

对高考性别歧视发起的

**Girlsonly: A One-time resistance against gender discrimination in China's
University Entrance Examination system**

Translated by Hemant Adlakha

Honorary Fellow, ICS, and Associate Professor,
Centre for Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies, JNU, New Delhi
haidemeng@gmail.com

Summary

This years' 高考 (gāokǎo) or University Entrance Examination season in China produced an unusual thing on the country's social media – a "Girlsonly" voluntary organization, which offered to answer all queries related to the examination, received widespread attention. "Girlsonly" tried to use more practical actions to promote "gender awareness" in order to eliminate gender inequality.

Source: <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001089437?adchannelID=&full=y>

Revised and updated by ftchinese.com editor, Yu Shuchang

Series Editor: Hemant Adlakha



A female Gaokao aspirant
Source: ftchinese.com

In recent years, women's rights issue has been a hot topic of discussion on the Chinese internet. From Cong Xianzi exposure of Zhu Jun's sexual harassment case to the Women Artists' Collective coming forward to voice their support for the 15-year old teenager and to protest against her alleged guardian-rapist, Bao Yuming – a 48-year old Tianjin native of US nationality – all such stories have their origins in the Chinese social media. At the same time, some Chinese feminists went further from forwarding keyboard to spontaneously organising grassroots Mutual Assistance Groups by picking up sexual harassment cases across different professions. The main agenda of these feminist activists was to promote female awareness and to eliminate gender inequality in society.

During this years' university entrance examination season, a social media voluntary organisation to assist women college aspirants, Girlsonly, received widespread attention and popularity. In less than a month, Girlsonly

answered thousands of queries regarding the university examination from women aspirants. Four work-stations have been active in different time zones 24x7 and hundreds of volunteers kept themselves busy in sorting out queries and providing answers to thousands of young aspirants. A few leading questions and their answers are provided here for the readers' benefit.



Chinese-American lawyer Bao Yuming
Source: globaltimes.cn

Recently, FTChinese.com interviewed the operators of Girlsonly and the volunteers who have been involved in answering to the queries from this year's college examination aspirants. These operators and volunteers go by names such as "Ms. Liang" and "Ke ke" respectively.

One of the Girlsonly promoters told FTChinese network that the setting up of the platform or the chat room happened "naturally." In her over 15 year's experience as a women's rights activist, "she has received hundreds of private messages on Weibo (Chinese social media considered equivalent to Facebook or Twitter –

tr.) from girls asking questions about the university entrance examination,” she said. Being a Chinese who studied abroad, she was clueless as to how to address the queries. So she passed them on to her acquaintances in China who were active on Weibo and requested them for answers. This exercise gradually turned into an organised activity. Ms. Liang organized the girls active on Weibo into a group, which in turn connected with the female university aspirants seeking answers. The whole exercise slowly took shape of the prototype of the Girlsonly.



Hard time for Chinese feminists
Source: *supchina.com*

On its Weibo homepage, Girlsonly is introduced as “Only for Women” platform “providing voluntary answering services to questions related to the university examination, studies abroad and the workplace.” Ms. Liang admits being selfish by keeping Girlsonly “strictly for women.” She quickly explains: “Women feel they are deprived of resources when growing up. They have access to very limited opportunities compared with men, and they grow up under a lot of pressure both at home and outside.” “I hope to provide direct

and easy assistance and guidance to all the ‘sisters,’ especially those coming from backward and remote parts of China, and to all those who do not have easy access to resources, so that they can have at least the advantage to adequately prepare for the university examination. Because in China today, given our social and economic environment, we all know how crucial it is to be able to enter a good university,” she emphatically said.

China’s university entrance examination system is generally regarded as a fair selection process which provides equal opportunity to all for upward class mobility. However, with the coming into light of the fraudulent exam practices involving Guo Jing and Chen Chunxiu, the fairness in the conduct of the examination has come under cloud. Girlsonly work mainly focuses on gender inequality in the higher-education in China. The women aspirants who seek advice from Girlsonly come from different educational backgrounds and mainly aim for cracking the entry point to top Chinese universities such as Peking University and the Tsinghua (Qinghua) University. But in the process of replying to their queries, Girlsonly platform discovered most women aspirants were faced with similar kind of dilemma and puzzles.



