is dominated by the donors’ interests. In challenge to this perception, she points out that one should be aware of the relation but also the distinction between the explicit and implicit aims of the Project. She argues that the “superficial” cause of addressing domestic violence is indeed driven by the deeper cause to promote gender awareness and equality.

Song Meiya, a China Women’s News journalist who conducted the oral account project with battered women, argues that exploration of domestic violence will ultimately lead one to the critical awareness of the patriarchal cultural structure as the institutional roots and mechanisms of gender inequality. She points out that when people are questioning their focus on domestic violence, they only see the issue and the individual battered women in their focus. But indeed, intervening against domestic violence not only opens a window to the social anatomy of gender violence, but also points out a path to transform this anatomy. Talking about the opposition against the Project, Lv Ping, a young ex-China women’s News activist, reflects that the ranking of women’s needs forces one to choose sides, and whatever the results are, there will always be someone who disagrees. She suggests that the meaningful question is not whether or not domestic violence is the most critical concern to Chinese women, but what they are trying to achieve by focusing on the issue. To her, domestic violence, as a form of gender subordination, shares the root with all other oppressions faced by women.
These views imply the perspective that women’s needs are not entirely separable, but are profoundly connected to each other as they all can be traced to the fundamental bedrock of gender inequality. These views also indicate whether an issue is “practical” or not has no absolute criteria. It is a construction depending on subjective perspectives. To DV Project participants, domestic violence is an issue that combines both women’s practical and strategic gender interests.

*Alliance Interest: Pooling Resources and Forming Collective Forces*

The DV project is not just predicated on the rationale that domestic violence is an important issue that needs to be addressed, it is also mobilized by the common perceptions among participating women’s NGOs that there is a need for different organizations and groups to combine efforts in this area for optimal results. The initiative is seen as a great opportunity for women’s NGOs concerned with the issue to build horizontal collaboration so as to mount a more substantial impact against VAW.

Several NGOs explained that they joined the Project because they perceived a need for pooling resources for a common purpose. Wang Xingjuan, director of the Maple Center, stated that, “we all feel that we need to combine into a collective force to fight domestic violence, and to foster a collective force, we came upon the idea of developing a network.” Lin Lixia, a legal counselor with a long history of participation at the Women’s Law Center shared that the rationale of forming a domestic violence network lies in the need of individual organizations for partners in promoting this cause. It provides an efficient means to build alliances, consolidate resources and exchange information. She explained that the Women’s Law Center, as a single NGO, cannot possibly address everything about domestic violence. As legal aid is its focus, its pursuit of other strategies, such as public advocacy and medical intervention, is necessarily limited.

Cai Yiping, a Women’s Media Watch activist, claims that without support from other women’s NGOs, media activists like herself cannot “stir up anything.” She asserts that the significance of the Project is that it helps build a network that links individual efforts in women’s anti-domestic activism and services to a common platform. To her,
the alliances enabled through the DV project inject a “new” and “larger” significance into the initiative, as they are not merely an aggregate of individual actors’ forces, but an articulation of a new “collective force.” Feng Yuan, also a Media Watch activist, argues that it is just a “self-apparent” matter that combining into a collective force provides a shorter springboard to social change than relying on “a single gun and a single horse.”

The common reference to a need for a “collective force” to enhance individual NGOs’ ability to address the issue of domestic violence suggests strongly that the different NGOs anti-violence activism in the post-Beijing context indeed has fostered a quite explicit “group consciousness” and “collective interest” among these organizations, which provides a crucial motivation and foundation for the formation of the DV Project. This manifestly “collective” interest spells a collaborative interest and may result from these NGOs’ constant exposure to multi-agency interventions against DV in other countries. It also seems to be a strategic response to the politically marginalized status of civil society NGOs and the scarcity of resources for women’s NGO activism, especially in the relatively new field of anti-gender violence work.

**Institutional Interest: NGO Building**

A related but different logic given for the participation in the DV Project reflects a significantly institutional interest in NGO building. Again, the Project is perceived as a means to an end, one that goes beyond these women’s gender identity and commitment to women’s gender interests. Rather, the Project is seen as a vehicle and opportunity to build a more “authentic” NGO, not in terms of the organizational form, but in terms of the organizing principle and political ideals. “Transparency,” “democracy” and “equity” are the key words behind this aspiration, and they express a perceived need not just for more NGOs, but indeed for more politically autonomous and structurally democratic women’s NGOs. It is not an interest shared by all participants, but is an agenda shared by the several activists who occupy key leadership positions within the Project.

Ge Youli, who plays a crucial role in the mobilization process for the DV Project as the liaison person between local women activists and international donors, explains

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97 It is a Chinese idiom referring to reliance on individual efforts.
that her own political investment in the initiative is twofold. One is tied to her concern for
the issue of domestic violence and interest in doing something about it, the other is
related to her concern about how to “do a movement, an organization, a NGO
organization.” To her, the agenda of building an organization is no less important than
that of addressing the issue. As a self-identified feminist, she suggests that what should
distinguish a women’s NGO is not what it does, but how it goes about what it does. She
claims that the DV initiative offers a good opportunity for women’s NGOs to explore
how to practice feminist values of “empowerment” and “transparency” in organizing. She
contends that “even if you seem to be doing things for women, if you are doing it without
women’s or feminist values and perspective, then I feel that what you are doing will be
totally meaningless.” Her perceptions about the need to build the DV project into a more
feminist NGO are linked with her critical reflections on the development of the NGO
sector in the field of women’s activism of which she herself has been an active member
since the Beijing Conference. She reveals that she is concerned about the discrepancy
between the avowed values of equality and the de facto practices in several NGOs with
which she is familiar. Therefore, the DV Project promises a brand new opportunity to
explore women’s NGO organizing. To promote this agenda, Ge has deliberately sought
out like-minded activists who share similar interests.

Ge’s interest in NGO building also finds resonance among several other key
activists in the DV Project. Guo Yanqiu, one of the organizers of Women’s Media Watch,
reveals that when Ge approached her about the DV Project, the agenda of realizing a
more “open,” “transparent” and “democratic” form of NGO organizing was immediately
appealing to her. As an initiator and leader of Media Watch, a women’s NGO with a
decentralized and informal structure of leadership, Guo felt that the lack of monitoring
mechanisms across many women’s NGOs, including her own, might potentially
compromise their egalitarian and democratic values that originally inspired many groups.
Therefore, she seconded Ge’s idea.

Chen Mingxia, the selected coordinator for the Project also shares an intense
interest in institutionalizing democracy in women’s NGOs. Though she was not attached
to any particular women’s NGOs before she joined the project, she explains that the
development of the NGO sector has captured her interest for a long time. As a legal scholar specializing in human rights, she believes in democracy as the foundation of an equal and just society, and NGOs represent to her a growing current towards democratization. Therefore, she decided to devote herself to the NGO cause of the DV Project when she already had accumulated enough professional capital to become a Ph.D. adviser in her own research institute. In her interview with me, she repeatedly and emphatically pointed out that she is not the “leader” of the group, but a “coordinator,” though her duties and power equal those of a program director.

“Why do we make the title ‘coordinator’? It is to say that we don’t support absolute authority and leadership here. We’re entirely based on a democratic and transparent methodology of doing things, we don’t need any so-called authority or power….or someone who controls everything! What we need here is democratic decision-making and negotiation among all participants, and that’s why we need someone who works on coordination. Coordinator is to facilitate and mediate, it is someone who organizes the work, who facilitates contacts, and is someone who leads the initiative to implement the decision results of our discussion, yes, initiative leader, that’s what it means.”

Her emphasis on characterizing herself as the “coordinator” in the group and her stress on democratic values as a salient feature of the DV Project speaks volumes about the institutional interest in NGO building as another significant motivation that has engineered the construction of the DV Project.

It is worth noticing that “democracy” is a significant rhetoric employed by these activists. Their discussions suggest that “democracy” of NGOs is understood as a participatory, egalitarian and non-hierarchical mode of organizing. Aspirations for democratic values in women’s NGOs are linked with some activists’ critical reflections on the power dynamics of women’s NGOs they themselves have observed or participated in. At the same time, the critical awareness is also raised and enhanced by the Project’s endorsement of democratic organizing principles, which are obviously reflected in its institutional structure characterized by a collective decision making body.98

98 When the Project was first established, the decision-making body was composed of representatives from all its 11 sub-projects, and the body was named the “Project Management Team.” Chen Mingxia was elected as the “coordinator” to oversee the overall operation of project. In the second phase of the Project
My discussion in this section shows that the local mobilization of the DV Project is indeed fuelled by a diverse range of “vocabularies of motive” beyond the global vocabulary of violence against women. Whereas the international donors are funding the DV Project primarily as an issue-project, local activists and organizations have brought in a much wider scale of interests and invested multiple strategic visions in this Project. Also, despite a critique of international donor’s imposition of will and the withdrawal of some NGOs, the successful formation of the DV Project challenges the implicit assumption that there is a coherent and unified category of “local interests.” The miscellaneous “interests” articulated by local activists and NGOs are “vocabularies of motive” testifying to the Project participants’ collective and strategic decision to organize around the issue of domestic violence in pursuit of a group of shared interests. That a multitude of different individual and organizational interests is articulated in relation to the Project reflects enormously on these “local” interests as an artificial product of political organization rather than as a natural entity. This evidence clearly suggests that the DV Project is not just a product of available resources. It is a project of political organizing involving assessment of opportunities and collective interpretation of interests. It is an expression of local agency exactly because it is a product of organizing rather than an automatic response to structural change.

Conclusion

This chapter documents and analyzes the formation process of the Domestic Violence Project in 2000, a non-governmental women’s organization comprised of both NGOs and individual women activists committed to anti-gender violence activism in Beijing. My discussion examines this process as an outcome of both successful resource mobilization and collective interest construction. The resource mobilization not only results from the impact of consciousness raising on the issue of violence against women at the Beijing Conference, which stimulated and shaped Chinese women’s anti-gender

starting in 2003, the Project changed its name to Network and set up an elected executive council of directors to coordinate the multiple activities, conduct strategic planning and provide leadership for the entire organization.
violence activism in the NGO sector post Beijing. It was also shaped by close interactions between the Chinese NGOs and their international donor agencies, whose economic power and propensity for VAW as a funding area has contributed both directly and indirectly to the specific mobilization of the DV Project. In addition to resources, the DV Project also was mobilized by a group of collective interests shared by its participants, which include academic interest in “domestic violence” research, moral interest in protecting women from the human rights abuse of domestic violence, both the practical interest to address domestic violence and the strategic interest to mainstream gender equality, and the institutional interests to form alliances among NGOs as well as to strengthen NGO building in the field of women’s issues. In the next chapter, I will examine how the transnational feminist frame of VAW has been translated in the DV Project’s anti-domestic violence agenda.
CHAPTER 6

TRANSLATING THE TRANSNATIONAL CONCEPT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Introduction

Since its inception in 2000, the Network/Research Center for Combating Domestic Violence in China (DVN) has adopted a multi-faceted approach to addressing the issue of domestic violence. Indeed, DVN is organized around a broad set of programs aiming at preventing and intervening against domestic violence in China through a multitude of measures and activism.99 Table 3 illustrates the current organizational structure and major component projects of DVN. China Law Society, a state-approved nongovernmental research association, acts as DVN’s sponsoring unit and provides the DVN with a legal identity. The head of the Women’s Rights and Interests Department of the national All China Women’s Federation is honorary advisor to the DVN. This strategic liaison solicits support from the state women’s organization and further strengthens the legitimacy of the DVN. Financially, as Chapter 5 has discussed, DVN is dependent on four major foreign donor agencies. However, the decision-making power of DVN resides in the executive council, which is composed of a group of elected participants from the core projects run by the organization. The council is responsible for raising funds, communicating with donors, allocating resources, strategic planning, and

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99 Originally, the Domestic Violence Project was organized around 11 sub-projects, which included the Network project, the Office project, the Documentation Center, Gender Training, Survey and Research, Case Studies from Women’s Hotline, the Media project, the Oral project, the Training Manual project, Urban Intervention project, Medical Intervention Project, Legal Aid and Rural Intervention Project. The Domestic Violence Project changed its name to the Network/Research Center for Combating Violence (fandui jiating baoli wangluo/yanjiu zhongxin) in China in August, 2003, after its first term. In abbreviation, the organization is called as the Domestic Violence Network (fan jiabao wangluo). See Domestic Violence Network website (www.stopdv.org.cn).
addressing a broad range of key financial, management and organizational issues associated with DVN. What is known publicly as the Network (Research Center) for Combating Domestic Violence is, indeed, an aggregation of diverse programs. These programs can be divided into the three broad areas of information, training, and research programs. Information programs include DVN’s public documentation center, its website and media projects; training programs conduct and provide gender training; and research programs contain both research and intervention projects, the latter carried out across three pilot sites representing the urban, rural and medical community in China. The only full-time employees—which include one director, two deputy directors and a small group of administrative and financial assistants—work in DVN’s only office in Beijing and coordinate DVN’s numerous projects in assistance to the executive council.

Most of these programs are implemented by part-time participants and volunteers. Table 4 shows that, as of 2006, DVN has 104 individual members and 52 organizational members across the country. The individual members affiliated with DVN represent a variety of professional backgrounds that encompass education, journalism, the NGO sector, healthcare, criminal justice, law enforcement, government services, and some other occupational categories. Most of the members joined through direct and indirect participation in DVN’s projects. However, university professors and academic researchers constitute more than one third of the individual membership, demonstrating academic women’s strong involvement in NGO activism. The majority of the individual members are based in Beijing, only very few work outside of Beijing. On the contrary, most of DVN’s organizational associates are based outside of Beijing, though most of them are ACWF branches, which make up more than half of DVN’s organizational members. In addition to ACWF organizations, DVN collaborates with a number of women’s NGOs and research centers.
Table 3: Network (Research Center) for Combating Domestic Violence of China Law Society, Organizational Structure

Note: This table is a replication of the illustration printed in DVN’s public folder, albeit with simplified descriptions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Members</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Professional Identities</th>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women (86)</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>University Professors/Academic Researchers (39)</td>
<td>ACWF Organizations (37)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men (18)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing residents (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>ACWF cadres (8)</td>
<td>--Provincial ACWF (12)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Healthcare workers and administrators (9)</td>
<td>--Municipal ACWF (21)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advertising agents (2)</td>
<td>--Township ACWF (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actor/Actress (2)</td>
<td>--Autonomous Region ACWF (3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Judges, Prosecutors and Law Enforcement staff (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Government servants (4)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Journalists (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NGO advocates (14)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lawyers (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School teacher (1)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Graduate students (3)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Editors (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Beijing residents (100)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beijing organizations (5)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Beijing organizations (47)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: DVN’s membership**

*Note:* this table is based on the membership information currently published by the DVN on its public website. The information was collected and corroborated by the DVN in 2006. There may be changes since then.
In its public advocacy statement appealing to the “government,” “the entire society” and “every individual citizen” for action, DVN proclaims that “domestic violence against women is a global social problem and an important component of gender-based violence that cuts across differences in nationality, culture, class, ethnicity and race; it constitutes a violation of women’s human rights and a fundamental impediment to women’s and social development.”100 DVN also declares that its goals are to educate society about the human rights abuse of domestic violence against women, transform the perception and condoning of domestic violence as a private matter, and ultimately to eliminate violence from women’s lives.101 The visions declared by DVN clearly reverberate with the gender and human rights frame embodied by the transnational concept of violence against women.

