
Social Activism as a Response to Experienced Forced Migration in China

by

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Abstract: This paper examines the roots for feminist social activism with special regard to biographical experiences. Starting with a clarification of central terms like civil society and voluntarism, I will dig deeper into the special female experience of the Cultural Revolution mass movements. Since many of the very first pioneers of the non-profit, non-governmental movement belong to a certain generation I will first analyse joint experiences and continue to filter the differences in the individual experiences. It will be shown how the experienced (forced) migration formed individual activism, social activism and academic careers. Exemplified by the life course, memories and reflection of protagonists of the feminist movement I will highlight the fundamental differences in the same respective generation. Doing this, it will be shown that there exists very different coping strategies and the direction of activism differs between raising the level of gender consciousness, organizing for mutual support or writing in order to foster public reflection.

The experience of forced displacement can form strong identities and loyalties which in turn can lead to powerful social movements. Social or political movements are simultaneously based on an “other” identity¹, and form new identities for themselves. For China, we can find many historical examples of organized resistance movements or social movements which originated in forced displacement or colonial oppression². On the other hand, forced displacement can

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¹ Sometimes even through internalized racial attitudes (Enwezor 2001, p. 11)

² Jun Jing (2006) described the long struggle of one whole village which was resettled during the 1960s and recovered by collective commemoration. The best example of resistance against “colonial oppressors” is perhaps the opposition movements during 1970 on Taiwan, which was led by

destroy the very essential sense of belonging and produces ethnic-cultural disintegration. It is well known and also discussed in this volume that displaced people have to struggle to integrate in the receiving areas, to adapt to local communities and most of the time do not manage to build up sustainable livelihoods.

In this paper, I will address the relationship between displacement and social activism. In particular, I will focus on post-Mao women's activism in China and analyse the socio-cultural and historical roots of this activism from a biographical perspective. I will argue that women who experienced the forced migration were especially sensitive to gender issues. Also, I will analyze the reasons why women started to organize themselves and what role the experience of state-induced mass migration played for their social activism.

I will argue that women non-party/non-state initiative³ first constituted out of their experiences during the Cultural Revolution (CR). There are two aspects which fostered their activism: one nurtured by memory, another by the need to survive. The term "culture of remembrance", which Assmann defines as a universal phenomenon and describes as "memory which founds communities" (Assman 1999, p. 30), does not necessarily have to found "nations", as in the case of Israel, but these "memory communities" can also function on a much smaller scale inside societies or "sub-communities". Additionally, the need to form self-help initiatives during the 1980s resulted from lessons learned during their 20s and the urgent need to challenge old state paradigms of women's liberation.

In a first step I would like to highlight the changes and recent developments concerning women's activism in China to explain the specifics of the "new Era" of women's activism. In a second step, I will characterize two prominent figures of these new female "pioneers". Finally, I will highlight the main common stigmas of this generation of women related to their forced migration. I would like to invite your comments and further discussion. My study nevertheless suffers from a non-representative sample and likely bias. For that reason arguments raised in this article are tentative and serve as material for further discussion.

Introduction

I have discussed elsewhere the influence of public discourses and current social status on the individual memory of women who experienced forced migration or participated in the mass migration movement of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. In particular, I have shown how the memories of women who belong to the highly stereotyped and stigmatized generation of the so-called *Zhiqing-*

indigenous members of parliament. Other examples for resistance movements are the opposition movements which occurred among Tibetan and Uyghur' diasporas.

³ I do not want to repeat here the lengthy discussion on the correct use of Western terms like NGO or civil society in the Chinese context. For a short but detailed clarification of the terms NGO and grassroots organizations see Keech-Marx (2008, p. 175).

Generation⁴ are influenced by different parameters like public discourse, individual meaningful life (“Sinnstiftung”), their different status and “class background” during the Cultural Revolution and identity formation (Sausmikat 2000, 2002). It was shown, how dominant discourses as well as the commodification of memoirs of this specific generation forced women to adjust their narrated life stories to dominant master narratives and how they developed mechanisms to find space for non-mainstream memory. During the last 15 years, memory-, biography- and life course research has experienced a fascinating come back in the field of social and political transformation (Della Porta 1992; Blee 1996; Breckner 2000; Miethe and Roth 2000). Studying Post-war Estonia or Russian political thought, the biographical perspective on societies seems to find worldwide interest. These theories treat memory as a forming force for political consciousness and – analyzed with structural hermeneutic – as a mirror of social processes. On the other hand we experienced a renewed debate on the deficits of memory. It is argued that memory is constructing fake history and always serves individual interests (Singer 2005; Welzer 2005). Rather than perceiving memory as a “tape recorder” for history I see memory work as a constitutive process of a political identity formed through a complex intertwining of social processes, narrated life stories and discourses.