Women hold up half the world
Source: whatsonweibo.com

Girlsonly operators confessed to FTChinese.com, the overwhelming response received from the women aspirants have been far beyond expectations and amazing. The mutual assistance exercise limited only to a small group of answer-seekers turning into a widespread feminist “movement” to promote gender awareness and gender equality is too true to believe. “We also faced hard questions and criticisms,” Girlsonly operators admitted. For instance, most Girlsonly volunteers hail from either abroad or belong to China’s top national universities. And these volunteers sometimes find it difficult to provide satisfactory answers to women from the second or three tier cities and colleges/schools. This sometimes leaves the impression that the volunteers only care for the privileged or upper tier female college aspirants.

In interview with FTChinese.com, Ms. Liang and Ke Ke discussed with us how they viewed the different layers of the issues they faced from the answer-seekers. Ms. Liang and Ke Ke also elaborated upon the general confusion felt by the female aspirants regarding the higher

education system in China and about the job prospects. Most revealing part of the conversation with Ms.Liang and Ke Ke is the consciousness levels of these women have been changing over the past few years.

The following is the excerpts from the interview (the interview recording has been attached at the beginning of this article above).



Chinese feminism: past, present, and...
Source: echinacities.com

FTChinese.com: In your view, is Girlsonly a feminist organization?

Miss Liang: Of course, it is. First of all, I want to say that women's rights are stigmatized to a certain extent in China, but based on my own definition of women's rights I think women's rights are to help women achieve equality. It is how feminism is defined, i e, helping women to achieve equality of status between the two sexes, so of course we are working hard to achieve our goal in this direction.

FTChinese.com: Are all your operators and volunteers aware of your feminist identity?

Miss Liang: All our past activities, achievements, about the kind of work we do and our selection criteria for volunteers have been uploaded on our Weibo blog. For our student volunteers, we expect all of them to identify and agree with our goals and our feminist outlook. We anyway don't expect those to work for us who disagree with our perspective. For example, if someone – he or she – thinks there is no gender inequality in China and women are not deprived as compared with men, such people would rather stay away from us, right?

FTChinese.com: Could you be specific in pointing out differences in choice for preferred university between men and women aspirants, and the areas where women feel they are unequal?

Miss Liang: Well, there are many areas where women students have been facing discrimination. For example, women of post 80s, 90s generation were always targeted by professors teaching mathematics, physics and chemistry, some professors openly insulted and ridiculed women students in the classroom mocked the women students for being incapable of understanding maths and science. Such suppressive attitude on behalf of professors was both tangible and intangible. For examples, women must look for “stable jobs,” they are not cut-out for high-salaried jobs or for highly promising careers or even for jobs that are considered high-status jobs in

society, etc. Some professors even bluntly used to say in the classroom that “women should be only considered for jobs ‘exclusively’ meant for women.”

On the other hand, what we as feminists do is to provide guidance and encouragement to all those women who show promise and are talented. We tell women to strive for opportunities that belong to them, and then go on to achieve what is theirs.



Chinese feminism is growing...
Photo: latimes.com

FTChinese.com: Tell us more about gender discrimination in the *Gaokao* system and in the university admission system?

Ke Ke: The scores of male/female candidates in *Gaokao* leading eventually to university/college admissions are abnormally different. At times, the difference in scores is almost double, depending on the choice of disciplines, namely admissions to the police academy and/or disciplines generally regarded as the male bastion. It has also been recently noticed that in disciplines where traditionally women have dominated before, such as kindergarten teachers or nurses, at the time of

admission selection such arguments are put forward that “there are no men candidates or applicants.” Therefore, minimum bar for scores be reduced so that men can be admitted to maintain the ratio. However, no such arguments have been ever recommended in all other male-dominated disciplines to upgrade male-female ratio. Such discrimination has been a popular topic of discussion on the social media in recent years.

FTChinese.com: What are some of the most common confusions or dilemmas coming from the women answer-seekers, especially when choosing areas of studies at the time of filling application forms for *Gaokao*?

Ke Ke: The primary reason our advice or opinion is sought has much to do with the choice of ‘major’ subjects and the career choices prospects. The other reason is women *Gaokao* aspirants face a lot of pressure from their parents and peers and have very little choice of their own in determining what course to opt for and which university to apply for. For example, we have noticed a large number of women under family pressure apply for the teachers’ training degree as the tuition fee for such courses are relatively cheap. Or parents feel women are more suitable to become teachers, both as per the social norms and expectations and also from the point of view of their own future family needs.