In this chapter, I will examine the socio-political processes of DVN’s “translation” of the transnational concept of violence against women in its local anti-domestic violence programs. In particular, I will look at how both the gender and human rights rhetoric has been engaged, transmitted and transformed in both discourses and social policies. In my discussion, I will draw on a combination of resources, which include DVN documents and publications, my interviews with the organization’s key activists and my ethnographic observations in the field. I will examine DVN’s gender and human rights advocacy across three of its major areas of activism --- research, gender training and legal advocacy. I found that to mainstream the gender and human frames into institutional practice so as to translate them into actual rights protection for women victims of domestic violence, DVN adopts a “politics of engagement” with state institutions, especially the governmental women’s organization, the All China Women’s Federation (ACWF). However, I argue that this strategy produces mixed results with dubious benefits to DVN. Though institutional discourses and practices are obviously responsive to DVN’s advocacy, their emphasis on harmony, family stability and state

100 DVN issued this declaration at the 2nd anniversary of the Domestic Violence Project on December 10, 2001, in commemoration of the International Day of Elimination of VAW. The document is published as an appendix in Domestic Violence Project 2002, 355.

101 Ibid.
control not only threatens to co-opt DVN’s gender and human rights advocacy, they might also restrict DVN’s organizational and discursive autonomy in its future activism.

Stats and Stories: Making Violence Against Women a Credible and Salient Frame

To provoke social action against domestic violence, social movements, first of all, have to show that it exists and affects many people. The construction of violence against women (VAW) as a global human rights concern rests on the assertion that VAW is widespread. The credibility of this claim is fundamental to the justification of public intervention. In China, one study shows that VAW is an unfamiliar term with no apparently agreed-upon definitions by the Chinese people, though it is a powerful term for raising consciousness about violence directed specifically against women. (Tang et al. 2000). Given that the terms “violence against women” and “domestic violence” were interjected into Chinese discourses only around the time of the 1995 Beijing Conference, as this dissertation has shown, it is not too surprising that they lack popular resonance in China.

A number of social movement scholars have pointed to the critical importance of frame resonance to the movement’s ability to recruit supporters (McAdam and Rucht 1993; Tarrow 1992; Snow and Benford 1992, 2000). Snow and Benford (2000) point out that frame resonance rests on two intersecting key factors: the credibility of the frame and its salience to targets of mobilization. Credibility concerns a frame’s “truth” claims, while salience is about a frame’s perceived rank of importance in comparison to other related issues. Only when social movement claims are perceived to be credible and concerned with important issues will social action be effectively mobilized. To achieve credibility and salience for transnational feminist claims that domestic violence, as a form of VAW, is prevalent, serious and deserves public intervention as a human rights abuse, DVN carries out both quantitative and qualitative research to expose and illustrate women’s experiences of victimization.

DVN’s quantitative research is a public survey polling the prevalence of and public attitudes towards the issue of domestic violence (Liu and Zhang 2003; Zhang and Liu 2004). It collected 3543 questionnaires from approximately half women (51.6%) and
half men (48.4%). The survey focused exclusively on wife abuse in marital relationships, reflecting the global feminist belief that marriage functions as a significant site of gender violence against women. Applying the “conflict tactic scale” and “domestic violence recognition scale” adapted from Western research instruments, DVN surveys the incidence rate of conflicts between spouses, forms of abuse used against the wife, men’s and women’s reactions to conflicts, and the respondents’ perceptions of what constitutes domestic violence as well as how to address the issue.

The survey found that about a third of the respondents (34.7%) report physical fighting, ranging from once and several times every month to once or multiple times every week. Women report physical, mental and sexual forms of abuse against them when tension arise between them and their husbands. Of the female respondents, 65.9% report being ignored, 29.6% report their husbands banging objects or door, 28.5% are verbally denigrated and insulted, 21.7% physically assaulted, 16.9% abandoned at home, 16.2% grabbed, 12.1% kicked, 9.7% have sometimes thrown at them, 8% are isolated from communication with other people, 7.3% have had their belongings destroyed by their husbands, 5.8% were forced into sex, 2.6% were threatened with a sharp weapon, and 1.7% were scalded by boiling water (Liu and Zhang 2003, 312). As the survey is disseminated to both rural and urban populations, economically well off and poor, well educated and poor schooled respondents, its findings not only provide empirical evidence of the existence of domestic violence against women in China, they also credit global feminist claims that domestic violence cuts across different populations and the scope of its existence should not be ignored.

DVN’s qualitative research is an oral project with a group of battered women, half of whom are prison inmates jailed for killing their abusive husbands (Song and Xue 2003). It collects and recounts 28 women’s narratives of their past experiences of domestic violence and illuminates the diverse patterns, dynamics and consequences ofDV against women from their personal perspectives. Though documenting in-depth interviews with a small group of battered women does not provide strong or

102 The survey was disseminated across 9 cities in 3 provinces representing the rich, middle class and poor regions of the country respectively.
comprehensive statistics on the prevalence of the issue, it still yields crucial empirical data that demonstrate the existence of domestic violence in Chinese families.

This research not only testifies to the credibility of transnational feminist claims about the prevalence of domestic violence, it also supports claims of domestic violence as a social problem rooted in gender inequality. The emphasis on viewing domestic violence as a gender issue enhances perceptions of its salience and demands social action. The survey project endorses a gender perspective as its guiding research framework and demonstrates gender as an indispensable variable in studies about domestic violence. The researchers provide gender disaggregated statistics and explore gender as a key explanatory category associated with the dynamics and perceptions of domestic violence. Their findings expose discernible gender differences in the way men and women respond to conflicts, perceive DV, define the causes and regard the necessity of having specialized DV legislation.  

Though the survey also explores other variables and finds association of DV with differences such as education, location of residence, childhood experience and length of marriage, it conscientiously espouses the primacy of a gender perspective to the understanding of domestic violence and promotes perception of the issue as a gender phenomenon. Zhang and Liu assert that “men’s use of violence against women is a result of cultural and social tolerance and acquiescence to such use,” tying the cause of VAW closely to unequal gender relations (2004, 5).

The oral project with battered women also stresses domestic violence as a product of gender inequality, shifting the blame away from individuals to the society. By presenting women’s narratives of their domestic violence experiences in the form of autobiographical accounts, the oral project furnishes crucial contextual information to understanding why and how domestic violence happens. As each narrative is followed by a comment written by a DVN expert, the comments provide a way for DVN advocates to reframe public interpretations. These comments name the stories by attaching titles and comments, such as “domestic violence is an extreme manifestation of inequality between men and women,” “the outdated notion of defending men’s power and interests is beyond

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103 One example is that while 81.4% of the female respondents think it necessary to have a domestic violence law, only 75.3% of the male respondents hold the same view, see Zhang and Liu 2004, 80.
harmful,” “domestic violence, it can happen in any family,” “breaking the mental prison of traditional patriarchal thoughts, raising gender awareness,” and so on. This brief survey of the titles suggests a strong focus on gender in DVN’s analysis of the women’s experiences (Song and Xue 2003).

The oral project also evokes the human rights rhetoric to amplify the demands for institutional intervention. In the introduction to its publication, the oral project states that “in the worldwide tide of anti-domestic violence actions, domestic violence is regarded as a public harm, violence against women equals the concept of a women’s human rights violation, and these perceptions are widely accepted in the international community” (Song and Xue 2003, 17). To facilitate public understanding of domestic violence in relation to the human rights framework in China, the oral project highlights the cases of severely abused women who are driven to kill to preserve their own life.

In the oral project, one story concerns the experience of a rural woman named Xue Jinhua, who was brutally raped and physically and mentally constantly tortured by her husband for not having produced male offspring. Xue gave birth to 8 children and only one girl and one son survived because of the ongoing beatings, frequent miscarriages and her husband and in-laws’ attempts to kill or sell the children if they were girls. Finally, the woman killed her husband who had abused her for more than a decade by slipping an overdose of sleeping pills into his food (Xue 2002). In the comment, the DVN advocate Song Meiya argues that Xue’s story illustrates what it means to understand violence against women as a violation of women’s human rights, because Xue’s experience provides “an exemplary case of domestic violence” that demonstrates the full range of physical, mental, sexual and economic abuse in violation of women’s fundamental human rights (Song 2003, 54). The advocate points out that Xue’s misery is by no means her personal fault. On the contrary, she describes Xue as an intelligent, capable and talented rural woman and attributes her experience to extreme gender inequality that denies women basic health, reproductive, bodily and sexual rights.

Of the 28 women whose stories are presented in the oral project, 14 are incarcerated for killing their abusers and jailed for a range of sentences from death row,
to life imprisonment, to a few years in jail. The project points out that though only a
small percentage of women resort to killing to escape domestic violence, the focus given
to these cases is intentional for the purpose of discussing the role of social institutions,
especially the criminal justice system, in the construction of women’s victimization
(Song and Xue 2003, introduction 12). I argue that, this overrepresentation of
incarcerated women victims is also a strategic deployment to articulate, highlight and
even dramatize the horrendous range of human rights abuses embedded in domestic
violence against women.

In the U.S. context, Rothenberg argues that the telling of battered women’s stories
provides a crucial means for the feminist movement to establish its claims and harness
public support, since individual narratives give flesh to “an otherwise abstract and
socially invisible issue” and evoke emotional responses (2002, 225). In the context of
DVN’s anti-domestic violence activism, the image of battered women who killed their
abusers, oftentimes after insufferable chronic abuse, is conducive to connecting domestic
violence to the human rights framework. It not only represents the extreme victimization
of women and therefore is likely to produce sympathy from the public, it also provides an
affective and narrative medium that is able to translate the abstract and unfamiliar human
rights framework into relatable personal life stories.

Gender Training: Advancing the Gender and Human Rights Perspective

The gender training project is a unique sub-project among DVN’s multiple
programs. Rather than being an independent and self-contained project, the training is
carried out and diffused throughout other aspects of DVN’s activism. As such, it
constitutes an extremely significant element of DVN’s anti-domestic violence agenda. It
is also an internal requirement, as all DVN participants, from the leadership to the
volunteers, have to go through the training. The training program disseminates, advocates,
and seeks to mainstream primarily the feminist gender perspective and also the human

104 The overrepresentation of imprisoned battered women can be partially explained by the difficulty to
recruit respondents from the general public due to the deeply personal and silenced nature of such
experience. Therefore, DVN advocates deliberately focused on the prison system and gained access to the
14 women they interviewed for the project.
rights perspective to a wide variety of institutional audiences. Through exposition and discussion of the gender concept and international human rights documents addressing the issue of VAW in participatory workshops, the training program is used as a vehicle for consciousness-raising and to impact institutional practice. Essentially, it builds a political foundation for DVN’s demand for institutional intervention in domestic violence. Both the gender and human rights perspectives are also promoted to guide institutional intervention through a feminist approach centered on women’s needs and interests.

The training project is largely an outcome of and response to the gender mainstreaming policy recommended by the Beijing documents. The model practiced by DVN adopts the contents and replicates the training methodology used by international agencies working in the area of gender and development. The project is mainly discharged by a NGO group called “gender and development facilitator’s group,” which evolved out of a Chinese “gender and development” training manual project commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) China Office between 1997 and 1998 (Feng 2002, 427). The group was also formed because of an informal gender training program run by a Hong Kong U.N.DP volunteer and gender expert during her stay at China Women’s College in Beijing in the mid-1990s. This international volunteer secured small amounts of funding from U.N.DP and conducted a series of participatory workshops for the college faculty and other local women scholars and activists interested in learning about the concept of gender. Therefore, this informal program was an important site from which the gender training method became popularized in Beijing. When the program was over, several participants in the program, mostly university teachers and academic scholars formed an initial group called Jingjin, as it drew together people from both Beijing and Tianjin city (H.T. Li interview). One active participant in this group was Feng Yuan, who later became the director of DVN’s gender training program.

DVN has carried out numerous gender training programs and workshops to various target audiences, including the ACWF cadres, the police, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, media workers, hospital staff, community volunteers, women victims and batterers. It also has published a series of training manuals tailored to a multitude of
institutional audiences. The training programs are conducted in a participatory format that is meant to foster an egalitarian, engaging and learner-centered environment. DVN organizers lead the workshop as “facilitators” and combine lecture, discussion, surveys, case analyses and other creative instruments to facilitate participants’ understanding of the gender frame. Though the format and contents are largely adopted and translated from the gender training framework developed by U.N.DP in the issue area of gender and development, local statistics and discussion cases are inserted throughout DVN’s training materials to cater to Chinese trainees.

The major goals of the gender training project are to raise and promote gender consciousness, challenge cultural myths, mobilize, expand and ultimately mainstream domestic violence intervention across different institutional sites (Rong 2002). The gender frame evoked by DVN analyzes domestic violence against women as a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women. It emphasizes domestic violence as a gender mechanism and shifts understanding of the issue from a “women’s problem” to gender inequality. It also advocates “empowerment” for women and connects domestic violence advocacy to women’s liberation.

To introduce the gender frame to Chinese audiences, DVN draws on Western feminist theories of gender. For example, in the police handbook, DVN cites the U.S. feminist Joan Scott’s definition of gender as “a constituent of social relations based on discernible sexual difference, and it is a fundamental means of expressing power relations.” DVN advocates intentionally adopted the artificial term “social gender” (shehui xingbie) to emphasize gender as a social construct and distinguish it from the biological concept, since in Chinese, there is only one word for gender/sex. They

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105 See for example Rong and Zhao 2004, which is the manual developed by DVN for training of the police. In the introduction, one section talks particularly about the principles and format of participatory training, see pp. 6-9. Though there are altogether 10 manuals designed for different system workers, each manual follows a similar formula. In the following discussions, I will use the police training handbook as an example to talk about DVN’s gender training materials in general.

106 The quote is from the police training manual, see Rong and Zhao 2004, 37. It is cited from the Chinese translation of Joan Scott’s “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” in an anthology of Western feminist works translated by Chinese feminists. See Li, Lin and Tan 1997.

107 In Chinese language, there is no distinction between “gender” and “sex” as in English. “Xingbie” is the word used for “sex.” It is composed of two Chinese characters, one meaning “sex” and the other
pointed out that gendered traits and behavior are a result of socialization that usually ascribes unequal gender roles to men and women. Activists argue that this socialization process results in unequal gender power in both the private and public spheres. This argument, that gender not only manifests a social construction but also a power relation between the sexes, is central to the program’s gender advocacy. This “power” perspective is also reflected and further reinforced by numerous analyses produced by DVN activists and scholars of domestic violence as a power and control mechanism, social exclusionary practice, gender oppression, gender discrimination and violation of women’s human rights.¹⁰⁸

DVN’s gender advocacy indeed poses a quiet challenge to the state’s “equality between men and women” frame, which is critiqued by various Chinese feminist scholars for the implicit criteria of gender sameness based on a male-centered ideology.¹⁰⁹ In my interview with Feng, director of the gender training project, she pointed out that gender training ensures that domestic violence is opposed “from the perspective of gender equality” and not “on the ground of protecting the status quo of gender relations.” As in the police handbook, DVN points out that gender analysis requires us to “situate women’s issues within gender dynamics; it is not about going blindly after an equality based on sameness to men, but emphasizes equality of rights, obligations, opportunities and choices” (Rong and Zhao 2004, 48). Its exposition of gender as a social, processual and relational concept effectively repositions domestic violence against women as a social and institutional problem rather than a “woman’s problem,” leading attention away from essentialist ideas of sexual difference to social consciousness of gender relations.

