

Cyber Trans Panic: Chinese Trans-Antagonistic Feminism and the Transnational Circulation of Transmisogyny on Social Media

Chris Jingchao Ma

is an Arthur J. Ennis Postdoctoral Fellow in the Augustine and Culture Seminar Program at Villanova University. Her research focuses on identity and bodily experience.

✉ jingchao.ma@villanova.edu

Heng Simone Wang

is a PhD student in the Institute of Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice at the University of British Columbia. Their research interests include trans and queer studies, transnational feminisms, sexual and reproductive ethics, social movement studies, Sinophone studies, and global Asia studies.

Trans-antagonism and transmisogyny have gained increasing visibility on social media globally. In this article, we explore how trans-antagonism and transmisogyny have developed among Chinese feminist communities, called *jijin nüquan* (“radical feminists”) on Chinese social media. We argue that the trans-antagonism and transmisogyny displayed on Chinese social media must be understood through a historical and transnational lens in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of it. We contend that the increasing policing of queer feminist organizations has confined all feminists to social media spaces where misinformation and disinformation are widely circulated, contributing to the trans-antagonistic views widely held by *jijin nüquan* feminists. Using case studies from Douban, one of the primary social media platforms used by *jijin nüquan* feminists for mobilization, we examine how the politics of translation—specifically, the histories of translating the concepts of sex, gender, and trans into Chinese—have contributed to *jijin nüquan* feminists’ trans-antagonistic views. Finally, we investigate how the trans-antagonistic trope of trans women invading women’s bathrooms has localized trans-antagonism into a particular form of transmisogyny. Through this analysis, we call for a rethinking of the process of transnational knowledge production and the political coalition between trans, queer, and feminist movements in contemporary China.

KEYWORDS trans-antagonism; TERF; transmisogyny; social media; China

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On June 6, 2020, British author J.K. Rowling retweeted an op-ed piece that discussed certain COVID-19 measures concerning “people who menstruate.” In the tweet, Rowling mocked the phrase “people who menstruate” and implied that the author of the article must have forgotten the word “women” (Rowling 2020b). When faced with criticism from users on X, formerly Twitter, she continued to assert that using trans-inclusive language to discuss menstruation equates to “erasing the concept of sex” (Rowling 2020a). In a later tweet, Rowling claimed that her defense of “women” was rooted in a response to male violence. She stated that while transgender people¹ are “vulnerable in the same way as women—i.e., to male violence”—(cisgender) women like herself “think sex is real and has lived consequences” (Rowling 2020c). Thus, she places cisgender women in a position of “real” and “consequential” vulnerability, arguing that they cannot escape male violence because of their “real” sex, thereby implying that trans women do not have a real or consequential womanhood.

Rowling’s tweets and stance sparked widespread debates in Anglophone media. The controversy gained even more attention when actors associated with the *Harry Potter* franchise, such as Daniel Radcliffe (2020) and Emma Watson (2020), voiced their support for trans people. Many trans activists, internet users, and authors directly addressed Rowling’s misinformation and trans-antagonistic attitude.² Drawing from Florence Ashley’s (2018, 4) work, this article defines trans-antagonism as a more broadly applicable term than transphobia, referring to how cisgender normative “beliefs and attitudes generate an opposition toward trans people while refusing to cast them as necessarily irrational or hateful.” Additionally, we use the term transmisogyny to refer to what Jules Gill-Peterson (2024) describes as the “targeted devaluation of both trans femininity and people perceived to be trans feminine.”

Rowling’s trans-antagonistic position and the surrounding debates have spread beyond the Anglophone world. In June 2020, on Chinese social media, *Harry Potter* fans and other social media users rose to defend Rowling against “transgender political correctness” and “cancel culture.” On *Weibo* (微博, “micro-blog”) and *Douban.com* (豆瓣网, “Douban-net,” Douban henceforth), two of the most influential Chinese social media platforms for user content production, most Chinese social media users agreed with Rowling and the articles that support Rowling were the ones most frequently translated into Chinese. Meanwhile, the robust responses from the trans community in the Anglophone world have hardly been mentioned, let alone translated or introduced into the Chinese-language debate.

Due to language barriers and limited internet access, it was indeed difficult for Chinese social media users to get a comprehensive view of the debate in the Anglophone

1 In this article, we use “transgender people” and “trans people” as the umbrella term for people whose gender is different from or does not fit comfortably with the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may use a variety of other terms to describe themselves, including nonbinary, genderqueer, etc.