In this essay I will look at the action level. In particular I am interested in the biographical roots for social action and political identity. Different to approaches which focus on the travel of ideas or discourses into policies (Derichs, Heberer, Sausmikat 2004) I find it necessary to ask for the root of a political identity which forms political ideas. In an earlier essay I highlighted the relationship between political ideas and life stories and focused on the instrumental use of the term “generation” for legitimacy purposes (Sausmikat 2003). What I want to demonstrate here are the socio-psychological roots of social movements by referring on the agent-focused social movement theories (Miethe 1999; Roth 1997). It should be clear that there have been no social movements in China in terms of the New Social Movement Theory. But I look at these first women’s initiatives as the sprout of a later social movement. As Myra Marx Ferree has demonstrated, the biographical perspective can be very helpful for understanding the social movement agent as a *familied self*, which highlights especially the difference between men and women when it comes to political action (Marx Ferree 2000).

This paper is based on a variety of materials. Besides the interview material used for the analysis of Cultural Revolution memories, it uses findings of my research on the spillover effects of intellectual discourses on political change (Sausmikat 2006) as well as the extensive work on Civil Society in China (2006-2010). This article also draws on informal exchange with prominent representatives of the first wave of women’s activism⁵, and the material available from the two

⁴ The full term reads *Zhishi qingnian*, which means literally “youth with knowledge” and refers to educated youth between aged between 14 and 20 who were sent to the countryside for re-education during the Cultural Revolution.

⁵ Two recent examples are: Our EU-China Civil Society Forum organized a workshop in Vienna on women activism in 2009 (http://www.eu-china.net/german/Termine/2009.09.28_Social-Developments-in-China-and-Europe-an-exchange-of-experienc.html) as well as a panel focusing on

path-breaking meetings of the “Chinese Women Organizing” conferences held in July 1999 in Oxford (Hsiung, Jaschok, Milwertz with Chan 2001) and in 2010 in Beijing. Therefore, this paper is meant as a “thought in progress” presentation which does not claim to be based on representative empirical field research. It is the attempt to build a bridge between the new work done on the different generations of “civil society protagonists”, which is inspired by a political science perspective, and the work done in the more historically and sociological informed research on “political generations”.

A few qualifications are necessary before we explore the generation in question. This holds true in particular for the term “civil society”, which travelled globally and was adapted by China in a very local sense. Above that we shall briefly discuss the meaning of voluntarism, especially in connection with different phases and characters of the migration movement. Finally, the term “generation” will be critically revisited to be aware of all the different connotations and power-related concepts conveyed by this term.

Some clarification of terms

Civil society: There will be no detail discussion of the terms “civil society” or “NGOs” (Non-governmental organizations) in China⁶. Since – as mentioned above – there has been much written on the problematic adaption of civil society or NGO to the Chinese context, I just briefly summarize the main findings⁷. The old Hegelian understanding of a dichotomy between state and society influenced the European coining of the term. Sometimes it is used in the sense of Habermas, to a certain extent also Gramsci (highlighting public spheres between market and state which forms public opinion), sometimes in a communitarian sense (highlighting the solidarity and responsibility among social communities, today often associated with the welfare function of the “Third sector”) or for the highlighting of the core element of a free society, the protection of civil rights, including the right to form autonomous organizations (Dahrendorf, Toqueville). We know that the adaption of this term in China happened precisely when China entered the global community of market societies. During the internal struggles and social changes of the 1980s as well as the reception of the big changes in Eastern Europe after 1989, this term carried the danger of toppling the regime, but during the first half of the 1990s the state managed to regain control over the shoots of independent singular actions and the influx of foreign concepts. From 1995 onwards, Chinese civil society means – as Yu Keping highlights (Yu 2008) – a form of social management in partnership

women’s political participation and NGOs during the international conference “Women and politics in Asia: A Springboard for Democracy?”, Hildesheim 2009.

⁶ This I have done extensively in Sausmikat (2010).