DVN’s gender advocacy also emphasizes the idea of “empowerment” and seeks to transform the unequal power structure constraining women’s life choices. Its training materials state that gender analysis “emphasizes listening to women’s voices” and


articulates the gender mainstream policy goal set by the Beijing Platform and the achievement of gender equality as its ultimate vision (Rong and Zhao 2004, 48). In domestic violence intervention, the idea of empowerment suggests that social institutions should not only take a proactive approach to service provision and resource allocation for women victims, they should also resist victim-blaming, adopt a gender perspective, consider women’s needs, approach women as equals and increase women’s control of resources in endeavors to elevate women out of an unequal status to men (Feng 2003, 301-302). Another DVN activist, Jiao Yang argues that to empower women victims of domestic violence means to raise their gender consciousness and perspective on domestic violence, increase personal abilities, transform relations to the violent context and finally helps them to break out of the vicious cycle of violence (2003, 402-403). Although DVN points out that gender advocacy also is invested in men’s liberation (Rong and Zhao 2004, 49), it focuses on “women” as subjects of “empowerment” and emphasizes women’s personal autonomy and individual well-being.

DVN’s gender training project also promotes the human rights perspective on domestic violence. The human rights concept and documents constitute an important part of the training program and materials. Though not discussed as a theoretical concept or presented as a work methodology to the institutional audience, the human rights rhetoric is upheld and endorsed as an international moral and legal principle. It also provides a useful rhetoric to elicit and maintain the understanding of domestic violence as a public issue, as the accusation of human rights abuse powerfully counters the society’s tendency to perceive domestic violence as a “domestic” matter.

In the gender training manuals, the definition of domestic violence and its forms and characteristics are often introduced and discussed through the definition of VAW adopted by international human rights documents, such as the 1993 Vienna Declaration of Elimination of Violence Against Women and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. The human rights framework is also promoted as a framework equally essential as gender through which to understand VAW and domestic violence. The manuals often point out that the most significant features of VAW to be grasped are that the practice “violates women’s human rights and basic freedom,” “includes diverse forms of violence in both
public and private,” and inflicts “bodily, sexual and psychological/mental harms” (Rong and Zhao 2004, 22). In the police handbook, it is stated that “all forms of domestic violence constitute a violation of women’s human rights and therefore are criminal behaviors that the judicial system has the responsibility to intervene in, no matter whether they cause minor or serious results” (Rong and Zhao 2004, 69). The manual also cites the Beijing Platform and its recommendations to the state on how to address VAW in order to compel police involvement. By quoting from and directly linking the issue of DV to an international human rights framework, DVN intentionally highlights DV as a high profile international public policy issue and thus legitimates its call for social action in the local context.

However, the human rights rhetoric is not limited to women’s rights or individual rights. Take the police training manual, for example, while discussing the harms of domestic violence, it addresses detrimental effects of DV caused not only to women, but also to children, the batterer, society and the state, portraying the threat of domestic violence on an escalating scale (Rong and Zhao 2004, 24-28). It seems that, to justify social attention, the program deliberately outlines a broad impact of domestic violence beyond the individual woman and family so as not to sound individualistic and to appear sensitive to domestic violence’s influence across different social sectors.

I argue that the focus on the gender frame suggests attempts to distance the motivation of DVN’s anti-domestic violence initiatives away from the focus on individuals and women alone suggested by the human rights frame. The gender frame allows DVN advocates to discuss DV as a social problem and to build a convincing claim for social intervention, as the gender equality frame has far more political, social and cultural validity in China given the state’s advocacy for “equality between men and women” as a constitutional principle since the country’s foundation. By situating its concern with domestic violence against women within a “gender equality” frame, DVN is able to pre-empt potential oppositions to its de facto focus on women’s rights as well as to minimize feelings of alienation that might be caused by an emphasis on the human rights framework due to the Western powers’ persistent stigmatization of China’s human rights issues. The human rights frame is often employed strategically as a powerful
rhetoric to defy the public/private dichotomy that functions to trivialize domestic violence. It also is evoked as a legitimate rhetoric to stimulate the state into action. By focusing its advocacy on gender and interspersing human right principles, DVN finds a way both to appeal to local audiences and to keep human rights on its agenda.

Legal Advocacy: International Human Rights Framework as a Domestic Source

Though DVN aims for a comprehensive strategy to address domestic violence, legal advocacy occupies a prioritized position. In a published account, DVN claims that “the major direction of China’s anti-DV enterprise is the making of laws” (Rong 2003, 72). The prominence of legal activism within DVN’s agenda has to do with the fact that legal scholars constitute a significant cohort in the group. Several DVN activists have played key roles in legal reforms in the domestic violence issue area. Since the inception of the project, one of DVN’s main activities is to advocate for a domestic violence law in China. More than a sub-project, it is a central objective pursued by the organization.

A major obstacle that impedes the protection of women’s human rights with regard to VAW is that many forms of gender violence, including domestic violence, were not named and recognized in Chinese law.110 Also, the prevalent perception of domestic violence as a private matter within China’s criminal justice system poses another fundamental roadblock. A DVN survey of 1301 judicial workers from two cities, Beijing and Liaoning, found that only 47.9%-50.2% of the respondents agreed that domestic violence is not a private issue and that it deserves intervention whenever it happens (Xia 2002, 24).

To designate “domestic violence” as an independent category of crime, DVN advocates utilized the amendments to the Marriage Law and the Law on the Protection of

110 Though China’s Constitution protects its citizens’ human rights, prohibits abuse against the elderly, women and children, they remain legal principles and are not applicable to prosecution. To advocate for women victims of domestic violence, women’s organizations usually resort to the legal provisions against abuse of family members and intentional physical harm provided in China’s Criminal Law. However, many activists complain that most physical injuries caused by domestic violence simply do not match up to the rigorous standards required in prosecution for both abuse and intentional harm. The Regulations on Administrative Penalties for Public Security (zhi’an guanli chufa tiaoli), which are primarily enforced by the police, also protect family members from physical abuse, but they treat domestic violence as a misdemeanor rather than a felony and the punishment is extremely light. It can result in moderate fines, verbal warning and/or up to 15 days of detention.
Women’s Rights and Interests in 2001 to write the concept into the law. Several legal scholars associated with DVN had the opportunity to serve on the expert committee during the amendments of both laws, and thus were able to provide advice and suggestions to the nation’s legislative body (Harness and Chan 2006, 16). Chen Mingxia, chairperson of DVN’s executive council, participated on the expert committee of amendments to both laws and thus was able to wield her position to influence both pieces of legislation.111

According to Chen, to institutionalize women’s human rights protection is a definite goal guiding her participation in these two legislative activities. She pointed out that “though I was involved in the process as an expert, I was not merely an expert. I also brought my NGO perspective into it, my gender perspective, and the goal of mainstreaming gender into the law. I participated in the making of these legislations with this attitude, which was aimed at promoting the protection of women’s human rights in the law, and at protecting women against violence against them” (from interview). The impact is considerable and profound, as it achieved a historical breakthrough in China’s legislation with regard to the issue of domestic violence and sexual harassment. They are the first and only two laws promulgated by the national government that prohibit domestic violence explicitly.

However, though both laws explicitly recognize domestic violence and designate it as a crime, both stipulations are extremely vague in content. Many activists complain about the lack of the laws’ practical value. Guo Jianmei, director of Women’s Law Center in Beijing, comments that though women victims of domestic violence are more able to obtain a divorce under the new provision of the Marriage Law, the law does not provide clear criteria on the amount and category of compensation women can apply for (Women’s Law Center 2003, 29). The Rights and Interests Law is strongly critiqued for

111 On the Marriage Law committee, she was a major proponent for writing the term of DV into the final text of the amendments. On the Women’s Rights and Interests Law committee, she was delegated the responsibility of drafting the section on women’s “rights to the body.” As the primary drafter of this chapter, she and her colleagues included the issue of sexual harassment. Despite enormous objection, sexual harassment was named into the Law due to Chen’s and her feminist colleagues’ adamant insistence. This information was gathered from my interview with Chen.
its non-pragmatic nature given that there are no judicial instructions to operationalize the provision. At a conference organized by the Women’s Law Center on sexual harassment and domestic violence in Beijing during my fieldwork, one non-profit legal aid lawyer fiercely criticized the Rights and Interests Law. She blurted out that, “The Rights and Interests Law is absolutely repulsive, there is not yet one case that is based on this law. Though it seems to give you the power, it does not offer any means of real aid!” Activists’ profound frustrations indicate that though the inclusion of domestic violence in both the Marriage Law and Rights and Interests Law is a remarkable milestone, both laws are seriously inadequate in their ability to offer women real and effective protection in domestic violence situations. Keith and Lin (2006), in their discussion of both revisions, suggest that the lack of clarification with regard to the crime of “domestic violence” is certainly a result of “the politics of legislative bargaining” (76). They reveal an eclectic approach by the state legislators, who, while agreeing to the criminalization of domestic violence, simultaneously perceive a need to limit its legal scope and institutional responsibility. The definition of domestic violence is very narrow, since neither marital rape nor assault in common-law and dating relationships are recognized (76-77).

In order to force the state to go beyond lip service to the human rights principle and to provide pragmatic measures for the protection of women’s human rights in the domestic sphere, DVN has drafted and is promoting an anti-domestic violence law at the national level. A group of legal scholars, with Chen Mingxia as the leader, have taken up this initiative as a DVN sub-project. The project consists of drafting the law and proposing it to the state. The draft is also published as a book.

In the drafting and proposal of national domestic violence legislation, the international human right instruments furnish a strong and legitimate framework for DVN’s negotiation with the state. When explaining the necessity of such a law, the project highlights the definitions of domestic violence as gender discrimination and human rights violations in a range of human rights documents, including CEDAW (1985), the Convention on Children’s Rights (1990), Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). It
also declares that “to prevent and stop domestic violence requires a comprehensive social law whose immediate goal is not to adjust citizen’s marriage and family relations, but to offer direct support for citizens’ rights to the body, to life and health, freedom and human dignity, and with these, we can facilitate gender equality, guarantee healthy and secure family life and stimulate society’s civilization and sustainable development” (Chen et al. 2005, 24). The human rights framework is cited as a primary rationale for DVN’s proposal, though the project also deliberately connects the human rights rhetoric to that of protecting the family and improving society.

In its definition of domestic violence, DVN obviously aims to parallel the broad definition advocated by the global women’s movement across a series of international human rights documents. The project discusses the Vienna Declaration, CEDAW, and the U.N. special Rapporteur’s definition of VAW as its primary templates, along with national laws in other regions and countries. It defines domestic violence liberally as all those acts that happen to family members and cause physical, mental, sexual and economic harm to them” (Chen et al. 2005, 25), reflecting the inclusive framework promoted by feminists internationally. It particularly addresses selective sex-identification and forced abortion as forms of gender violence specific to China’s context. In addition, DVN’s definition also expands the traditional concept of the nuclear and multigenerational family in Chinese culture to recognize a wide range of domestic members, including current and ex spouses, parents, children, current or ex co-habitants or intimate partners, which include same-sex partners (30). DVN’s definition of both domestic violence and the family represents an extraordinarily feminist and progressive perspective, which is certainly not supported locally but instead, is traceable to the international human rights framework.

Perhaps more importantly, the global human rights framework provides a particularly useful rhetorical and institutional ground to demand state intervention. China is a signatory party to all the major international human rights instruments, including those concerning women’s rights in particular. This fact is used as a leverage by DVN in its political request that the state adopt a domestic violence law to demonstrate Chinese government’s commitment to the international human rights standard. It argues that to
address domestic violence is part of a state’s duty “to fulfill its relevant obligations to the international community and to enforce the Constitution and other related legal provisions” (Chen et al. 2005, 34). The proposed law explicitly relegates the primary responsibility to prevent and redress domestic violence to the state, reminding the state that it has promised to protect citizens’ human rights in both the international human rights conventions it has signed and the national constitution it has promulgated. It also points out that clarification of government responsibility “not only helps the implementation of the promises made by our government to the international world, the development of concrete legal measures and enhances the greatness of our country’s international image, it also provides the most effective guarantee for the work to prevent and eliminate domestic violence” (37). The international human rights instruments are not only used to hold the state to human rights accountability by its own promise, they are also evoked to apply international pressure on the state and to motivate it into action by playing on its vanity.

However, DVN’s endorsement of the human rights principle not only expresses a concern for individual rights, it also connects itself to the rhetoric of protecting the family and improving the society. The project states that the purpose of the law is to “prevent and stop domestic violence, protect domestic violence victims (including the deceased victim), educate, correct and punish the batterer, guarantee the health and safety of family life, and stimulate equality and mutual respect among family members” (Chen et al. 2005, 20). Protection of individual citizen’s human rights is indeed portrayed as an enhancement of the family as well as a means to achieve more profound social goals such as those of gender equality, civilization and development.

DVN’s law draft also proposes a wide range of progressive measures to strengthen the punishment of domestic violence as a crime as well as the protection of women’s human rights. In particular, it encourages the state to adopt two core measures, the protection order system and correctional treatment for batterers. It urges the government to ascribe power to the court system to issue protection orders so as to remedy an important vacuum in the country’s law with regard to victim protection in domestic violence-related cases. It stresses that the purpose of the protection order is to
“prevent the batterer from continuing to perpetrate violence against the victim” (Chen et al. 2005, 58). In addition to the protection order, DVN’s law project also proposes the adoption of judicial correctional measures to enhance the punishment of legally minor crimes of domestic violence as well as to increase treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence. This suggestion reveals a significant interest in integrating the batterers back into the community and family, since it advocates community service and education rather than imprisonment as the more desirable approach. In its discussion of this approach, DVN also expresses considerable concern with the stability of the family, community and society beyond the focus on women’s rights. I argue that while the protection order is suggested primarily to separate the victim from the batterer in order to protect her security and well-being as an individual, batterer treatment is recommended more as a means to protect the family and society from further violence. Again, these measures indicate that DVN intends to integrate both the need to protect individual rights and the community at the same time in the human rights framework.

DVN’s law project is a major effort aimed at translating the human rights frame into real protection for women. However, though the human rights framework shapes DVN’s emphasis on the protection of women’s individual rights, it does not exclude its concern with protecting the family and social stability either, at least rhetorically. A major problem is that such an approach prioritizes state power as the primary force to curb domestic violence and protect women’s human rights. But it also may have the effect of reinforcing the state and its inclination to control violence rather than transform social inequalities. Although the law project articulates a strong human rights framework, the care it takes to conform to state discourses on social stability can militate against its feminist intentions. The law project is definitely designed as an ideal standard and DVN advocates may lose significant control over how it will be interpreted and implemented by the state when it is legislated in the future.

Engaging the State through the ACWF: The Costs of Translation

In order to translate the gender and human rights frame from the realm of political and moral rhetoric into the realm of institutional policy and action, DVN practices what
Claire Reinelt describes as “a politics of engagement,” characterized by the viewing of “mainstream institutions as absolutely necessary terrains of political struggle” (1995, 85). Based on her observations about the U.S. battered women’s movement in the 1990s, Reinelt argues that “a politics of engagement is based on a belief that long-term social change depends on mobilizing and educating women in their communities by creating autonomous institutions, and on establishing relationships and structures of communication with those who work in and set policy for mainstream institutions” (85). She also points out that a major feminist challenge associated with this approach is the difficult balance between the need for autonomy and the ability to effectively challenge institutional practice. I argue that, in the context of DVN’s feminist politics, engagement with the state has certainly effected considerable change, reaped valuable resources and expanded the space for their activism. However, a significant flip side of this engagement, I contend, is the considerable dilution of the gender and human rights frame advocated by DVN, since the strategy eclipses DVN’s discursive and political autonomy and makes its perspectives more susceptible and vulnerable to appropriation by external agents. This politics as well as its consequences, however, are important to our understanding of how transnational frame and concept are translated into local consciousnesses and practices.