2 For example, UK-based transgender activist group Mermaids (2020) urged Rowling to “[not] speak about trans children, unless you’ve listened to them first,” and US-based YouTuber Natalie Wynn (ContraPoints, 2021) made a video explaining, among other things, how the “sex is real” rhetoric denies trans people’s identities while implying that trans people are ignoring or rejecting science or facts.

world. Accessing these debates and translating them into Chinese requires extensive labor, often performed voluntarily by some social media users. However, what was translated disproportionately favored the trans-antagonistic perspective, with a majority of the subsequent trans-antagonistic comments and tweets coming from users identified as feminists. Over the past decade, China has witnessed a significant feminist mobilization and growing consciousness on social media, with many individuals taking up the label of *jijin nüquan* (激进女权, “radical feminists” or “radical women’s rights”) to identify themselves.³ Meanwhile, the activities and visibility of feminist and queer non-profit organizations have significantly decreased, following accusations from state-affiliated institutions and media labeling both feminism and LGBTQ+ activism as the “invasion of Western ideology.” Feminists on Chinese social media, particularly those identified as *jijin nüquan*, have increasingly exhibited explicit trans-antagonism and especially transmisogyny in recent years.

Though there are many studies on trans-exclusionary radical feminism and the “gender critical” movement in the Anglophone world, a transnational approach that incorporates the mutual influence of translation and local political practices is still largely absent (Bassi and LaFleur 2022). Moreover, there is little research on trans-antagonistic discourses and politics in Chinese context, despite Sinophone trans studies have gained scholarly attention as an emerging field in the last decade (Chiang 2012). Existing monographs and edited volumes are more strongly rooted in historical and literary studies, often mediated by decolonial theories (Chiang 2012; Sommer 2020; Stryker 2012). This scholarship contributes to the epistemological project of constructing an Asian transness outside the West’s modernizing framework of “transgender” as a self-claimed identity. It also critiques the singularization of Chinese trans bodies in the context of China while overlooking Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Asian diasporic spaces. While the works categorized under what Chiang (2020) calls “transtopia” bring important insights to the field, trans studies—when named after the geographic-linguistic formation of the Sinophone—have had limited application to contemporary Chinese trans issues. This has, in some ways, obscured the evolving trans identities, cultures, and discourses burgeoning in Sinophone societies in recent years (Hu and Wang 2024). This gap is even more pronounced in the cross-cutting field of feminist media studies, where there is a noticeable lack of published academic work on Chinese trans-antagonistic feminism, particularly in comparison to feminist mobilizations beyond Sinophone societies. However, our research does not merely seek to fill these gaps by treating Chinese social media as an incidental case. Rather, our focus on translation provides an epistemological framework for analyzing trans-antagonism and transmisogyny in a transnational context, accounting for the interplay between linguistic hegemony and the politics of translation. We argue that this framework is crucial for understanding the rise of fascist “gender-critical”

- 3 Only some feminists in China take up this label of *jijin nüquan*, and its usage is primarily on social media. While the majority of *jijin nüquan* feminists online do not actively claim a shared lineage with the radical feminism in the Anglophone world in the 1960s, they share some beliefs with and consciously learn from the more recent trans-exclusionary radical feminism in the Anglophone world. We hope to shine some lights on the complicated relationship between *jijin nüquan* feminists, other feminists in China, and Anglophone radical feminism in this article.

movements on a global scale.

As our research question, this article explores how and why transmisogynistic discourses have become prevalent among many *jijin nüquan* feminists on Chinese social media. Considering the spaces where *jijin nüquan* feminists mobilize, we use case studies and discourse analysis as our methods, as analyzing representative cases and their discourses can efficiently foster a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action without the need to present numerous examples (Tellis 1997). After identifying Douban as the primary Chinese social media platform used by *jijin nüquan* feminists, we search for articles and posts using keywords such as *kua xingbie* (跨性别, “transgender”), *luo lin* (罗琳, “J.K. Rowling”), and *kua nv* (跨女, “trans women”). The rationale for choosing these keywords is twofold. First, it is based on our experiences as long-time Douban users who have observed the popular terms used by both pro-trans and trans-antagonistic users. Second, it directly responds to our research questions on how and why transmisogynistic discourses have become prevalent among *jijin nüquan* feminists on Chinese social media. Douban consists of two primary user groups: those who post in “Douban groups” and those who use the “timeline broadcast” feature. While *jijin nüquan* feminists, who are predominantly Douban group users, rarely engage directly with broadcast users, exceptions occur when a post or article trends on Douban. In such cases, it appears in the timeline of Douban group users even if they do not follow the original poster. Based on this rationale, we identified one trending article and one trending broadcast, both posted by pro-trans users—one a translation, the other an original personal testimony, that attracted a significant number of trans-antagonistic comments from *jijin nüquan* feminists.