#MeToo in China
Source: chinafile.com

On the other hand, we do come across many women carry their own ideas and ideals and who tend to make career choices accordingly. For example, such women want to study engineering, computers as majors and there are others who aspire for careers in architecture and in the legal profession. But these women face a lot of resistance and opposition both from the outside world and at home. They are continuously being discouraged from choosing hard subjects as majors or that these subjects are not meant for girls. Then there are women who are worried and concerned regarding gender discrimination prevailing in certain professions, so they do not want to opt for such course even if they like the subjects.

Then there are women who prefer to consider applying only for those disciplines where they feel there would be less gender discrimination and finding a job may not be that difficult.

FTChinese.com: What advice do you offer to women who approach you with women wanting to resist pressure from parents in choosing a career?

Ke Ke: We are very careful in such cases and approach them on a case by case basis. Our questions are template based, and we expect full personal information to be filled-in by those seeking our guidance. For example, we also seek information including individual's hobbies and ideas. This helps us avoid generalisations and instead provide individual-specific guidance.

Overall, we still prefer everyone to get rid of the secular mentality and encourage individual women to realize their own world outlook is different from that of the outside world. Of course, it goes without saying that we do not offer answers or guidance which is detached from the world, but we encourage them to be guided by their own thoughts and preferences. But that also includes consider salary, job status, career development, social and professional needs. But certainly we do not encourage them at all to blindly follow what they are told by parents and others to follow.



Some Chinese feminists fight patriarchy
Source: pri.org

FTChinese.com: There are criticisms on the social media that your volunteers are mostly Chinese students studying abroad and they

come from privileged families, or that they have had schooling in “Key” schools like “985” or “211,”so these volunteers are a total mismatch to advice women coming from small towns and cities. How do you respond to such criticisms?

Ke Ke: In fact, to answer this question will take us back to the time when we started this “movement.” In 2016, we were only a small group of people. Indeed, at the time we were dealing with queries coming mostly from privileged school background and overseas students. In fact, over fifty percent of our volunteers too came from such elite background. Most of the young women who wrote to us, especially 30 percent or more, too were from the top ranks in their respective provinces or cities.

However, this year, perhaps due to wider awareness and due to our blog's growing influence, girls from all walks of life have suddenly appeared, and many among our original group of nearly one hundred volunteers had difficulty in addressing all queries satisfactorily. We actually wanted to recruit a few volunteers with tier-2 and tier-3 city schooling backgrounds. Also, we did ourselves realize the need, but in the end we had to fill-in ourselves and do our best.

Miss Liang: Frankly, I did not expect such a scenario this year. Even in terms of scale, we were far from prepared to deal with such large volumes of women visiting our blog with all

kinds of questions. Eventually we were rushed into addressing questions from all women visiting our blog, and we admit our operational model is not “perfect” to deal with such a situation. In fact, we have admitted this flaw in our internal review meetings. Though we somehow managed this year but we will be better prepared and will have more representation among our volunteers from all kinds of schooling backgrounds for the coming year.

FTChinese.com: Over the past years, did you notice substantial changes in the choices women *Gaokao* aspirants made, especially following your guidance?

Miss Liang: My impression is more and more women have been opting for choices which were traditionally considered male-dominated. For example, in career options for disciplines such as computers, the number of women has been rising. And this is quite evident now for all to see. I can say with confidence, both in the job market as well within the computer industry itself, attitudes have been changing. People now want more and more women taking up such careers.



#FreeTheFive



Five Chinese feminist activists were arrested on the International Women’s Day in 2015
Source: rebloggy.com

Ke Ke: This year I noticed a happy change. More number of women appeared to have strong opinion of their own and they looked very determined. Although they approached us for help but from their queries it is clear they were firm in their resolve. This means they also must have been under tremendous peer pressure but they did not deter. But I am tempted to say I feel overwhelmed with this whole exercise and I wish to pursue the endeavour. Still, I am also clueless as how to better our performance. This year in particular has been rewarding and far more revealing.

FTChinese.com: Does the rise in the number of women approaching you for guidance have something to do with the increasing level of awareness among Chinese women in recent years?

Ke Ke: It certainly seems so. From 2016 to this year, the change is quite obvious. Both from the trend and from the content, one can say the social media has been playing an active and positive role in promoting women’s rights awareness and women’s consciousness about gender inequality. To equipping oneself with the awareness of their rights and then fighting for their rights and equal status, is something that has been not only happening but also getting consolidated on the social media. Therefore, our exercise this year has seen more resonance and response from everyone, and

more women have been willing to participate in the event.