Partnering with the ACWF

As a young and bottom-up type of NGO, DVN has very limited political means to engage the state in response to its claims. Therefore, it cultivates a strategic collaboration and partnership with the ACWF, the governmental women’s organization, to reach the state. This strategy is obvious in DVN’s changing membership over the years. While the ACWF’s involvement in DVN’s initial projects was restricted to only a few ACWF branches in Beijing actively sought out by DVN activists, as of 2006 DVN claims at least 12 provincial and 21 municipal ACWF branches on its list of organizational and non-Beijing members. Indeed, the ACWF is DVN’s major institutional ally and liaison to
regions and localities outside of Beijing. At every DVN-organized workshop and conference I attended during the fieldwork, middle-tier ACWF cadres, usually working in the Rights and Interests department of their local branches, always composed a large and dominant cohort of participants. Also, DVN has incorporated ACWF nominally in its own organizational structure, as the national ACWF’s Director of the Department of Rights and Interests is listed as the special advisor for the group.

DVN’s top leadership also confirms that collaboration with the ACWF is a deliberate strategy. Chen Benjian, the current executive director of DVN’s administrative staff, points out “if this network wants to expand, especially to penetrate into more local regions, and given that NGOs are still quite rare outside of Beijing, then it (ACWF) could be a viable path. It can amplify the influence of the Network…without this, your hands are tied” (from interview). According to her, conducting the types of activism that DVN proposes without the assistance of ACWF is virtually impossible and therefore leaves cooperating with ACWF as the pragmatic option. Chen Mingxia, one of the primary strategists of DVN, is more positively assertive of this approach. She argues that “in our communist regime, it (ACWF) is a bridge and bond between the party and the society, therefore we carry out a lot of our work through ACWF, and ACWF is the pillar supporting the DVN at the foundation” (from interview). Among many DVN participants I interviewed, linking up with the ACWF is perceived as a necessary, strategic and effective means to implement DVN’s agenda as well as to achieve the institutional results advocated by the group.

ACWF is not a policy-making institution per se, nor does it hold equal institutional power and authority with other state institutions. However, it is still far more powerful than the autonomous women’s NGOs, simply given its history and size. Founded as a mass organization by the state when the People’s Republic of China was established, it has developed into a gigantic apparatus with a nationwide vertical network of 52,807 branches above the county level, 830,869 branches at the village level and

112 See Harness and Chan, 2006, 30-31. I was also told by several DVN activists that initially DVN asked the national ACWF to be its sponsor but was rejected. Because of the ACWF’s unwillingness to sponsor the organization, DVN switched to the China Law Society as an institutional sponsor and home.
numerous representatives across virtually every type of social institution in China (Li 2005, 38). But, most importantly, as Jude Howell has pointed out, its institutional privilege over the NGOs primarily has to do with the fact that it enjoys “the legitimacy of the Party-state” and “is regularly consulted at national and local levels on policy and legislative changes,” albeit only as far as they are perceived to be of some relevance to women (2005, 61). Compared to the popular women’s NGOs, its massive administrative structure from the top to the bottom, its ability to reach and mobilize the grassroots through its extensive network, and its consultative status with the state leaders and connections to other state institutions all are unparalleled and unique advantages (Fengtai District ACWF/Beijing 2002; Xu 2004).

It is this fundamental power dynamic among the ACWF, the NGOs and the state that has shaped DVN’s distinctive approach to the engagement of the state through the ACWF, especially given that DVN’s primary activism is institutional advocacy rather than social service. However, the redefinition of ACWF as China’s largest women’s NGO since the Beijing Conference and ACWF’s reassertion of its role as “a representative and protector of women’s interests” (Jin 2001, 130) since the country’s economic reforms provide important grounds of solidarity and political partnership between the two. The ACWF is also concerned with domestic violence as an issue that affects women in particular.\(^{113}\) In addition, considered from the perspective of the ACWF, collaborating with the NGO has its incentives, as such collaboration may bring new information, economic resources and opportunities to the ACWF. Such benefits are particularly appreciated by the lower-level ACWF organizations with significantly fewer resources and less power than the higher-level branches.

DVN’s knowledge of gender and human rights theory, connections to foreign scholars and international discussions through conferences, a public documentation center with a substantial collection of books and materials available on loan and its website, where a huge amount of theoretical, legal, journalistic and organizational information is posted for free access are all coveted informational resources that many

ACWFs are not equipped with. One department director from a provincial ACWF told me that she made a request to join DVN and her branch was lucky to squeeze in at the last minute and therefore was able to get a share of DVN’s resources. When asked why such earnestness, she stated that it was because DVN kept her posted about new information, moves and trends in the women’s circle. The resources contributed by DVN are certainly not only informational, but also economic. As a matter of fact, DVN doles out considerable portions from its own financial resources to fund ACWF participation in DVN activities. Funds are often channeled through gender-training programs and domestic violence-related projects undertaken by ACWF organizations in their own localities.\(^\text{114}\) To some participating ACWF branches in relatively impoverished regions, DVN even provides computers so that they can gain access to the Internet and keep in touch with DVN. This situation suggests that though DVN is a NGO, its financial connections to international donor agencies makes it economically more privileged and secure than most middle-tier to grassroots-level ACWF branches who are facing declining funds from the state in a market-oriented economy. Project-based ACWF-NGO collaboration has indeed become a more popular trend.\(^\text{115}\)

By sharing resources with the ACWF through its multiple projects, DVN is able to solicit ACWF’s support and to harness its political influence and connections to the state to advance its advocacy. This collaboration has facilitated DVN’s agenda in three important ways. First, ACWF’s participation in DVN projects has effectively expanded the mobilization base for DVN’s anti-domestic violence agenda and extended its messages to many grassroots communities DVN simply is not able to reach given its limited resources and energy. The elaborate propaganda machinery and skills at mass mobilization possessed by the ACWF are put to both creative and efficient use through public speak outs, educational billboard displays, signature campaigns, local opera, short

\(^{114}\) See DVN newsletter 27. In the 2005 organizational report published in this newsletter, three non-Beijing projects are listed and all are undertaken by local ACWFs. One is the “Zero Violence Community Project” conducted the Changsha city ACWF in Hunan Province; the second is a legal aid project carried out by Liaonin province ACWF; and the third is a shelter and volunteer-training program implemented by the Xiaogan city ACWF in Hubei province.

\(^{115}\) For example, the Maple Counseling Center has collaborated with the Tianjing city ACWF in a family project over several years. See Wang et al. 2005.
plays, stage shows and TV performances organized by local ACWF organizations that incorporate indigenous performance genres and use local talents (Tian 2002; Qi, Li and Zhu 2003; Qiao 2003). Second, the ACWF’s administrative networks with other state agencies, such as criminal justice and law enforcement, not only help the DVN to build its institutional connections, it also substantially lubricates DVN’s communications with state agencies. As I will discuss in a following section, DVN’s ability to mobilize a multi-agency response to domestic violence across all its community intervention projects relies primarily and critically on ACWF’s coordinative capacity and its role as a well-embedded member in the state interagency system. Third, the ACWF has also facilitated DVN’s dialogue with the state and opened political channels for its advocacy. For example, DVN’s domestic violence law proposal was submitted through the ACWF because, as a popular NGO, it is not authorized to propose legislative plans to the state. To place the law draft on the national legislative table, chair of DVN’s executive board Chen Mingxia “lobbied” the national ACWF General Secretary, who then organized a meeting with 30 national people’s congress representatives to discuss DVN’s proposal. This meeting successfully obtained the representatives’ endorsement and enabled the proposal to be submitted to the Legislative Plan Committee of the 10th National People’s Congress. Although the project is still pending approval, this was a significant and hopeful step forward to DVN’s legislative goal.116

Due to DVN’s deepening engagement with the state and reliance on some state agencies, especially the ACWF, to advance its advocacy, DVN’s discursive and political autonomy faces considerable erosion. While DVN emphasizes women’s rights and empowerment in its gender and human rights advocacy, ACWF’s and other agencies’ involvement has exerted increasing pressure on the DVN to dilute its feminist gender and rights rhetoric. Instead, more emphasis is placed on the “harmony” and “social management” rhetoric, which corresponds to the discursive shifts of the state. Also, the multi-agency domestic violence intervention model largely enabled through ACWF’s

116 I gathered this information through an interview with Chen Mingxia. There is also some discussion in DVN’s publications, see Chen et al. 2005, editor’s note.
participation promotes a state-centered power structure, which can result in significant restrictions of DVN’s autonomy and voice as a civil society advocate.

*Harmonious Family and Society*

While many ACWF cadres and agency workers now openly evoke both the gender analysis and human rights rhetoric in their discussions of domestic violence, this might just be a rhetorical gesture. In action, ACWF and other state agencies are more inclined to promote domestic violence prevention and intervention as a “harmony” project, emphasizing domestic violence as a threat to family and social harmony rather than as a gender injustice issue or a violation of women’s rights alone.

At a gender training workshop I observed in Beijing, ACWF cadres urged DVN to shift their advocacy for women’s rights to community harmony. All of the participants at the workshop had received training as trainers by DVN the year before, and this meeting was organized for the participants to exchange experiences, discuss problems and brainstorm on better strategies to promote gender training. Participants included ACWF cadres, hospital administrators, media workers and DVN organizers. ACWF participants, in particular, pointed out that emphasis on the issue of domestic violence against women alone was neither sufficient nor entirely desirable to the promotion of gender advocacy. One participant, a Rights and Interests department chair of the Changsha city ACWF, argued that anti-domestic violence initiatives had to expand beyond their focus on domestic violence alone to connect with the “big” political picture so as to gain support from local government. The Chair shared that since 2005, the department began to integrate the issue into a campaign it was promoting locally, entitled “upholding loving heart, protecting the beautiful family.” The campaign was part of a larger effort to establish models of the so-called “peace village” at the local level. Other ACWF participants echoed their colleague’s viewpoint and contended that the anti-domestic violence agenda should link up to the state’s current emphasis on “building a harmonious society.” They suggested that within this framework, domestic violence could be discussed more legitimately as a threat to family and social harmony and this would increase the ability to gain support from the government.
A popular strategy used by the ACWFs participating in the DVN project to promote public advocacy against domestic violence is the “five family virtues” competition. This is a nationwide grassroots-level campaign promoted by both the ACWF and another state propaganda agency; it advocates respect for the elderly, care for the young, benign treatment of family members and friendly interactions with the neighbors. In essence, it is focused on fostering harmonious relationships both in the family and community. In Yanqin county, a rural area of Beijing where DVN collaborates with the local ACWF to carry out one of its community intervention projects, the participant ACWF incorporates “freedom from domestic violence” as a new criterion in the evaluation of the “five virtues” model family (Li 2003). The campaign also includes domestic violence public education and encourages family members to strengthen communication among them through family-centered competitions (Zhao 2002). However, the “virtues” are often encouraged in the wife rather than the husband, since most of them are regarded as women’s obligations and duties. The model family is often selected according to the woman’s performance as well (Bu, DVN website).

At the Youanmen sub-district in Beijing, another site of DVN’s community intervention projects, the message advocated by DVN is also transformed when transmitted to the community through state institutions. In the domestic violence handouts disseminated to the Youanmen residents by the Youanmen sub-district committee, DVN’s main partner in this project, I found that the rhetoric of family and harmony had replaced human rights. Gender is also treated in a rather simplistic way. The handouts advocate a “harmonious” family, where family members respect and regard each other as equal partners, and praise the “harmonious” family as a model for all the society to emulate. To achieve harmony, family members are encouraged to improve their communication skills and parents especially are admonished to care for their children. The handouts insert the gender perspective promoted by the DVN and discuss it mainly in the sense of gender stereotypes of a traditional family structure. To distinguish sex from gender, the English terminology of “gender” and “sex” is quoted. However, feminist criticism of gender as a power structure is totally omitted. Instead, domestic violence is suggested as a result of poor communication skills and as a
characteristic of outdated family structures following traditional gender roles. That
domestic violence is primarily committed against women is an implicit message in the
handouts since they address the family as a unit and prioritize the progress of family as
the goal of anti-DV initiatives. Also, the handouts seem more intent on protecting
children from corporal punishment, a widely normalized practice in Chinese families,
rather than protecting women from male violence.

At both the Yanqin and Youanmen project site, two batterers’ counseling
programs, one called “the harmonious family development team” and the other called
“the happy family development team,” are being implemented. Although the male
psychologist who runs both programs for DVN is a feminist and teaches gender theory to
the male batterers (Tao 2003), the original focus on women’s rights and empowerment
promoted by DVN largely is replaced by a new emphasis on harmony and family stability.

This evidence suggests that the gender and human rights discourses are adjusted
deliberately by participants from the ACWF and state agencies in order to mainstream
DVN’s anti-domestic violence agenda into their institutions. Their preference for the
“harmony” rhetoric suggests resistance to the emphasis on individual rights embodied by
the gender and human rights frame. One scholar argues that in Chinese culture, “the idea
of the individual was not absent: but it was of an order of importance secondary to a
family-based community system which differentiated between roles and abilities” (Kent
1993, quoted in Donnelly 1999, 77). A major challenge to the human rights frame from
Asian societies revolves around the perceived conflict between “rights” and “duties.” As
Donnelly has summarized, “traditional Asian societies were structured around duties, not
rights, and any rights held by individuals, families, or communities were largely
dependent on the discharge of duties. Essential to any plausible conception of human
rights however, is the claim that all human beings have certain rights prior to and
irrespective of their discharge of social duties” (1999, 78). Since feminist gender and
human rights rhetoric centralizes women and their individual rights, both might be
perceived as incongruent with China’s traditional values.

The vitality of the harmony rhetoric also reflects the shifting ideology of China’s
new leadership. “Building a harmonious society” is a current goal and slogan proposed
by President Hu Jintao at the 16th National Congress of the CCP. In Hu’s words, the harmonious society is one characterized by “democracy and governance by law, equality and justice, honesty and friendly love, dynamism and energy, stability and orderliness,” and one where “humans and nature live in harmony with each other” (Hu 2005, quoted in Qin 2005, 14). To achieve the socialist version of a harmonious society, President Hu outlined a number of priorities in China’s development plans and exhorted both the government and civil society to work toward these goals. The “harmonious society” agenda includes the tasks to maintain a sustained, high speed, balanced and healthy economic growth rate; to realize a socialist democratic governance where diverse political, social and economic relations and interests exist in harmony and balance; to strengthen the rule of law; to enhance socialist moral education and promote public virtues; to defend and realize social equality and justice through redistribution policies and social security programs; to stimulate the society’s creativity and energy; to improve society building and social management; to deal effectively with people’s internal conflicts and complaints; to strengthen engineering of a healthy eco-system and improve environmental management; and to maintain social stability and guarantee the “harmony” project with a fundamental infrastructure (Hu 2005, quoted in Qin 2005, 15-26).

The slogan is proposed by the state to address increasing class cleavages and social conflicts caused by the country’s drastic and uneven transition to the capitalist market economy. Set against China’s rapid economic development in recent years, the newly defined focus on the building of a harmonious society reveals the state’s anxiety about and concern for the country’s political stability under increasing social pressures associated with its fast-pace and audacious reforms in the economic realm (Jia 2005). The emphasis on harmony articulates the state’s intention to appease rising social unease, to reassert its political legitimacy, and to prevent eruptions of political upheavals that may devastate the economy and even disrupt its leadership. The “harmony” project is promoted simultaneously as a policy vision, social aspiration, and moral exhortation. It calls for a broad range of social, political, and educational measures and is intended to involve and mobilize the mass society. Within this scheme, family and community are
percieved as important elements to the building of a harmonious society because their moral beliefs, stability, and management at the base of social structure affect the harmony of the entire society (Fu 2005, 191-95). As a key implementer of the state policy agenda, ACWF has been carrying out numerous programs to promote “harmony” at the community and family levels, such as the “five virtue family” and “peace village” programs. These programs are largely implemented as morality projects that are designed to encourage virtuous practices such as respect for the young and old, respect for the spouse, friendliness towards the neighbors, concern for the poor and the sick, willingness to lend a hand of help and other behaviors in the family and community.