Through analyzing the content and comment section of these two posts, we find that both the politics of translation and the circulation of the image of “trans women invading women’s bathrooms” have significantly played part in generating transmisogynistic backlashes. We argue that trans-antagonism is perpetuated through the spread of false images of trans women as threats to the safety of cisgender women and this image has gained cross-cultural popularity in part due to the current feminist emphasis on biological vulnerability as a discursive mobilizing tool in contemporary China. Our article calls for transnational solidarity against the circulation of harmful transmisogynistic images and discursive elements and contributes to the scholarly effort to rethink queer and trans feminist futures in China.

GLOBAL BACKGROUND ON TRANS-ANTAGONISM AND TRANSMISOGYNY

To understand how trans-antagonism emerges and circulates in China, we situate it within three lines of inquiry: the origins of trans-antagonism, particularly transmisogyny, in the Anglophone world; the politics of transnational information circulation and translation; and the history of feminism in contemporary China.

In the Anglophone world, the last two decades have witnessed a global rise in antagonism toward trans individuals, particularly transmisogyny against trans women, among those who identify as lesbians, feminists, and otherwise politically progressive. Similar anti-trans antagonisms occupied feminist politics in the 1980s, as exemplified by Janice Raymond (1980) and Mary Daly (1990), who portrayed trans women as delusional and a threat to cisgender women. However, the recent resurgence of such antag-

onism calls for special attention and necessitates new analyses. Scholars have examined the Neo-Fascist roots of the “gender critical” movement around the globe (Bassi and LaFleur 2022; Butler 2021; 2024), particularly in their dangerous political vision of population control. From an intersectional perspective, scholars have highlighted a long tradition of the cult of femininity, the mid-19th century US extolment of Christian, domestic, white women as embodying “true womanhood,” while Black women were denied womanhood under the regime of gendered white supremacy (Snorton 2017; Spillers 1987). The current TERF objective of gatekeeping “femininity” as a category with a fixed meaning and standard is rooted in anti-Black racism and the depiction of white femininity as innocent and vulnerable. In terms of historical antagonism against trans women, Jules Gill-Peterson (2024) argues that transmisogyny is a global phenomenon that converges with the imperial regimes of the UK and the US to dominate local populations.

When we investigate the contemporary global trans panic, one particularly notable phenomenon is the circulation of misinformation and disinformation, especially online, where much trans-exclusionary content is generated and spread. The harm caused by misinformation and disinformation about transgender people is evident in health-care practices, policies, legislation, and public opinions about trans individuals (Billard 2024; Lockmiller 2023). Scholars in critical misinformation and disinformation studies suggest that we focus more closely on the ideological context and political consequences of such content (Billard 2023; Kuo and Marwick 2021). Rather than treating misinformation and disinformation as mere glitches in an otherwise clear and transparent system of information circulation, we must examine the underlying power struggles and how historically dominant groups use misinformation and disinformation to advance their political aims.

We are particularly interested in the translation and transnational, translingual circulation of misinformation and disinformation. When we discuss transmisogyny as a global phenomenon, it is crucial to emphasize the critical role of translation and cross-lingual practices. Translation does not occur between two perfectly independent languages in a vacuum; rather, it operates within unequal power structures. Therefore, in subsequent sections, we will closely examine an example of the politics of translation, exploring which images are highlighted and how the translation and vernacularizing of terms contribute to a trans-antagonistic understanding of gender.

In our analysis of the Chinese translation of transmisogynist content, we identify the “trans women invading women’s bathroom” narrative as what Patricia Hill Collins (1999) would call a controlling image, one that targets a group of people and marks them as morally wrong, thereby justifying their oppression. To examine the formation of such a controlling image, we will first contextualize trans issues within the historical context of Chinese feminism from the 1990s to the present. Then, by focusing on the politics of translation, we will explore the inherent crisis within the Chinese translation of trans-related lexicon and attempt to answer the question of how this controlling image has gained such a powerful hold on the imaginations of Chinese trans-exclusionary feminists. On this basis, we will further discuss the ideological foundations behind this mobilization and how they facilitate the transnational and translingual dissemination of the misinformation and disinformation about trans women.

CONTEXTUALIZING TRANS ISSUES IN CHINESE FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

The collective identity of *jijin nüquan* and the broader Chinese feminist consciousness on social media must be understood within its historical, political, and socio-economic context. Following the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, mainstream feminist activism involved collaboration between civil society, government, and other institutions pushing for more research and the implementation of legal and social changes. This in turn fostered a relatively robust environment for the growth of NGOs and feminist activists. Since 2000, feminist activism has increasingly shifted away from government collaboration toward NGOs, community-based organizing, and individual activism. This shift has been accompanied by growing visibility of feminist activism, thanks to the rise of social media and a vibrant urban, educated youth population with internet access. Wang (2018, 264) suggests that the new generation of urban young women differs from their predecessors, as they are more “self-assertive, rebellious, and bolder than previous generations in pursuing career expectations.” Ye (2021, 93) also observes that this generation of feminists use a global grammar of protests, such as human rights and individual freedom. However, institutional and political organizing in the more formal sense remain underdeveloped.