Chinese feminist Li Tingting
Source: chinafile.com

FTChinese.com: From the perspective of the (Chinese) society as a whole, is there any way for women to obtain the same rights as men?

Miss Liang: I think first and foremost, the fact that the issue of equal rights is gaining currency in itself is a welcome change in the society. Realizing that in the future everyone will see how to act, will act as a great incentive for us to keep doing what we are doing. As regards the larger struggle for women's equal rights, you can see that from Weibo or from social media to many other organizations,

people are making some efforts each in their own respective ways. Take for example, women are treated unfairly. There are special reports or coverage on this in the media – “Elder sister is here” is one such event which happened last year (the event refers to what has been mentioned in the beginning of this article, where women artists formed a group to voice their support in favour of the teenage girl who was being sexually exploited by her so-called faster father, a Chinese-American lawyer – *Tr.*). In other words, there might be a case involving lesbian women fighting for equal distribution of wealth or resources, so there should be a collective fund drive for raising resources for them. I personally think whatever methods can be employed to help women all should be welcomed. Different people may have different understanding of women's rights. This is because everyone is exploring and is self-learning. It is best for everyone to contribute in one's own way.

The views expressed here are those of the translator and not necessarily of the Institute of Chinese Studies

ICS Translations *Back Issues*

Issue No/ Month	Title	Translator
No.10 Sep 2020	Moon Chung-In: How China Can Avoid a “New Cold War?”	Vyjayanti Raghavan
No.9 Sep 2020	Chinese View: Indian Army Illegally Crosses LAC again, Occupies Chinese Territory	Hemant Adlakha
No.8 Aug 2020	Words and Deeds of Bureaucrats with High Degrees Disappoint Masses. Why?	Tanvi Negi
No.7 Aug 2020	More Frequent US Military Comes Near Us, More Likely It is to Cause “Guns and Misfires”	Prashant Kaushik
No.6 Jul 2020	Epidemic in the Eyes of “Three Generals of Chinese Sci-fi”	Shanky Chandra
No.5 Jul 2020	China’s Long Range Missiles not threatened by Indian Air Defence Systems	Hemant Adlakha
No.4 Jul 2020	Do we really need experts who only know “jargons?”	Hemant Adlakha
No.3 Jul 2020	More frequent US military comes near us, more likely it is to cause “guns and misfires”	Hemant Adlakha
No.2 Jul 2020	China: Bubble that will never pop?	Hemant Adlakha
No.1 Jul 2020	Mao Zedong on Sino-Indian Boundary Dispute	Hemant Adlakha

PRINCIPAL SUPPORTERS TO ICS RESEARCH FUND

TATA TRUSTS



MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



INDIAN COUNCIL OF
SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

GARGI AND VIDYA
PRAKASH DUTT FOUNDATION



JAMNALAL BAJAJ
FOUNDATION

PIROJSHA GODREJ FOUNDATION

ICS PUBLICATIONS



A short brief on a topic of contemporary interest with policy-related inputs



Platform for ongoing research of the ICS faculty and associates



Authored by the faculty, also emerging from research projects and international conferences



Draft paper of ongoing research

ICS JOURNAL



In its 56th year, *China Report* is a refereed journal in the field of social sciences and international relations. It welcomes and offers a platform for original research from a multi-disciplinary perspective, in new and emerging areas, by scholars and research students. It seeks to promote analysis and vigorous debate on all aspects of Sino-Indian relations, India-China comparative studies and multilateral and bilateral initiatives and collaborations across Asia.

China Report is brought out by Sage Publications Ltd, New Delhi.

Editor
Associate Editor
Assistant Editor
Book Review Editor

Sreemati Chakrabarti
G. Balachandirane
Rityusha Mani Tiwari
Vijay K Nambiar



INSTITUTE OF CHINESE STUDIES

8/17, Sri Ram Road, Civil Lines,
Delhi 110054, INDIA
T: +91 (0) 11 2393 8202
F: +91 (0) 11 2383 0728

<http://www.icsin.org/>
info@icsin.org

twitter.com/ics_delhi [facebook.com/icsin.delhi](https://www.facebook.com/icsin.delhi)
[ln.linkedin.com/icsdelhi](https://www.linkedin.com/company/icsdelhi) [soundcloud.com/ICSIN](https://www.soundcloud.com/ICSIN)
[youtube.com/ICSWEB](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSWEb) [instagram.com/icsdelhi](https://www.instagram.com/icsdelhi)