Given ACWF’s own investment in the state discourse of “harmonious society” as a state policy promoter, it was not surprising that at the gender workshop I observed, many ACWF participants advocated the merging of anti-DV rhetoric and activism into the mainstream harmony discourse. Though they also agree with the gender power and human rights frame advocated by DVN, the state discourse competed equally if not more for their attention. Within this state-centered frame, some ACWF cadres re-interpret the priority of anti-DV initiatives to move them from protecting women’s rights to preserving the family. One cadre pointed out that when addressing the issue, one should not put all the blame on men and should avoid being too provocative, because it might cause the dismantling of a family and result in numerous harms. Another young ACWF cadre working in a rural project stated that to facilitate the harmony of family and society was her main goal. If the family fell apart, she added, that would bring a lot of social problems.

The “harmony” rhetoric, I argue, militates against DVN’s gender and human rights advocacy, as it shifts the priority from protecting women’s rights to preserving family unity. One NGO activist distinguishes the woman-centered approach from the family-centered approach to domestic violence intervention by pointing out that while the former approach is aimed at enhancing women’s autonomy and ultimately elevating women’s social status, the latter approach may reinforce women’s victimization by pressuring them to stay for the sake of the family (X.Y. Chen 2002). The “harmony” frame also privileges mediation as a desirable strategy. As Joseph Chan points out, “in
the Confucian view, we should strive to resolve conflicts first by means of education, mediation, and compromise in order to preserve the spirit of mutual caring and trust” (1999, 237). Mediation is actually a long-standing approach to domestic violence intervention in many institutions, such as the ACWF. As one Chinese activist cautions, “the major purpose of mediation is to induce reconciliation, but the majority of batterers perpetrate violence to maintain control in the marriage, to maintain an imbalanced power structure” (M. Chen 2003, 85). The concept of harmony in Chinese culture, offers Peerenboom, despite its philosophical doctrines of interpersonal respect, care and propriety, also has a deeply coercive element, as it often requires a unification of interests into “a single, cohesive whole” bridging the individual and community (1998, cited in Angle 2002, 234). In the context of domestic violence intervention, the “harmony” frame is often interpreted by state agency workers as the paramount imperative to preserve the family and defend its stability. It may or may not prioritize women’s rights and interests, even though domestic violence is also simultaneously and increasingly recognized as a rights and gender issue, since the concept of harmony itself is not founded on a feminist or human rights critique of violence against women.

**Comprehensive Social Management**

Another growing discourse distracting from the gender and human rights perspective advocated by DVN is the “comprehensive management of public order” frame adopted by most local anti-domestic violence policies and legislation which have proliferated around the country. It is a fairly recent development spearheaded and pushed by the ACWF. DVN has also invested significantly in collaborating with the ACWF to promote this approach.

As early as 1995, Hunan ACWF raised the issue of domestic violence to the provincial government urging it to take legislative action. Due to ACWF’s advocacy, in 1996 the municipal government of Changsha city, the capital of Hunan province, issued a policy paper prescribing “Several Regulations with Regard to the Issue of Preventing and Stopping Domestic Violence” (Yuan and Rong 2003, 266). In 2000, Hunan province passed the first local legislative act against DV in the country, entitled “Resolutions
Regarding How to Prevent and Stop Domestic Violence” (Rong and Yuan 2003; Rong 2005). Though ACWF is not part of the legal system, it often participates in legal processes as a policy advocate. Legal counseling for woman is a core aspect of ACWF’s outreach activities. In some regions, the judicial system also collaborates with the local ACWF in the processing and sentencing of domestic violence cases.117

The 1996 and 2000 regulations on domestic violence enacted by the Hunan government, which were enacted before the first-time inclusion of anti-domestic violence clauses in the Marriage Law and Women’s Rights and Interest Law amendments in 2001, indicates that local legislation might be a more achievable policy goal than enacting a comprehensive national law. As a matter of fact, many places have followed in Hunan’s footsteps by passing domestic violence regulations and developing policy papers through local state functionaries. As of the end of 2006, more than 23 provincial, municipal and autonomous district governments had enacted some type of regulations and policy injunctions exclusively addressing the issue of domestic violence (B.J. Chen 2001, 71). A significant number of these legal acts were passed by the provincial national congress and, therefore, amount to de facto law. Other regulations are mostly issued as a joint policy statement by a mix of state functionaries, such as the public security system, people’s court and ACWF, to stimulate social intervention against domestic violence. Though they are not laws per se, they nevertheless constitute a quasi-legal regulatory framework and carry the authoritative tone of a state order.

To DVN, the mushrooming of local legislation on domestic violence constitutes precious sparks that can potentially light a prairie fire. The spread of local legislative initiatives builds crucial momentum from the bottom up to support DVN’s advocacy for a domestic violence law at the national level. Therefore, DVN also takes an active role in promoting this trend through direct advocacy activism and networking with the ACWF. According to its own review of past activism, DVN has contributed direct assistance and

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117 For example, since 1997, Xiangfan city’s middle court has invited ACWF cadres to participate as “guest jury members” in the jurisdiction of cases concerning marital and family disputes. In other places, the ACWF joins with the judicial system to establish “appraisal centers for domestic-violence related injuries,” such as in Qingdao city. Such centers issue documents that can be used as legitimate evidence to prosecute DV batterers in the courts, see W. Chen 2003, 245.
advice in the drafting of at least four provincial level regulations concerning the prevention and control of domestic violence. Urged by DVN advocates, many ACWF participants in the network have also undertaken the initiative of lobbying their local governments and their efforts have led to further legislative outcomes in different parts of the country (Harness and Chan 2006, 13-18).

However, the local legislation does not share the same feminist and human rights frame on domestic violence as DVN. Most of the laws define domestic violence as an issue of “comprehensive management of public order.” Hunan province, where the first local legislation against domestic violence was passed, sets a guiding example. The 2000 Resolution promulgated by the Standing Committee of the People’s Congress of Hunan Province states that

“state organs, social organizations, entrepreneurial and state-owned units and other institutions shall devote attention to enhancing civility in family life, promote equality between men and women, advocate a new socialist culture emphasizing respect for the elderly, care for the young and harmonious relations in the family, and incorporate the issue of preventing and stopping domestic violence into the realm of comprehensive management of public order” (quoted in Chen et al. 2005, 283).

“Comprehensive management” is a state-sponsored agenda aimed at social control. Unlike the Western law and order approach, the Chinese agenda emphasizes both social-educational actions and formal legal actions. It is also a mass campaign as the state mobilizes, directs and coordinates an extensive spectrum of social institutions in action (Keith et al. 2003, 40). This strategy actually complements the state’s current focus on building a harmonious society as a means to offset the destabilizing effects of China’s economic reforms. The framing of domestic violence as a “comprehensive management” issue, like the harmony frame, speaks of the ACWF’s and other sympathetic agency’s efforts to connect domestic violence intervention to the state institutional agenda. It is intended to ensure institutional attention and action, given that this state-directed agenda is often treated as part of their “work” by responsible agencies.

This frame clearly challenges the notion of domestic violence as a private issue and also manifests a resoluteness to intervene against domestic violence. In this respect, the local regulations seem to offer an effective response to the request for public
intervention demanded by human rights advocates of DVN. For example, the Hunan Resolution cited above designates legal responsibilities to a variety of criminal justice agencies and requires them to coordinate with each other. To insure organizational responsibility, many regulations also hold non-responding agencies accountable. In the 2004 Resolutions on the Prevention and Control of Domestic Violence passed by the Standing Committee of the People’s Congress of Shandong Province, one article stipulates that “with regard to those actors who have direct legal responsibility to stop and address domestic violence behavior but fail to conjure up such responses and therefore cause the worsening of the problem and serious results, they should be held legally accountable by law” (quoted in Chen et al. 2005, 304).

However, while these regulations quite successfully destabilize the private/public dichotomy that have traditionally held back institutional intervention, they give paramount importance to maintaining social stability and public order rather women’s human rights. Though the rights rhetoric is visible, the rhetoric usually only acknowledges domestic violence as a violation of the individual’s bodily rights from physical violence and restraint. Also, the gender focus is significantly eclipsed by a language focused on “family members” and the “family.” The predominant interest of these regulations lies in criminalizing and controlling domestic violence as an element of social disturbance rather than as a patriarchal practice that enforces and perpetuates women’s subordination. For example, the 2001 Resolutions on the Prevention and Control of Domestic Violence passed by the Standing Committee of the People’s Congress of Ningxia Autonomous District urges grassroots social institutions to “carry out propaganda and education about family virtues, organize activities to encourage the development of civilized families, mediate in a timely manner in domestic disputes and resolve conflicts immediately, in order to prevent domestic violence from happening”

118 For example, public security officers should administer an appropriate penalty to batterers and set up case file for those breaking the criminal law; people’s prosecutors should conduct timely investigation in reported cases, make arrests and prosecute alleged defendants according to the law; people’s court have to carry out timely investigations and trials, and also defend the victim’s economic and property rights when claims for civil law compensations and suits for divorce are involved. These legal requirements constitute the core stipulations of all local legislation, though some offer more detailed and broader suggestions than others. See Chen et al. 2005, 283-85.
(quoted in Chen et al. 2005, 267). Within such a frame, domestic violence is viewed essentially as a conflict to be resolved and suppressed to maintain social order. The feminist critique or consciousness is totally abandoned.

The local regulations might offer effective protection to individual women and, in this respect, they can be regarded as significant breakthroughs. However, the motives of intervention and formulation of domestic violence as an issue of comprehensive social management translate into desire for social control and public order rather than for elimination of gender violence as a human rights abuse, the latter being the ultimate goal of DVN’s advocacy. What is troubling is that DVN advocates seem to be accepting of the state’s reframing and have uncritically welcomed local regulations as a positive sign of progress. Their failure to question and contest the state’s construction and approach both contradicts and weakens their emphasis on the gender and human rights frame.

DVN’s Community Intervention Project and the State-Centered Multi-Agency Approach

Since the beginning, a major goal of DVN has been to establish a comprehensive “Chinese” domestic violence intervention model at the community level, hence its “community comprehensive intervention” project, which consists of three pilot studies carried out across three different types of Chinese communities. They are the urban intervention project, the rural intervention project, and the medical intervention project and DVN’s collective efforts to translate their advocacy into practical mechanisms protecting women’s human rights in the community. In particular, DVN seeks to set up a multi-agency network linking a wide range of governmental organizations into a coordinated and comprehensive response to domestic violence. While its efforts are largely successful, these initiatives also unwittingly put a state-centered multi-agency system in place, which might further displace and restrict DVN’s political autonomy.

The rural pilot study is conducted in Yanqin county on the outskirts of Beijing city, a relatively poor Beijing rural area with a population of about 300,000. Through the project initiative, an interagency anti-domestic violence work committee was established with the local government and ACWF in charge of leadership and coordination. By 2004, the project included 36 local agencies representing the local government
administration, criminal justice, law enforcement, ACWF, a broadcast station and other institutional organs (Bu c.2003). An “anti-domestic violence office” that simultaneously operates as a hotline service, legal counseling center, and coordinating center of the multi-agency collaboration also was installed at several sites. Though the office is staffed by ACWF cadres and professionals, its administration is directed by the local government and it enjoys the status of a governmental agency. Most importantly, domestic violence intervention has been incorporated as a “work” issue into the “10-5 National Development Plan for Women and Children at Yanqin county,” a policy platform designed and monitored by the national government. The local county government also has issued a policy paper stating the importance of multi-agency collaboration in interventions against domestic violence against women. It also urges and instructs local institutions to cooperate and coordinate with each other in domestic violence intervention. Such a mechanism successfully mainstreams domestic violence intervention into the daily work routines of the local government. It also has the benefit of harnessing the hierarchical structure and administrative instrument of governmental institutions for educational, service and intervention purposes (Tian c.2003).

In their discussion entitled “creating a rural domestic violence intervention model with Chinese characteristics,” the rural project’s two DVN leaders point out that “when conducting domestic violence projects in the rural area, one cannot alienate the local government and do things only your way. Instead, one should and is also absolutely able to gain their support, build up a friendly collaborative rapport with them. Through a multi-agency network, we are able to coordinate, cooperate and work together” (Zhao and Tian 2003, 385-86). Indeed, DVN invited the Beijing city ACWF’s Rights and Interests department director as a project leader in order to facilitate communication with the county leadership. Since the “project” also promises funding, the Yanqin government agreed to participate. In my interview with Li Xin, a young cadre of the local ACWF at Yanqin, she stressed that the local government’s support was the key to successful implementation of the project. When I went to the Yanqin county anti-domestic violence office, an office staff member who was recruited locally also praised the efficiency of the multi-agency approach. She pointed out that this approach not only significantly
shortened the procedure an aggrieved woman had to go through to get help, it also made intervention more effective with the involvement of the police and support from above (from interview).

At Youan’men sub-district in Beijing, the site of DVN’s urban intervention project, a similar multi-agency network was set up to assure that domestic violence cases are addressed in a timely manner and handled appropriately. This interagency system encompasses the grassroots governance body, police station, court, hospital, judicial bureau, and a number of residential committees located in the community, among others. In the case of the urban project, the approval and presence of the Fengtai district ACWF and government119 on the project coordinating committee provided a significant guarantee of successful implementation. Their involvement designates administrative power to the project and enables it to bring a multitude of community-based institutions to the table. To connect domestic violence intervention to different institutional systems, each participant unit in the network develops work plans, evaluation criteria and intervention protocols. Under the coordination of the project, a collaborative system is fostered among the agencies and the speed of response to domestic violence complaints is significantly enhanced. The network also holds regular work meetings to share experiences, discuss problems and plan new solutions (DVN c.2003a; Qi, Li and Zhu 2003).

One report states that “the establishment of the multi-agency collaborative work model of domestic violence intervention in the community not only rounds up the limited resources scattered across individual institutions into a collective pool, it also constitutes a quite effective mechanism of regulation, monitoring and control to obligate the different institutional organs to perform their duties. Even these sections do not have to address domestic violence as most of them have taken an active approach to intervention by now” (Jin n.d., DVN website). Though the urban project does not set up an anti-domestic violence station as in the rural project, the interagency network mobilized by the DVN project insures that domestic violence intervention is mainstreamed as a work component across every relevant institution. Since 2004, the urban project has established

119 Administratively, the You’anmen sub-district is subordinate to the Fengtai District government.
a new partnership with the Beijing municipal ACWF and also has begun to promote the multi-agency domestic violence intervention model to more sub-districts located in the city (DVN c.2005).

The medical intervention project, unlike the urban and rural project, is focused on incorporating the medical system into multi-agency response to domestic violence. It is also a collaborative project with the San Francisco-based Family Violence Prevention Fund, which is actively promoting its multi-organizational model of domestic violence intervention around the world.¹²⁰ To help Chinese activists implement the project, the Prevention Fund provided DVN with several training manuals developed in the U.S. context. Chinese activists translated these manuals and also edited the materials into handbooks for Chinese audiences in the medical system.