It is worth noting that during this period of robust work by NGOs, informal community organizing, and individual activism, queer and trans women played an important role. LGBTQ+ feminist activists displayed “open defiance of heterosexual normativity” and maintained a “strong focus on body politics” (Wang 2018, 266). Within NGOs, trans activism gained significant support and resources from Lala (拉拉, a local term adapted from transliteration of “lesbian”) activism.⁴ For example, one of the most famous Lala organizations, *Tongyu* (同语, “Common Language”), provided legal support for China’s first transgender employment discrimination case in April 2017. Activists from *Tongyu* also largely contributed to work that led to the founding of Trans Brotherhood China in 2018 to serve trans masculine people. It was common for queer feminist activism and feminist NGOs in China during this period to include, support, and empower trans activism.

Feminist activism led by queer women, which has generally been trans-inclusive, experienced a significant decline over the last decade as freedom of speech became increasingly restricted. In 2015, the arrest of the “five feminist sisters” in Beijing marked the end of most offline feminist activism (Wang 2015). The Law on the Administration of Domestic Activities of Foreign NGOs, which came into effect in 2017, stipulates that NGOs receiving funds from abroad must undergo a double-approval registration process or face penalties, including fines and arrests. Since no LGBTQ+ NGOs have been officially recognized by the Chinese government, they are considered “illegal” and have struggled to secure any funding. In this context, queer and trans NGOs and community organizing efforts, even if still operating offline or within small circles, tend to keep a low profile on the internet to avoid further crackdowns by the government. This has contributed to an already heavily censored internet environment, where liberal human

4 Lala is a term used for sexual minority and gender-nonconforming women and people assigned female at birth in Mainland China. See Engebretsen (2014) for an ethnographic study of Chinese Lala’s activism and their political subjectivity formation. Notably, Lala as an identity term is inclusive of trans people, as Huang (2015) points out.

rights discourse, LGBTQ+ discussions and expressions, and social issue discussions are often viewed by the government as social unrest that needs to be suppressed.

Without NGOs or activists maintaining an online presence or engaging in public education, feminist discourse has become fragmented. The feminist consciousness of the emerging class of urban young women more often comes from news-related posts on Chinese social media rather than from feminist and queer theory, which is absent in publishing and higher education. Moreover, with the rise of social media, this new generation of feminists mostly turns to individual influencers and online communities to explore feminist issues. While these online communities can be empowering and inspiring, they can also become homogenous and susceptible to state propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation, thereby marginalizing queer and trans voices.

It is within these feminist social media spaces that a politically radical group, *jijin nüquan*, has become increasingly vocal. They are identifiable as a group through their presence across various social media platforms, particularly Douban and Weibo. Though there are individual differences, the most common principles of *jijin nüquan* include *buhun buyu* (不婚不育, “no marriage no offspring”) and *dannü huzhu* (单女互助, “single women mutual aid”).⁵ Our observation of these discussions shows that *jijin nüquan* have adopted a strategy of mobilization that emphasizes cisgender women’s bodily vulnerability and that transmisogyny has become a popular attitude—sometimes even a central principle—among this group of feminists.

POLITICS OF TRANSLATION AND THE TRANSNATIONAL CIRCULATION OF TRANS-ANTAGONISM

Compared to the large volume of translations supporting Rowling, opposing views were much less frequently translated and, when they were, often received disproportionate backlash. To better understand how the harmful image of “trans women invading women’s bathrooms” and misinformation and disinformation from Anglophone social media influence Chinese-language debates, we will closely examine two cases on Douban. Both involve content posted by trans authors, with the majority of comments coming from *jijin nüquan* feminists. Analysis shows a series of linguistic translation failures plays a crucial role in facilitating the transnational circulation of trans-antagonistic misinformation.

In the first example, Douban user Enlightening published a trans advocacy article on July 8, 2020, in the midst of the Rowling debates. The article was their translation of a video transcript by English YouTuber Jammidodger (2020), which explains why Rowling’s position and writings on trans people are erroneous and harmful. This post sparked a heated and long-lasting debate in the comments section,⁶ where many com-

5 The political principles of *jijin nüquan* have been influenced by Korean feminist movement (see Sussman 2023).

6 Enlightening had 11,625 regular followers. This translation received 687 likes and 1,526 favorites, and it was reposted 667 times, which made it the most-viewed post arguing against Rowling’s transphobic views on Douban. Over 350 comments were posted from the day of publishing to December 2022, two and a half years after the original post was published https://www.douban.com/note/769986412/?_i=4657274uTAE_To. Numbers retrieved on January 13, 2023.

ments focused on bathroom access. One comment stands out as representative of the most common rhetoric:

1a. Sex relies on comparison, which builds upon real sexual difference, not mind! In the reign of mind, having nothing to do with real sexual characteristics, gender identity exists. But for the private spaces, only real sexual characteristics matter, especially like toilets and bathrooms. These spaces must acknowledge real sex. (Douban user Tao Jiang)

In this comment, the user was less focused on acknowledging the legitimacy of gender identity by distinguishing between sex and gender, and more on framing gender in contrast with sex, with the latter being understood through an ambiguous notion of “sexual difference.” The distinction between “sex” and “gender” as that between “body” and “mind” frequently appears in these trans-antagonistic comments. When making this distinction, some users employed the Chinese translations of “sex” and “gender,” while others insert the English words “sex” and “gender” into their sentences written in Chinese. This semantic distinction and the use of English terms alongside Chinese calls for a more detailed examination of these concepts and their translation, circulation, and localization in the Chinese language. Why are the terminologies of sex and gender perceived this way in Chinese, and how does the formation of these meanings lend itself to a trans-antagonistic politics?

In the transnational circulation of trans-antagonism, the role of translation is not a transparent process that converts original texts into translated ones. Instead, as Liu (2019) points out, translation is a practice that actively engages with gender politics. The selection of texts for translation, potential appropriations, and methods of interpretation may all carry ideological imprints. Reviewing the genealogy of these translations is essential for understanding how the keywords that constitute much of the trans-antagonistic content on Chinese social media have gained meaning and merged with the local understanding of gender in Chinese society. The trans-antagonism we observe on Chinese social media often relies on rhetoric that delegitimizes gender identity as a concept. We argue that this delegitimization is partially due to what we call the unfinished work of translating both “sex” and “gender.” These failures are the result of both global trans-antagonistic politics and localized knowledge, as mediated by gender politics within the Chinese context.

The first aspect of the politics of translation we will examine is the genealogy of the Chinese translation of the terms “sex,” “gender,” and “transgender,” and their connotation of a binary biological essentialism—the belief that a person’s social role is determined by their reproductive organs and biological makeup (Fausto-Sterling 2000).

Prior to the 1990s, “sex” had been translated as *xingbie* (性别) in Chinese. Since *bie* in Chinese means “difference,” *xingbie* addresses the differentiation between different sexes. When the concept of “gender” was first introduced to Chinese readers in the early 1990s, an academic debate arose over its translation. Some scholars proposed that “gender” should simply be translated as *xingbie*, adhering to the feminist stance that biological sex does not determine one’s social roles, and hence the “difference” itself is a social one. In this view, “gender” would represent the differentiation in social roles that is conceptually separate from biological sex. However, other scholars argued that since *xingbie* was already used to translate “sex,” a new term was needed to avoid confusion, and they suggested *shehui xingbie* (社会性别), where *shehui* means “social.” Thus, the lit-

eral meaning of “gender” became “social sex” or “social sexual difference.” In this translation, “gender” and “sex” appear to have a clear distinction—one is social, the other not. Min (2003) points out that this translation has its drawbacks: translating “gender” by adding “social” to the common understanding of *xingbie* as “sexual difference” could reinforce the sexist belief that the “sexes” are inherently different by nature, thereby justifying the unequal social positions between women and men. “Social sexual difference” does not constitute a powerful challenge to biological essentialism, making it difficult for Chinese feminists to view *shehui xingbie* as a legible category for advocating for social equality. The repetition of “sexual difference,” or *xingbie*, in both translations of “sex” and “gender” (rendered as “social sex”) further essentializes “sexual difference” as natural and as the foundation of any social difference. This semantic naturalization makes it challenging to argue that sex has always been socially constructed.

Given the unfinished project of translating “gender” without relying on and naturalizing “sex,” the translation and interpretation of the term “transgender” in Chinese has encountered even more difficulties.⁷ In Taiwan, Josephine Ho’s (2003) edited volume *Kua Xingbie* (跨性别) collected original essays and translations, including essays by Leslie Feinberg and Minnie Bruce Pratt. This volume first established *kua xingbie* (跨性别) as the Chinese translation of “transgender,” a term going around with multiple translations in the community at the time. In China, Bornstein’s 1994 semi-autobiography *Gender Outlaw*, translated by Aiwan Liao and published in China in 2013, further popularized *kua xingbie* as the common term for “transgender.” “*Kua*” in Chinese means “to go across,” much like “trans-” in Latin.⁸

These terms, along with the incomplete localization of gender, contribute to the ongoing rhetoric of biological essentialism found in trans-exclusive feminism. Translating “gender” as “social sexual difference” can lead to two implications: 1) “Sexual difference” already delineates the distinctions between women’s and men’s experiences in the world, rendering “gender” superfluous; and 2) Since “gender” is considered “social,” it only refers to interpersonal aspects and cannot be a legitimate category for an individual—only “sex” is real. As observed in comment 1a, a person’s “gender” identity is perceived as something “in the mind” and therefore lacks the “realness” of “sex.” This comment reflects the belief that gender is not a distinct category or conceptually different from sex, but rather something superfluous and unreal. Consequently, a person’s gender

7 When without an official translation, trans people were more often referred to by their English abbreviation as “T,” “TS,” “TG,” and other regional stigmatizing appellations such as *yao* (妖) or *eryizi* (二椅子) (Chow, 2018).