The medical project adopts a similar strategy to the urban and rural project of persuading the system from the top down. To carry out their project at a particular hospital, DVN advocates first had to obtain consent and support from relevant government agencies, because most hospitals in China are still owned by the state. Through negotiations with the Fengtai district government and health bureau facilitated by the Fengtai District ACWF, DVN advocates were granted governmental support and permission to implement the project at the current site, Tie Ying Hospital of Fengtai District. The approval from the district government also helped them to acquire cooperation from the hospital leadership (DVN c.2003b).

To mainstream domestic violence intervention into the medical system, DVN activists not only introduced new practices in medical diagnosis, documentation and filing to the doctors and helped set up an outreach center for reception of domestic violence victims in the hospital. Most importantly, the project has sought to routinize domestic violence intervention in the hospital’s administrative system so as to sustain the

¹²⁰ In 1999, the Fund invited two Women’s College professors for a ten-day domestic violence training workshop in San Francisco in preparation for the set-up of its China program. Later, the San Francisco fund decided to fund a project in Beijing to educate the medical system about domestic violence intervention. Li Hongtong, one of the professors they invited for training in 1999, was chosen as their collaborative partner. At the same time, since the Domestic Violence Project was developing and Li was a key activist participating in the mobilization, the San Francisco Fund agreed to fund the medical project as part of the DVN initiative. Information gathered from interview with Li; also see Yang 2004, 1-2.
intervention work. As in the rural and urban project, a governmental administrative framework in the form of a government-led project coordinating committee guarantees the project a supportive environment (DVN c. 2003b).

If there is a unique Chinese characteristic of the multi-agency approach constructed by DVN’s community intervention projects, it is its state-centered structure. Not only are most agencies in this system state institutions, more importantly, they are bonded and coordinated through the state institutional leadership, whose vertical power hierarchies are reinforced and enforced to ensure the cohesiveness and efficacy of the interagency system. The ACWF plays a critical role in involving other state institutions and promoting the state-centered approach to DVN, because such a model strengthens the ACWF’s institutional relations to other agencies, facilitates its work and is also viewed as an efficient approach to domestic violence intervention. One could argue that DVN’s acceptance and even embrace of this state-centered model is a matter of necessity. Without state support and such a structure in place, DVN would find it difficult to carry out its projects, and be even less likely to mobilize a multi-agency intervention network. The emergence of such a system across the sites of DVN’s community projects is also a significant victory as it attests to the translation of DVN’s advocacy into policy action.

However, as Reinelt rightfully points out, “engaging with the state is a strategy that has risks” (1995, 101). The state-centered multi-agency domestic violence intervention system that evolves out of DVN’s projects poses a profound risk as such a model effectively marginalizes civil society organizations like DVN itself. It will exert pressure on the DVN to modify or assimilate its gender and human rights rhetoric to conform to the “mainstream” (i.e. the state’s discourses), which as I have shown in previous sections, emphasize family harmony, social stability and control of public order over women’s rights. It is dubious whether the DVN will manage to retain and also maximize its own autonomy within the state-centered parameters of engagement it has largely consented to, especially since DVN pursues a cooperative rather than a confrontational politics. At DVN’s annual conference in 2006, one of the organization’s leaders stated that, “In some trainings, some scholars from abroad told our women’s NGOs that to do advocacy is to make your voice heard. If the government disapproves,
we should organize ourselves and even protest against it. That is not viable in our country’s system.” Her speech represents and encapsulates DVN’s non-oppositional advocacy philosophy. Rather than using the gender and rights framework to critique the state and demand response, DVN emphasizes the state’s responsibility and role as the protector of citizens’, especially women’s human rights. Rather than opposing the state, it persuades the state to take action through collaboration and trying to fit its own discourse and strategies to the state’s model. However, how to pursue and preserve DVN’s own agenda if it constantly has to challenge itself rather than challenging the state to change?

Some DVN activists began to voice ambivalence and criticism with regard to the increasingly ACWF-ized composition of its membership and the state-centered multiple-agency model of intervention. One young journalist showed particular concern with the declining space for DVN’s voice as a NGO in such initiatives. She points out that DVN should ask more questions about “what can we gain” and “where is our subjectivity” in promoting such a state-centered intervention mode. She argues that “to say that we should mobilize the government is not to say that we want the government to dominate over our heads, and whenever I hear of the so-called state centered multi-agency collaboration, I always feel kind of….berserk! I feel that this is not our goal, our goal is to develop our agenda and our space…. through the multi-organizational alliance” (from interview).

However, to most DVN activists, to localize (bentuhua) the transnational feminist and human rights agenda of violence against women is to translate it into the state-centered institutional discourse and practice in China. One executive director of DVN Zhang Lixi points out that “bentuhua, bentuhua, of course it means something has to be ‘digested’!….But some fundamental stuff and concepts cannot be touched, like the idea that domestic violence is a violation of women’s human rights and gender inequality, these concepts. But the experience should be transformed (into our own)…” (from interview).

My discussion of DVN’s politics of engagement exactly intends to show that this “experience” or process is a unique product of China’s institutional context. The major goal and challenge of DVN’s social and political translation of transnational feminist ideas is to make them translatable in China’s state-dominated arena of institutional politics. As
Wang Xingjuan, a veteran women’s NGO activist, summarizes, “If you want to exercise your faculties and make change, you have to respect and adjust to the current system, and this is called *bentuhua.*”

**Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed DVN’s efforts to translate the transnational concept of violence against women into local discourses and policies through its gender and human rights advocacy. It examined three areas of DVN’s activism, research, gender training, legal advocacy. It also investigated how DVN engages with the state primarily through collaborations with the ACWF to advance its institutional agenda. However, this politics of engagement has brought in competing discourses to reframe the issue of domestic violence. Also, I analyzed DVN’s community intervention projects to show how DVN’s engagement with the state has produced and promotes a state-centered multi-agency approach to domestic violence intervention. I argued that DVN’s strengthening alliance with the ACWF and deepening cooperation with the state has diluted its advocacy message and may pose serious restrictions on its own autonomy.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: REFLECTING ON TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST POLITICS THROUGH A LOCAL STUDY

My dissertation documents and analyzes the formation and political activism of one women’s non-governmental organization in China, the Domestic Violence Network (DVN) in Beijing. More than a women’s NGO, its development signals, represents and also advances the women’s anti-domestic violence movement in China. Considering the fact that domestic violence was a barely recognized concept and a suppressed issue in public discourse in China at the beginning of the 1990s, the exponential growth of women’s organizing around this cause within a decade and a half, which virtually moved the issue from the back rows to the front rows of local women’s political agenda, is nothing short of remarkable.

This dissertation argues that the rapid growth of the women’s anti-domestic violence movement in China cannot be understood properly if one does not situate this phenomenon in the global context of transnational feminist politics. In tracing the trajectory of the DVN from the 1995 Beijing Conference to its gender and human rights advocacy programs, my dissertation has demonstrated how global-local interactions are inherent in and constitutive of the contemporary women’s anti-domestic violence movement in China at every stage of its development. In the following, I will review my major findings and reflect on a couple of important questions raised by my research.
Transnational Feminist Politics Create New Political Conditions and Resources for Women’s Mobilization at the Local Level

My study finds that women’s mobilization against domestic violence as a distinct priority among a range of women’s issues in Beijing, suggested cogently by the status of the DVN as the only women’s NGO exclusively devoted to the issue in the country, is largely influenced by the construction of violence against women as a central frame by the transnational women’s human rights movement. Framing, as a political “road map” with the deliberate intention to orient a social perspective and organize collective action, performs crucial functions in mobilizing social movements. The transnational feminist frame of violence against women, introduced to Chinese women’s movements through the historical context of the 1995 Beijing Conference, often regarded as the height of the transnational women’s human rights movement, transforms social and state consciousness, elevates the issue of domestic violence from marginalized to accepted discourse, legitimizes and stimulates women’s political anti-domestic violence activism, mobilizes crucial economic resources for the DVN’s broad projects, and also provides conceptual tools for DVN’s local advocacy.

At the Beijing Conference, the insertion of the transnational feminist frame of violence against women into the state’s discourse and the organization of the NGO Forum through a series of preparatory meetings, where an unprecedented number of women around the globe were able to participate as civil society actors, offers two specific and essential political opportunities for the later development of the Domestic Violence Project. The frame of violence against women opens a crucial discursive opportunity for Chinese women to engage and discuss the topic in public. As a global and institutional frame, it encourages women to politicize the issue and also affords significant legitimacy to such acts. The emphasis on NGO participation and the extensive preparatory activities organized for the NGO Forum at the Beijing Conference obliged the Chinese state to allow contingent political openings for non-governmental women’s organizations. Its open acknowledgement of the NGO concept, evidenced in the state’s redefinition of the ACWF as China’s largest women’s NGO, is another discursive
opportunity that has institutional impacts. Without either, the formulation of the DVN as a women’s anti-domestic violence NGO would have been impossible.

Aside from mobilizing women’s commitment to the issue in the NGO sector, the transnational political frame also translates into both economic and political currency for local women’s activism. In the DVN’s case, it is exclusively the international donors’ money that has enabled and sustained the DVN economically as a grant- and project-based NGO. The prioritized status of the issue of violence against women in these donor agencies is directly related to mainstreaming of this issue frame in major international policy papers and documents through the activities of the global women’s human rights movement. The deep relations between Chinese women’s NGOs and international donors and the way that the founding of the DVN was tied to donors’ funding propositions demonstrate the agenda-setting impacts of the “violence against women” frame to mobilize resources for women’s movements worldwide. Taking a range of political and social factors into consideration, the emergence of the DVN in China is nonetheless a significant example of how the funding pattern of international donor agencies responds positively to women’s demands for more resources for anti-gender violence advocacy, outreach and service activism. The globalization of this frame has certainly generated new resources for women’s local anti-violence movements. At the same time, it is also a result of global flows of resources devoted to addressing this issue.

In addition to economic resources, one could also argue that the “violence against women” frame provides political resources as well. The gender and human rights frame promoted by the global women’s movement constitute a crucial conceptual instrument in DVN’s local advocacy, as they provide the organization with internationally supported political platforms to demand institutional action. In particular, they marshal new perspectives and discourses for Chinese women’s movements to engage the state, which tends to percieve “women’s issues” as unique to women as a special interest group and not a problem for “all citizens,” and to regard women’s liberation as a largely resolved problem in socialist system.

The frame of violence against women, as a strategic brainchild as well as an important political achievement of transnational human rights feminisms, once
established at the global policy level undoubtedly shaped new political conditions for women’s movements. Its most significant influence, as my study has shown, perhaps resides in its ability to influence women’s mobilization at the local level.

The Domestic Violence Network as an Interactive Outcome Between Global and Local Actions

As a local mobilization of a global issue frame, the formulation of the Domestic Violence Network in Beijing also illustrates a dynamic process of global-local interactions. Though the transnational feminist frame of violence against women has set local women’s agenda in critical ways, my dissertation stresses that the construction of DVN is essentially an outcome of an active global-local nexus catalyzed by the hosting of the 1995 Beijing Conference in China. This argument means that it takes both global and local actions to make DVN happen and local actions are by no means merely “reactions” to global events and impacts.

First, the discursive interventions affected by the Beijing Conference would not have mobilized local support for the anti-domestic violence cause if the issue were not found by local women activists to be a particular concern to women in their own activist experiences. Second, while the Beijing Conference created precious political opportunities for women’s non-governmental organizing in China, this is not an entirely straightforward outcome, since the Conference did not transform the institutional political structure constraining NGOs’ development in China per se. The government’s approval for NGOs was restricted to a handful of state-designated organizations created deliberately for the Conference, while the “popular” women’s NGOs that already existed were largely excluded from participation. Rather, it is local women activists who took advantage of the NGO momentum and who took various political and economic risks to establish the autonomous genres of NGOs around the time of Beijing Conference, largely inspired by their direct exposure to transnational feminist NGO practices during the preparatory process for the NGO Forum, that has effectively expanded the political space for Chinese women’s non-governmental organizing. Without these trail blazing NGO initiatives on the part of local activists, the space for bottom-up women’s NGOs would
not have opened automatically. Third, though international donors’ funding interests directly triggered the formation of the Domestic Violence Project, its successful mobilization was equally dependent on the more general and diffuse mobilization processes already undertaken by various women’s NGOs and NGO activists in social services, writing and coalition building to address the issue of gender violence after the Beijing Conference. It is rather the latter context of women’s local activism that has provided the critical support base for the Domestic Violence Project. Fourth, after DVN was founded, the centrality of gender and human rights advocacy to the organization’s local anti-domestic violence agenda furthered global feminist campaigns against violence against women by adopting two of its most prominent global frames.

To understand DVN as a result of simultaneous global and local productions advances a dialectical perspective on the global-local nexus. My research also provides an analytical example of how to attend to both the global and local dynamics in the construction of a particular project that is shaped by both.

**Returning to the Inter-Trans-Global Feminisms Debates**

My dissertation is not only a study about the women’s anti-domestic violence movement in contemporary China. My intention also is to examine and reflect on the conceptions and debates surrounding the subject of what I call the “inter-trans-global feminisms” (ITG feminisms) through the window of DVN’s story in China. The global-local interactions I have studied and analyzed in the formulation of the women’s anti-domestic violence movement in China yield several important insights to the current scholarship on ITG feminisms.

Studying women’s political organizing against domestic violence in China as an integral component of the transnational anti-violence against women’s movement, my entire dissertation suggests and cultivates a “locational” conception of ITG feminisms. In particular, I address the prevailing conceptions characterizing most movement studies on transnational feminist politics, which typically concentrate on “global” processes (such as the production of international policy documents), the “global” sites of their activism (such as the United Nations), or the “global” structure of organizing (such as the
transnational advocacy network). Though these studies are definitely important, their emphases on “global” dimensions necessarily push the “local” aspects of ITG feminisms out of focus. My research demonstrates that the local is an important site to understand how global feminist causes, such as violence against women, become perceived as universal concerns, mobilize transnational support and are advanced politically on the ground. It shows that localization, the process undertaken by local women’s organizations and activists to integrate global feminist claims and practices into the vocabulary, consciousness and social and political apparatuses related to a specific locality, is a fundamental mechanism to the advancement of the political workings of ITG feminisms on a global scale. The locational approach is not proposed to replace the “global” approach, instead, it advances a relational perspective of both the local and global but also makes a particular point about the importance of local process to the global dynamics of ITG feminisms. By focusing on local instance of women’s anti-domestic violence movement in China, I offer an alternative, less examined but nonetheless important angle to comprehend how ITG feminisms foster women’s movements on a global scale.

Set against my own review of the conflicting conceptions of the global-local linkage, which frame and drive the tensions within feminist scholarly debates on “global sisterhood,” “global feminism” and “transnational feminism” (Chapter 1), my research suggests that a situational approach might be more productive than the current one based primarily on political ideologies. While it is certainly important to find an accurate terminology and to discuss what should constitute an ideal global-local praxis in ideal transnational feminist practice at the theoretical level, an equally significant task is to examine feminist knowledge in context and to reflect on the theoretical through the experiential. My research exposes an intricate and often contradictory global-local interface that does not fit easily into any individual conceptual model with regard to the global-local relations in the current ITG feminisms debates, but one that instead challenges the increasing ideological differentiation between anti-colonialist and pro-human rights feminists.
Though the Morganian idea of a “universal sisterhood” is vehemently repudiated by feminist critics for its promotion of a transcendental politics, my research suggests that the transnational NGO Forum created by the Beijing Conference might have been liberating to Chinese women exactly because it allowed them to transcend their “differences” and dialogue with other women in a temporary space-time. These Chinese activists’ excitement during the Beijing Conference and their support for the international feminist anti-gender violence agenda were significantly derived from and associated with a feeling of “sisterhood” with women and women’s movements worldwide, even though most of these Chinese women have never read or heard of Morgan’s or other feminists’ discussions of global sisterhood. To them, sisterhood was an experience of solidarity they had lived, witnessed, participated in, and shared with women from countries worldwide during the Beijing process. It was also an exhilarating, empowering, and emancipatory collective experience—the underlying spirit that inspired and enabled the making of connections between Chinese and global women’s movements through shared interests in combating gender violence. This experience did not originate in theoretical knowledge of “sisterhood” politics as is debated in the Western academy, and therefore should not be treated as an equivalent of Morgan’s political model of “sisterhood” and evaluated within its structure.