8 As for the global background, the word “cisgender” was not added to the updated version of the Oxford English Dictionary until 2014, though it had been in circulation in newspapers and academic journals since the mid-1990s. The translation of cisgender as *shun xingbie* (顺性别) in Chinese was first observed on Weibo in 2014 when a few Chinese graduate students studying in the US launched a discussion of the term. Meanwhile, the late emergence of *shun xingbie* also owes to the fact that the visibility of trans and gender-nonconforming people did not significantly increase until 2016 in China. Today, the concepts and translations of transgender and cisgender have become quite popular and largely recognized both in academia and on the Internet in China.

identity is not afforded the same “realness,” particularly in sex-segregated public spaces.

The second aspect of the politics of translation that we examine here involves the questions of “what texts are chosen to be translated” and “the chain of events that may happen after translation” in the specific information environment of the Chinese internet today (Liu, 2019). Under authoritarian control, internet censorship serves the state’s interests in maintaining social stability. Given the disproportionate amount of trans-antagonistic content compared to pro-trans content being translated from English to Chinese on social media, it is significant that most Anglophone content appears on platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and YouTube—all of which are unavailable in China due to governmental restrictions on Chinese users’ access to the “foreign internet” (*waiwang*, 外网). Only a minority of people can afford to pay for a VPN to access these websites and acquire the language skills to navigate them. Those who undertake the work of accessing, translating, and transferring content from foreign social media platforms rarely face challenges regarding the accuracy, comprehensiveness, or objectivity of their translations, as the majority of their audience relies on them for a glimpse of the “foreign internet.” As a result, these translators do not need to worry about fact-checking the content they translate or interpret, and they are rarely held accountable for any mistakes and biases.

In this way, misinformation and disinformation can travel from Anglophone social media to Chinese social media with little challenge. When *jijin nüquan* feminists locate and translate trans-antagonistic content from Anglophone social media to Chinese social media, their audience has limited means to fact-check the content or to even know that refutations exist on the same Anglophone platforms. Given the uneven access Chinese internet users have to the original platforms where trans-antagonistic misinformation and disinformation are posted, it is easy to get the impression that these trans-antagonistic contents represent the majority opinion.

Overall, the two facets of the politics of translation that we have examined demonstrate that the current trans-antagonism among Chinese feminists on social media is not merely a direct import of Anglophone trans-antagonistic misinformation but the outcome of a complex transnational dynamic of information circulation. The unfinished translation and localization of the concepts of “gender” and “transgender” have contributed to the increased emphasis on biological makeup in feminist politics.

TRANSMISOGYNY AND THE MOBILIZATION OF VULNERABILITY AMONG JIJIN NÜQUAN FEMINISTS

The second example concerns the sharing of a personal experience by a young trans woman living and working in urban China instead of a translated Western media text.

Describing herself as “MtF / translesbian/feminist / gender critical/orthodox Marxist” in her profile, Philokimia is very active on Douban, frequently posting on feminist, queer, and trans issues, with almost weekly updates. On March 11, 2022, Philokimia published a lengthy post detailing her experiences as a trans woman in China, particularly her rare use of public bathrooms. She described her job as a lawyer in a major city in central China, providing context for her everyday life. As an educated, young, urban professional, her lifestyle is otherwise typical and similar to that of the majority of Douban users and *jijin nüquan* feminists. Below, we highlight parts of Philokimia’s post that

directly address her experience of using public bathrooms in her office building:

The only time I went to the bathroom at work in the past six months was when I worked overtime until the office was empty at night and then sneaked into the men's room. Even so, when I entered the men's room, I first observed at the door to make sure there was no one there and then rushed into the innermost stall, locked the door, and listened nervously to the outside noise while using the toilet. A large part of my daily life revolves around going to the bathroom. These details don't matter to a cisgender person, but for me, they all require careful calculation. Why do I still choose to do so? Because compared to the great uneasiness I feel when I go to a public restroom, these meticulous calculations are nothing more than a trivial inconvenience to me.

Philokimia wrote this post in response to the already rampant trans-antagonistic arguments circulating among online feminist groups on Chinese social media. In her post, she describes the extreme caution she takes in arranging her daily life to avoid using public bathrooms as much as possible—a concern that is common in the lives of many trans people. The only time she uses a semi-public bathroom is when she knows no one is around, where access is limited to employees, and she is only out as a trans woman to some colleagues. She opts for the men's room out of a greater fear of being outed in the women's room. In sharing this narrative, Philokimia powerfully refutes the image of trans women “invading” women's bathrooms and the underlying transmisogyny. By expressing her concerns for her own safety, she effectively turns the argument around, implying that she poses no threat to cisgender women or gender-segregated spaces; rather, these spaces may pose a threat to her safety by potentially revealing her identity to the transmisogynist others. It is also worth noting that Philokimia did not reveal any medical details about her body in response to the unreasonable demands to prove her “womanness” in the comments made under her post. In this way, her account could be seen as what Lingel (2021) calls “dazzle camouflage,” a negotiation of boundaries in the face of policing, surveillance, and the trans-antagonistic gaze by making some parts of her life hyper-visible while keeping other parts opaque, thereby both challenging online transmisogyny and protecting herself.

This post immediately caught the attention of many *jijin nüquan* feminist users. Large amounts of transmisogynistic speech soon took over the commentary section.⁹ We translated two representative comments here:

2a. Don't just say, “I have a dick, but I think I'm female, so I should be accepted by women to enjoy everything that women have,” and then overlook the damage you cause to the safe environment for women. Don't choose the easier target simply because patriarchal society oppresses you! Oops, he's bullying me, so how about I squeeze into the women's

9 This post received about 180 comments, 489 likes, and 499 reposts. Douban allows sub-comments, and some early comments have 50 or so sub-comments; thus, we estimate about 400 comments and sub-comments in total. The last comment was posted on August 5, 2022, concluding an active debate of five months under this post. Numbers retrieved on January 13, 2023. The original post and comments can be accessed at https://www.douban.com/people/46979882/status/3793219716/?_dtcc=1&_i=3147100Z--oMpc.

room? This makes women feel really unsafe! You should safeguard other women if you have the self awareness of a woman. You will never be a woman unless you have the courage to complete the surgery. (Douban user “Zoo horticulturist”)

2b. You’re not a woman, so you can say women who have this fear are trans-misogynists; you’re not a woman, so you condemn women who are terrified of sexual assault as being duped by patriarchy; you’re not a woman, so you think our worry is excessive. You don’t go through all the pains of growing up and living as a woman but still want to call yourself a woman, that is okay; but you despise and deny these pains and still think you’re a woman, then I think you’re shameless, cunning, selfish, and indifferent, and you make real women angry. (Douban user “nireiko”)

Most of these comments come from self-identified feminists and *jijin nüquan* feminists. Three points in Philokimia’s personal narrative particularly stand out to commenters and receive the most responses: 1) Philokimia’s claim to be a woman; 2) her description of her difficulties and concerns, which seem to ask for sympathy and understanding from cisgender women; and 3) her assertion that cisgender women’s fear of trans women invading women’s bathrooms is unfounded. However, many of the comments on Philokimia’s post, as exemplified by these two cases, go beyond the content of the post and project onto her an image that is not present in her original narrative. The comments accuse Philokimia of being aggressive and of taking away the hard-earned rights of cisgender women, despite her clear statement that she very rarely uses any public bathroom and used the men’s room on the rare occasions. We suggest that the comments on Philokimia’s original post are so off the mark because the real “target” of these comments is the harmful controlling image of trans women invading women’s bathrooms—a narrative imported from the Rowling debates and other Anglophone trans-antagonistic discourses. The stereotypical mischaracterization of trans women as an aggressive, sexually threatening presence in women’s bathrooms is a familiar talking point for those who have followed the bathroom debates on Anglophone social media. These narratives are so powerful in their transnational and translational circulation that they shape the rhetoric in these comments, overshadowing the deeply personal and local voice in Philokimia’s post.

These comments reinforce assumptions about cisgender women’s vulnerability and existence in a constant state of being threatened. Being assigned female at birth, and specifically not having a penis, is considered the determining factor of womanhood, thus cis womanhood is being reduced to physical vulnerability to all others. Meanwhile, because of the public’s narrow understanding of rape only as the non-consensual penetration of the vagina by the penis, trans women are falsely imagined to be free from sexual violence. In this imagination, trans women are associated only with the role of the perpetrator and never as victims of sexual violence. In the bathroom debate, trans-misogynistic feminist views emphasize certain aspects of cis women’s vulnerability, framing these aspects as the essential features of “being a woman,” while simultaneously invalidating the vulnerability of trans women and further excluding them from the category of women. In other words, “gender-critical” discourse seeks to juxtapose a vulnerable and silenced homogenous group of “real women” against pathological individuals

who are perceived as neither authentically female nor male. As Bassi and LaFleur (2022) suggest, in transmisogynistic ideology, both trans and cis womanhood are rendered in highly ideological ways: the former as an example of perverted and deviant individual behavior, and the latter as an ontological state whose normativity derives from its supposed naturalness.