However, even though “sisterhood” as lived experience and “sisterhood” as a theory should be distinguished, they are not entirely separate. Chinese women’s positive experience of the sisterhood politics at the Beijing Conference and its political impact validates Morgan’s theory that gender solidarity can mobilize and consolidate feminist struggles across different locations into a global force. Morgan’s theory also explains how it is possible for women’s movements from diverse histories and backgrounds to reach consensus. Chinese women’s identification with their global “sisters” is, first and foremost, identification with gender, but this does not mean that Chinese women are not aware of the differences among women nor that gender alone is sufficient to the formation of political bonds between women. Rather, Chinese women’s embrace of their global sisters at Beijing, despite immense ideological, cultural, and social differences and lack of almost any kind of interaction between Chinese movements and the outside prior
to the Conference, demonstrates Morgan’s fundamental premise that gender provides an essential and probably the most powerful identity for women’s mobilization on a global scale because it enables women to rise above their other differences for common ground. The ability to identify with each other over enormous differences elicits a sense of empowerment because it creates dialogues, builds bridges, makes comrades, and generates support.

However, Morgan’s model errs primarily in its failure to acknowledge and account for sisterhood as a process and product of political construction. Chinese women developed and expressed a strong sense of sisterhood with feminists from other worlds in the context of the Beijing Conference, and it is this context that has shaped the primacy of gender identification to women activists involved in this event from across the globe. Here, the model of strategic “global feminisms” espoused by the international women’s human rights movement is most helpful, as it renders visible the context and process that produced bonds of “sisterhood” among women at the Beijing Conference. This model views the “global” arena as a critical terrain to the advancement of women’s interests and directs the human rights and gender mainstreaming strategies that created important political platforms for the globalization of feminist movements. The Beijing conference embodies the “global feminisms” envisioned by feminist human rights activists, where “global feminisms” are the strategic goal as well as the product of successful networking, coordinating and collaborations among numerous forces of “local feminisms” aspiring for global impacts. In my research, this making of “global feminisms” proves crucial to the making of local anti-domestic violence feminism in China. The Beijing Conference is the key nexus to both the globalization and localization of the feminist human rights and anti-gender violence agenda.

However, though the strategic model of “global feminisms” propagated by the international women’s human rights movement underscores the importance of feminist strategic organizing and the creation of a universal framework at the global level, it limits critical inquiry of the powerer relations internal to this mobilization process of women’s movements. It is here that the model of “transnational feminisms” and its postcolonial
critique of the global human rights feminism provide useful insights and critical reflections.

“Transnational” feminists reprimand “global” feminists for facilitating Western hegemony and cultural imperialism through imposing Western visions and principles as “global” standards over the non-West. They particularly attack the global-local relationships constructed by global human rights feminism for replicating unequal power dynamics between the global North and South. Their critique sensitized my research to the social, political, and economic contexts that shaped Chinese women activists’ engagement with the human rights frame for the issue of gender violence. My research indicates that the mainstreaming of the domestic violence issue in Chinese women’s movements depended crucially on a group of elite Chinese feminists’ participation and identification with global human rights feminism during the Beijing Conference. Language abilities, advanced education, urban identity, political experience, and economic liaisons with foreign donors gave these women access to this global women’s event, while barring an enormous class of other Chinese women from participating. This suggests that non-Western women have to share some essential identity markers with Western middle-class feminists to be included in “global feminisms.”

Additionally, the economic dominance of Western donor agencies largely engineered and facilitated the translocation and popularization of the anti-VAW agenda in China. Western donors’ control of funding attributed to them significant power in the decision making process of local activists and movements, who depend primarily on Western money for their political organizing. The formation of the DVN shows how local activists’ critical needs for economic support determined their reliance on Western donor agencies. This economic relationship enabled the latter to be able to apply considerable influence to the making of the domestic violence project through their funding role.

These aspects reveal a certain degree of Western dominance in global feminist interactions, validifying transnational feminists’ suspicion of global feminists’ claims of “sisterhood.” However, although transnational feminists consider the universal human rights framework to be an instrument of Western hegemony, my research suggests that it
is rather *how* the human rights frame is circulated on the global scale that is hegemonic. This process is largely fueled by the hegemonic economic power of the West and is also implicated in Western institutions’ hegemonic interest in the promotion of a democratic civil society and human rights values. One cannot and should not ignore local agents’ own consensus and active construction of this process. Violence against women is by no means an agenda “imposed” on the DVN activists, though there is considerable influence from the global side. In addition to the availability of funding, Chinese activists’ concern with the issue, interest in its research, perception of the issue as a serious attack on gender equality and commitment to NGO building furnish equally if not more fundamentally important motivations for their commitment to the issue of domestic violence.

My research also indicates that the “global” is not always a more powerful category than the “local.” My analysis of how the local institutional discourses and practices are forcing the global human rights and gender rhetoric advocated by DVN into greater obscurity suggests that power is contextual and a process of production and reproduction rather than a fixed asset belonging to a fixed source.

In particular, my research provides a concrete example and alternative perspective to reassess the critique of universalism and essentialism within debates about ITG feminisms, which center on the human rights paradigm promoted by the transnational women’s human rights movement. While the “global feminisms” debaters argue that the human rights rhetoric links women from diverse localities into a global coalition via a common political platform, the “transnational feminisms” debaters accuse the universalist rights rhetoric of being a form of Western cultural imperialism due to its Western conceptual origins, which, in Grewal’s words, “elided the diversity of women’s agency in favor of a universalized Western model of women’s liberation that celebrates individuality and modernity” (1994, 17). My dissertation suggests that a refusal to look beyond the origins of human rights ideas also inadvertently denies women’s agency in acts of human rights practices, especially in non-Western localities. My research constitutes and promotes a discursive and investigative shift away from a focus on the “origins” and “contents” of the human rights frame to its traveling trajectory and actual deployment.
In the context of the Chinese women’s anti-domestic violence movement, the human rights rhetoric is engaged by local activists consciously and primarily as a powerful counter rhetoric to dispute the “privatizing” frames that treat domestic violence as trivial matters and impede intervention efforts. Individual rights are primarily asserted to the state to challenge institutional failures to punish harmful practices against women. Also, assertion of individual rights often coexists with rather than excludes concerns for family and community well being. The human rights frame does not contain nor does it dictate local women’s agency and political agenda, rather it is employed as an instrument to facilitate political challenge against the issue of domestic violence, which has historically been ignored as a violation of women’s basic rights because of the emphasis on the family and community over the individual in China. Indeed, in the Chinese context, gender rather than human rights seems to have offered a more useful and popular frame for local activists, although the rights rhetoric also proves to be central to the advancement of local activists’ claims. Therefore, to conceive and critique human rights as a Western concept only dismisses non-Western practice of the concept as an act of political agency and also refuses to see human rights as a constantly evolving and modifiable concept.

My research demonstrates that the formulation of a Chinese anti-domestic violence movement embodied different types of global-local politics, which can not be contained within any single explanatory model provided by Morgan’s formula of global sisterhood, human rights feminists’ strategic sisterhood or postcolonial critics’ transnational feminism. Choosing one standpoint over the other will reinforce the blindspots of each theory rather than diminish them. The concept of ITG feminisms was useful because it allowed me to incorporate important elements from different perspectives and enabled my research to reveal and illustrate the different realities and dynamics perceived from diverse angles without getting bogged down in debates or forced into a limiting decision to keep only the elements of one of the competing perspectives. Rather than eliminating one over the other, they are applied to reflect on and advance each other. The concept is facilitative of inclusive conversations among feminists and it also promotes a mixed theoretical model that may be best capable of
capturing the complexities, contradictions and ambiguities that make up the messy reality we call experience.

In addition, by studying how transnational feminist ideas and practices transplant from their multiple origins into a specific locality, my dissertation advances a “traveling” and “translational” conception of ITG feminisms which emphasizes the process of global-local interactions as a fundamental component. Both the concept of “traveling” and that of “translation” acknowledge the idea of origins without reinforcing it. Instead, they shift our attention away from the origins of ideas and practices to their movement, making the routes of traveling and its production as well as the products of translation the subjects of study. My dissertation suggests that traveling and translation, physically, intellectually, and politically, are crucial and ubiquitous forms of linkage connecting women and feminist causes from different localities together into ITG feminisms. Translation, in particular, which describes and always involves the act of rendering something with alien origins into a product of local resonance, serves a fundamental mechanism of enabling, maintaining and deepening the global-local linkages fostered by ITG feminisms. It is through cultural and political acts of translation that ITG feminisms accrue global momentum, the human rights paradigm develops into universal practice, and violence against women becomes advanced into an international concern. As Susan Gal points out in a recent article, “world-traveling, non-Western, and minority women are producing faithlessly translated or reframed feminisms. Such approaches are more meaningful in relation to their own (multi)cultural contexts and particular, albeit complexly aggregated and mediated, histories. They are also more useful in relation to developing local and transnational strategies that address their specific experiences of patriarchies and global capital” (2003, 81).

However, my dissertation also suggests that though translation should be regarded as an act of agency because it is often “faithless” to its origins, such agency does not necessarily equal resistance. Chapter 6 reveals that as a political practice, the process and product of translation is also shaped by the contingent context. The transformation of gender and human rights advocacy into harmony building, public order and state-centered interventional agenda in China is not a product to be celebrated. It suggests that
universalism never just universalizes, it shapes but also is reshaped by the place to which it is introduced.

My conception of ITG feminisms as traveling and translational processes is only preliminary, but it provides an experimental framework to explore issues of location, global-local linkages and agency in ITG feminist practice.

Lessons and Questions

The story of the DVN in Beijing shows that transnational feminist politics alters state-centered political opportunity structures in considerable ways for women’s movements at the local level. However, as it empowers women in relation to the state, it also reinforces the state as the target of women’s political organizing. DVN’s experience of engagement with the state reveals significant limitations of the institutional advocacy approach promoted by the transnational feminist human rights movement with regard to its sustained ability to pressure and challenge the state. DVN’s struggles to translate gender and human rights advocacy into local institutional discourses and practices exposes a contradictory result of ITG feminisms pursued by the women’s human rights movement. That is, rather than enhancing transnational feminist linkages across localities, it actually deepens women’s reliance on state apparatuses for political results.

Postcolonial transnational feminist critics are incisive in problematizing the compulsory relation between nation and women shaped by feminist human rights activism (see Chapter 1). However, rather than blaming the rights paradigm or the gender-centered frame for naturalizing the notion of the state, I think one has to re-examine and reflect critically on the elite politics and composition of transnational feminist alliances and movements. If there is a so-called transnational feminist public sphere even in a most contingent and transient sense, such as the one symbolized by the NGO Forum at the 1995 Beijing Conference, it is a space constructed largely by educationally, politically, socially, culturally or economically elite women from both developed and underdeveloped countries. As I see it, this elite base of the transnational human rights movement is directly related to the emphasis on institutional advocacy, which, in turn, requires and promotes elite strategies. However, such an elite politics
might impede ITG feminisms to mobilize mass support and thereby eventually constrain the ability of women’s movements to influence institutional practices even with globally accepted frames and rhetoric. In the case of my research, as DVN focuses on elite advocacy without investing equal energy in developing popular support for its cause, it becomes increasingly vulnerable to the state’s co-optation.

My dissertation also highlights several issues that require further research. First, DVN represents an intriguing case of a Chinese women’s NGO. As a non-governmental organization, it seeks political autonomy. As a movement organization concentrating on institutional politics, it relies on friendly liaisons with the state to pursue its claims. How does DVN negotiate these two quests? How will the non-oppositional approach to the state both facilitate and restrict DVN’s development as a NGO? Much feminist research indicates that state institutions and their policy-making channels, such as law, constitute primary targets of women’s movements and demands regarding issues of gender-based violence (e.g. Bush 1992; Burgess-Jackson 1999; Bevacqua 2000). However, engagement with the state and formal social institutions for reform and revolutionary purposes in the area of gender equality are often perceived by critics to have contributed to the deradicalization of feminist politics, the diminishing of autonomy of women’s movements, and the bureaucratization of mainstream feminist organizations (Barbara 1989; Katzenstein 1998; Banaszak et al. 2003).

In her comparison of the battered women’s movement in the U.S. and feminist campaigns against dowry murder in India, Diane Mitsch Bush (1992) suggests that it is often difficult for women’s movements to seek both protection and empowerment from the state, as protection measures are often granted without “facilitating empowerment for individual women nor producing social change in the structure within and between family, state, and economy as institutions” (590-91). When feminist demands are partially or largely accepted by the state, the movement’s ability to control a feminist definition of women’s issues often decreases whereas the state’s capacity to regulate a feminist agenda becomes strengthened. Her observation is exemplary of many feminists’ concern that effecting social change through the state has serious limitations, even though most researched states are liberal democracies. DVN’s organizing efforts against
domestic violence against women in China suggest that the state continues to be a central
terrain for the social struggles of women’s movements. Indeed, given China’s
authoritarian political regime, engagement with the state is often forced rather than being
a strategic choice. Therefore, research on how a civil society women’s organization seeks
both protection and empowerment from the state in a non-democratic context becomes all
the more critical to our deeper and wider understanding of the full range of complexities
in the engagements between women’s movements and the state.

Second, the state discourse of “harmonious society” has facilitated DVN’s
consciousness raising efforts and policy advocacy activism to state institutions. But,
while the harmony discourse repudiates violence in the family and can effectively apply
to the condemnation of wife abuse in the family, it can also be interpreted to prioritize
family unity and stability over the wife’s individual rights and well-being in the domestic
sphere. The fact that some ACWF cadres have chosen to interpret the “harmony”
discourse in the light of family preservation rather than women’s rights already points to
the ambivalence of individual rights in the notion of harmony. Therefore, it is important
to research how the concept of harmony is defined by both the state and civil society
agents who are employing this discourse. In what ways is this discourse helping or
obstructing the recognition of women’s rights in the family? How to redefine the concept
of harmony in China in relation to the gender and human rights frame so that the need for
family stability and the need to protect an individual’s rights to personal integrity and
freedom from violence can be balanced?

Third, my study shows that philanthropic foundations are crucial agents in the
promotion of transnational feminist campaigns against violence against women. How
does one theorize the relationship between foundations and feminist movements? In the
case of the women’s anti-domestic violence movement in China, how will foundations’
involvement continue to shape the political agenda and practices of local women’s NGOs?
Fourth, how relevant are scholarly debates about ITG feminisms to a local women’s
movement that actually constitutes a component of the transnational feminist politics
described and argued among feminist scholars? How would local activists conceive ITG
feminisms and what terminology would they apply if they were asked?
Summary of Contributions and Significance

My dissertation demonstrates how the politics of what I call inter-trans-global feminisms, which created the transnational women’s human rights movement in recent decades, constitute a new context for women’s movement politics around the world. By examining the formulation of women’s anti-domestic violence movement in China in relation to feminist framing of violence against women as an international policy issue at the global level, my research contributes a new theoretical understanding to both local and global women’s movements. On the one hand, as a study of a Chinese women’s movement, it sheds important empirical light on a contemporary example of women’s political organizing in China in an issue area that rarely has been studied before and which represents a new generation of women’s activism in the recently developed NGO sector. More importantly, my dissertation opens social movement studies of Chinese feminisms to a frame of analysis larger than the state, as it provides a systematic exploration of frames, political opportunities and resources related significantly to global conditions. On the other hand, my dissertation also illuminates and theorizes the local as an important site to the ongoing formation of ITG feminisms, shifting attention away from the focus on feminist politics at the global policy level alone in explaining the global impact of ITG feminisms. It also foregrounds local activists, those who work on promoting global feminist causes in a specific locality, as extremely important but often undervalued agents in transnational women’s movements. Most significantly, my dissertation provides a tentative attempt to integrate an interactively relational perspective on the global-local nexus in feminist conceptions of ITG feminisms, advocating a processual rather than an ideological approach to feminist theorizing on this subject. In particular, it advances the concept of ITG feminisms as a process of production and reproduction by suggesting traveling and translation as two essential mechanisms to the movement of ITG feminisms.