In the comments, we also observe two conflicting views on acknowledging the gender identity of trans women. Comment 2a asserts that only genital surgery will make a trans woman a woman, indicating that gender identity is not valid without a biological (read: genital) basis. Comment 2b, on the other hand, suggests that a trans woman's gender identity may be valid ("you want to call yourself a woman, fine"), but it is considered superfluous, unimportant, and unrelated to lived experience. The comment implies that "real women" have fears because of their innate vulnerability, based on a biological essentialist understanding—something that trans women do not have, did not grow up with, and therefore can never fully understand or sympathize with. Echoing the two implications of translating "gender" as discussed in Section 3, these two comments view gender identity as either unreal or superfluous.

CONCLUSION

The politically mobilizing force of the vulnerable female has animated *jijin nüquan* feminists on Chinese social media. Facing the challenging political landscape and the impossibility of building coalitions with queer and trans activism, many *jijin nüquan* feminists are politically motivated to defend women's rights but lack the means of building a community with other women across differences because of their narrow focus on essentialist understandings of sexed bodies. Their understanding ultimately stems from a cisgender matrix that links men's social positions of privilege and physical strength with their sexual characteristics, rather than adopting a more nuanced and intersectional understanding of the social construction of both sex and gender that would allow them to recognize the vulnerability of trans women. Building on our earlier discussion of the history of Chinese feminist movements and the politics of translation, we argue that the mobilization around the concept of women's vulnerability and the scapegoating of trans women are rooted in pre-existing mainstream feminist discourses that center middle-class urban women. The recent history of feminist mobilization online, the uneven access to information, and the politics of translation have all contributed to the perception that only certain bodies are vulnerable, while others pose threats to the vulnerable status of the former.

In this article, we examined the phenomenon of emerging trans-antagonism, particularly transmisogyny against trans women and trans feminine individuals, on Chinese social media. The rise of trans-antagonistic and transmisogynist discourses, fueled by misinformation within online feminist groups, is especially concerning as they engage with the global "gender-critical movement" and neo-fascist politics, while also being deeply rooted in the histories of feminist and queer activism in China and the translations of sex and gender. Therefore, we identified the modality and typology of transmisogyny in contemporary Chinese social media by tracing and analyzing the politics, histories, and emerging formations that contribute to such ideology. Further studies are needed to explore other forms of coalition and division within trans and queer

communities, as well as with emerging feminist communities in China. Additionally, it is important to investigate how these relationships have evolved over the years and what social and political factors have contributed to these changes.

We adopted a transnational approach to explore the discursive formation of transmisogyny among Chinese trans-exclusionary *jijin nüquan* feminists on social media from three major aspects. First, we examined how *jijin nüquan* feminists have increasingly dominated online spaces following the increased policing of queer feminist activists and LGBTQ+ NGOs since 2015. While *jijin nüquan* feminists have successfully mobilized a larger number of feminists online and garnered widespread grassroots engagement, they also import and actively produce homophobic and trans-antagonistic misinformation to create a sense of political urgency. Second, we analyzed the unfinished project of translating sex, gender, and transgender terminology into Chinese from the Anglophone-dominated knowledge production circulation. This unfinished translation project can reinforce biological essentialism, which, in the current political context, can easily be used to justify trans-antagonism. Lastly, by identifying the vulnerability of cisgender women as a central mobilizing strategy among *jijin nüquan* on social media, we argue that transmisogynistic ideology is mobilized by framing trans women as a threat to the imagined security of urban middle-class cisgender women, whose essentialist conception of womanhood is perceived as being particularly endangered by trans women. This essentialist conception of vulnerable womanhood is further reinforced by deploying the linguistic choices in translation, while the politics of translation often remains unexamined in such usage.

We acknowledge that the unique characteristics of transmisogyny on Chinese social media—borrowing from the Anglophone world but also localized in contemporary China—are the result of the entanglement between a global right-wing politics of imagined threats, misinformation on social media, and national historical contexts. However, despite the political setbacks and the continuing expansion of authoritarian policing, the emerging trans activism and the vibrant conversations between various feminist communities in China still hold promise. To make the future less harmful than it appears now and to ensure the flourishing of both trans activism and feminist communities in China, we call for a radical rethinking of the process of transnational knowledge production, a concrete and localized vision of queer and trans feminism, and the formation of transnational alliances among these movements.

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