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Appendix A

Consent Process of My Interviews

In compliance with responsible research practices, I presented my dissertation fieldwork plan for review of human subjects research by the Ohio State University Institutional Review Board. This application process helped enormously with my preparation for fieldwork, as it required me to think through the ethical implications of my research and have a plan mapped out before departing and interacting with the organization and people I planned to study. An important question raised by the application points to the issue of “consent.” Asking the research participant to sign a consent form seems to be an ideal approach as it ensures a documented proof of assent and obliges the researcher to make clear the terms and conditions of the research in writing. However, after a thoughtful consideration, I petitioned for waiver of documentation of consent and was granted the waiver by the review board at OSU.

I opted not to use a consent form but instead to obtain verbal consent for two important reasons. The primary reason is that China is not yet a country with open democracy. Though the country seems to be making a tremendous progress towards democratization through its current economic and political reforms, it is still an autocracy. Free speech, though a constitutional principle, is inflected with the dominant ideology and could be jeopardized by undue censorship. Second, according to my preliminary research, domestic violence has only begun to appear in public discussion in China in the 1990s. Thus, I speculated that this issue would be considered a “sensitive” and “uncomfortable” topic for people to talk about. If I were to approach with a consent form, it might arouse profound unease, anxiety and suspicion, and quite understandably so,
because the form will expose their identity and their participation in my domestic violence research.

When I came into initial contact with Network/Research Center for Combating Domestic Violence (DVN) in Beijing through the email address published on their website, they were very friendly and welcomed me for a visit. Later, when I arrived in Beijing and went to their office, I talked to all the office staff, including the executive director of the administrative team, introducing myself, presenting my research plan, offering to do volunteer work and asking for permission to conduct interviews and observations. They kindly accepted me and allowed me to observe and participate in a variety of activities both at the office and the organization’s other program sites. Shortly after I joined DVN as a volunteer/researcher, the office provided me with the DVN member list and contact information I requested earlier, with which I contacted members to interview.

While establishing contact, disseminating information about my research and seeking consent to participate, I used the following recruitment letter (in Chinese). In this letter, I explained the purpose and goals of my research plan, extended a cordial invitation, described the interview procedure and gave a couple of sample questions, and emphasized their right of choice about whether or not to participate, their freedom to withdraw, and their right to privacy of information. I also revealed my personal contact information as well as those of both my advisor and staff person at the Office of Responsible Research Practices at OSU. I included this information to provide alternative venues for the participants to verify my background and to learn more about their rights in the process. While some participants indicated consent through email or over the phone before we have actually met in person, the majority agreed to have an interview with me after they met me and became familiar with me through DVN’s activities. Below is the English translation of the Chinese letter I used to recruit and acquire verbal consent from the DVN activists I contacted for interviews.
Recruiting Letter

My name is Lu Zhang. I am a currently enrolled doctoral student of the Department of Women’s Studies at the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, of the United States. For my doctoral dissertation, I will stay in China from January 2006 through Autumn 2006 to conduct my research fieldwork.

My dissertation studies women’s domestic violence activism in contemporary China. Other recent studies have pointed out that women’s organizing, at both the grassroots and the institutional levels, has been steadily growing since the mid-1980s in China. Domestic violence, now an international policy issue, has mobilized incredible attention and activism from Chinese women in recent years. In looking at women’s domestic violence activism in contemporary China, I address two major questions: 1) What factors explain the emergence and form of women’s domestic violence activism from 1990 to the present? 2) Has transnational feminism played any role in the emergence of women’s domestic violence activism in China? By transnational feminism, I am thinking of the phenomenon of women’s coalitions and conversations across the globe, such as the 1995 United Nation’s 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing. I hope to inform the world about the admirable strategies, strengths and insights as well as the particular or shared obstacles experienced by Chinese women activists in their honorable fight against domestic violence.

I’m inviting you, with all my sincerity and respect, to participate in this study as my informant. I am interested in learning about your experiences and perspectives from your work on the issue of domestic violence against women in China. If you agree, I would like to interview you at a time and place most convenient to you. I may ask you to participate in more than one interview sessions, and each may last up to 2 hours. In the interview, I will ask some basic background questions about you (e.g., age, education, occupation) and your organization (e.g., when it started, how many members, if registered, activities) for information purposes. Then I would like to learn more about your experiences and perceptions as someone who has addressed the issue of domestic violence in your professional work, social activism, scholarly investigation or other types of activities. How much you tell me will be totally up to you. If you agree, the interview will be tape-recorded and later transcribed. I also will take notes during the interview. If it is convenient to you, I would like to give you a copy of the transcript of your interview and would like to check back with you to be sure that the transcript accurately reflects what you said. This also presents an opportunity for you to add or change information. In addition to the interview, I would also like to observe some of your work and to consult relevant documents you might be able to provide, if you permit.

If you choose to participate, all efforts will be made to keep the information you provide confidential, and every measure will be taken to protect your anonymity. I will not require your real name, and I will always use codes or pseudonyms in my files to
refer to you or your work. Even if you give me permission to use your real name, I prefer to keep this information confidential. All the information you provide will only be used for the academic writing, presentation and publication of my dissertation. You are totally free to withdraw from the study at any time should you change your mind about participating. This letter aims to provide you with an accurate account of the basic set-up of my study, so that you can make an informed decision about participation. If you would like more information, would like to participate or need more clarification, you can use the addresses and phone numbers at the end of this letter to contact me. I am more than glad to assist you with all your requests.

Note that if you choose to participate, I’m not requesting you to provide any written consent, in order to protect your anonymity. Instead, you can indicate your consent to me verbally in our conversation. I will use code name or number in my files to refer to you or your positions. Lastly, thank you very much for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Lu Zhang
My contact information (email, mailing address and phone number)

Cathy Rakowski, dissertation advisor
Contact information (email, mailing address and phone number)

Sandra Meadows, staff person at the Office of Responsible Research Practices of OSU
Contact information(email, mailing address and phone number)
Appendix B

Use of Names and List of Interviews Conducted

Use of Names

In my dissertation, I have used the real names of most activists. I use real names because many of the activists have published about their activist experience in both English and Chinese using their real names and they gave me permission to do so. Many of them are directors and significant leaders of different women’s organizations and all of them know each other quite well through the women’s NGO circle in Beijing. The stories about their organization and activist experience can be accessed by the public in both writings and on the Internet. To supplement information I obtained from interviews with them, I also cited their publications extensively. Therefore, to use pseudonyms would be extremely misleading. During my research, I also found that while domestic violence used to be a “sensitive” issue not many were willing to talk about in early 1990s, this has changed significantly within a decade. The existence of the Domestic Violence Network indicates that open discussion about the topic has largely been accepted by society, making the issue far less risky than I imagined before I set out for fieldwork. Also, as a public advocacy organization, DVN activists are engaged in a variety of advocacy activities not only using but indeed relying on their well-known public and institutional identities. Since my dissertation focuses on discussing their experiences of participating in DVN, which have also been extensively documented and published by the organization itself, the political risk of using their real names is minimal. However, I have withdrawn names and replaced them with professional titles in a few cases of activists who were not comfortable exposing their real identity.
List of Interviews

Beijing city, Beijing


Chen Benjian. Executive director, DVN office. Chair of the department of rights and interests and senior journalist at China Women’s News. DVN office. 1 August 2006.

Chen Min. DVN member. Lawyer, activist and organizer of a local support group for battered women. Interviewee’s home. 16 June 2006.

Cheng Mingxia. Board director, DVN. Researcher and Professor, Legal Studies Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. DVN office. 19 October 2006.

Ding Nin. DVN member. Director and Senior editor, Department of Documentary Literature. Beijing October Literature and Arts Publishing House. DVN office. 14 April 2006.


Guo Jianmei. DVN member. Director of the Center for Women’s Law Studies and Legal Aid Services and Associate Professor in Law studies, Beijing University. Women’s Law Center. 21 July 2006.

Guo Ruixiang. Program Officer, United Nations Development Fund for Women, China Program. Interviewee’s office. 11 July 2006.

Guo Yanqiu. DVN member. Senior director, China Women’s News. Interviewee’s home. 6 July 2006.

Jiao Yang. DVN member. Associate Professor of Social Work, China Women’s College. DVN office. 31 May 2006.

Journalist. DVN member. Interviewee’s home. 26 April 2006.
Li Hongtao. Board member, DVN. Chair, Department of Social Work, China Women’s College. DVN office. 12 May 2006.

Lin Lixia. DVN member. Administrative office director. Center for Women’s Law Studies and Legal Aid Services and Associate Professor in Law studies, Beijing University. Women’s Law Center. 21 July 2006.

Liu Meng. DVN member. Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, China Women’s College. Interviewee’s office. 25 April 2006.

Liu Xiao Juan. DVN member. Assistant manager, DVN office. DVN office. 23 October 2006.


Song Meiya. DVN member. Senior director, China Women’s News. Interviewee’s office. 20 April 2006.

Tian Xiaomei. DVN member. Professor, Department of Legal Studies. China Women’s College. 20 July 2006.


Wang Xingjuan. DVN member. Director, the Beijing Maple Women’s Psychological Counseling Center. The Maple Center. 11 May 2006.

Xia Yinlan. Board member, DVN. Professor, University of Politics and Law; Director, Marriage and Family Legal Studies Association of the China Law Society; Deputy chair, Beijing ACWF. May 19 2006.

Xue Ninglan. Researcher and Professor, Legal Studies Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. 18 April 2006.


Zhang Lixi. Board member, DVN. Principal, China Women’s College. Interviewee’s office. 11 May/9 August 2006.

Zhang Meiru. DVN member. Party Secretary, You’anmen sub-district committee, Beijing. Interviewee’s office. 28 June 2006.

Zhu Dongwu. DVN member. Professor, China Women’s College. Interviewee’s office. 15 June 2006.


Yanqin County, Beijing


Xi’an, Shangxi Province.

Li Ling. Counselor and Office director. Women’s Marriage and Family Research Institute, Shangxi Province. Interviewee’s office. September 13, 2006.
Appendix C

Interview Procedure and Questions

The Interview Procedure

Since I conducted semi-structured interviews, I relied on a core set of questions rather than fixed ones. I sent out these interview questions usually through email to all the participants agreeing to have the interview or who asked for more information about my research. I always made sure that participants had the questions ahead of the interview and repeated the explanation that they had the absolute right to choose to answer only those questions they felt comfortable speaking about. That’s why I called my question sheet “proposed interview questions.” I also promised to return the interview transcript to the participant so that they could revise and edit their responses wherever they wanted to. I did return all the transcripts to my interviewees unless it was not a formal interview and I took notes of a conversation. Some returned the transcript with their revisions, some gave approval after looking it over, and a few indicated in their interviews what contents not to record in writing.

During the interview process, I endeavored to create as much space as possible for participants to talk about what they wanted to with regard to the subject I raised. The following questions were generally posed to every participant, though not always in some cases. Sometimes, participants raised the issue I planned to ask about before I actually asked it. Sometimes, when participants were more interested in engaging in the conversation and willing to discuss their experience at length, their narratives revealed information I planned to ask about later. I adjusted my questions and made them more tailored to each participant’s particular experience as the interview went along.
Nonetheless, the following questions compose the general questions I asked of most interviewees.

**Proposed Interview Questions**

1. How and when did you come to be concerned with the issue of domestic violence?
2. Probe: Could you talk about what you know about domestic violence situations in China? For example, why do you think there is domestic violence in China? What are the issues faced by women victims?
3. How and why did you come to join the Domestic Violence Network? Could you describe the major activities of your participation in this organization?
4. Why do you think domestic violence begins to arouse social attention in China since the 1990s? How do you perceive domestic violence in relation to other women’s issues?
5. Could you share any information with me about the origination of the “Domestic Violence in China—Research, Intervention and Prevention” Project sponsored by the China Law Society?
6. Probe: Who proposed this Project? Why do you concentrate on domestic violence? What’s your economic support? How are scholars and activists recruited into this Project? Why do you think so many different individuals and organizations are willing to join the Project? Other than money, are there other resources that are important to your ability to engage in the kind of activism you do?
7. How would you describe the purpose(s) or goal(s) of the Domestic Violence Network? Do you think it is worthwhile to establish an organization with an exclusive focus on the issue of domestic violence in China? Why or why not?
8. What factors and conditions do you think have facilitated the formation and development of the DVN?
9. What do you consider to be your major achievements as a DVN activist? What about difficulties and obstacles? How do you address them?
10. In what ways is your anti-domestic violence activism meaningful to your work or life?

11. There’s an emerging body of literature arguing that there has been a global women’s movement targeting world conferences since the 1980s to advance gender equality in the international policy arena. The issue of violence against women, of which domestic violence is a prominent one, becomes an international issue through the global women’s movement and the United Nation’s World Conference on Women in Beijing is often discussed as a landmark event. Have you participated in the 1995 Beijing Conference? What was your participant identity? Could you talk about your experiences of participation? What role do you think has the Beijing Conference played in Chinese women’s anti-domestic violence activism, including the organization of the Domestic Violence Network?

12. Have you also been involved in any international conferences, projects or exchange programs addressing issue of domestic violence? Could you describe your experiences?

13. In what ways do you think are these international experiences relevant to your participation in DVN’s anti-domestic violence activism?

14. What global concepts or practices, especially those related to women’s movement, do you think are significant to DVN’s activism in China? How do you look at the issue of “bentuhua” (localization) with regard to the borrowing of these global ideas and practices? Please feel free to talk from your own experience.

15. To continue and promote anti-domestic violence activism in China, what resources or conditions do you think are most needed? What issues in this area concern you or the organization the most?

16. Would you describe the Domestic Violence Network as a feminist organization? How about yourself?

17. Could you talk about your expectations and visions for the future of the Network?
Appendix D

Participant Observation

Here’s a list of events for which I conducted participant observation outside of the Domestic Violence Network’s central office:

Conference on Research and Discussions about the issues regarding the trial of battered women who killed their abusive husband. Organized by the Domestic Violence Network and the Legal Studies Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Beijing. 26 March 2006.


The Tenth Anniversary of the Center for Women’s Law Studies and Legal Aid Services of Beijing University/Rural Women’s Lands Rights Conference. Beijing. 13 May 2006.

Women’s Watch Forum (a website column and program of the Law Center’s website). The Center for Women’s Law Studies and Legal Aid Services of Beijing University. Beijing. 20 May 2006.

Support Group for Battered Women. Beijing. 24 June 24-October 2006


Discussion about Huang Jing’s Case. Gender and Development Training Center. Beijing. 3 August 2006.

Gender Training to Volunteers. Community Service center, You’anmen Sub-district, Beijing. 8 August 8 2006