⁷ This summary naturally carries a strong bias – similar to the one Jonathan Unger openly admits when categorizing civil society definitions into three types: the Hegelian influenced neo-liberal type (highlighting free market society, of minority usage), the democratization type (which he judges as being tautological and of minority usage) and the “most prevalent conceptualization” focusing on the autonomous organizations (Unger 2008, pp. 2-3).

with state authorities. For our purpose here, which is to analyze the connection between women's activism and experienced migration, it serves much better to focus on social change and movements. Social movement theory interprets social movement as integral part of social change. Raschke defines social movement as "a mobilizing actor which aims for fundamental social change, tries to avoid it or reverse it with the help of different forms of action and organizations" (Raschke 1991, p. 32). The new era of women's activism after the Cultural Revolution will be analyzed as a result of social and political change. The transformation created room for activism which is rooted in certain biographical experience⁸.

Voluntarism and "forced migration": In Chinese history the term "voluntarism" was and is a very tricky construction. Especially when turning to state-induced mass movements under totalitarian rule "voluntarism" becomes a euphemism for forced submission. During the Cultural Revolution, one tenth of the city youth – people between 14 and 21 years old – were resettled in the rural areas. This movement from the very beginning always carried two aspects: one of being a hero, one of being the punished enemy. This mass movement was pretty well prepared with some "model resettlers" already propagated four years before the mass resettlement movement. Nevertheless, it makes a fundamental difference if the women went to the countryside because they belonged to the group of deportees 1966/67 or because they tried to upgrade their bad class background by showing their willingness for revolutionary sacrifice, or believed in a certain military mission. The migration policies had different phases before and after the top-down order of the 1968 mass movement.

Different phases of the rustication movement: Throughout the years 1964-1979 the urban-rural resettlement (or rustication) movement carried the different aspects of being an urban economic readjustment program, a "rural modernization program", an ideological re-education, and forced migration (which officially is not part of the rustication). Briefly, we can state that there were different phases of the migration movement: 1962-1968, 1968-1971/73, 1973-1979.

1) Between 1962 and 1968, resettlement became a centralized policy under the new commissioner Tan Zhenlin who was at the same time responsible for agricultural planning. There was no official order that urban teenagers had to be resettled (and re-educated by peasants). The aspect of force and punishment during that time mainly focussed on unemployed, uneducated and bad classes or people with "political problems". The aspect of heroism was pushed by the policy of anti-corruption and re-education of rural cadres (*siqing*) which was not genuinely Maoist but on the contrary was more representative of the Dengist group. Model resettlers were propagated who were meant to mobilize the masses. These figures still left room to believe that by moving to the remote areas these youth would "follow the revolution", "educate" the peasants (Qu Zhe) or stay in touch with the state through state subsidies (Xing Yanzi). Xing was first propagated in summer 1960 with the slogan "to go there where the party needs you most" (*dao dang zui*

⁸ For a more detailed elaboration on the interconnection between transformation and biography especially for the former German Democratic Republic or the former Soviet Union see Miethe and Roth (2000).

xuyao de difang qu). Xing deeply influenced the generation born between 1947 and 1952 – especially women. Even shortly after the great rural famine with approximately 30 million deaths⁹ the reading of Xing Yanzi's self sacrifices became duty lecture for schools after 1962. It was even propagated that the urban youth could free the countryside from hunger and protect China's border against aggression coming from the Soviet Union just by relying on the power of believing in socialism (Lieberthal 1993, p. 115)¹⁰. Nevertheless, paroles like Zhou Enlai's "embrace revolution and support production" (*zhua geming cu shengchan*)¹¹, which was meant to de-radicalise the violent struggles, also included the reduction of urban population and the stabilization of urban economy. With the radicalization of the Cultural Revolution and the violent clashes of Red Guards among each other and with the authorities, resettlement practice also became radicalized and some extreme forms of violent deportation took place (Barnouin 1993, p. 98). Until today it is a taboo to reflect on the deportations of class enemy's at the end of 1966 and the beginning 1967. Nearly unnoticed an announcement of the middle school no. four (the school of the famous 1989 activist Fang Lizhi) on the 24th August 1966 became the starting signal of a nation-wide campaign to deport class enemies and return urban citizens with rural backgrounds. The definition of the categories for class enemy varied during this "cleansing of class ranks". These deportations were jointly organized by police stations (*paichusuo*) and registration authorities (*juweihui*). Here it was declared, that all "rich peasants, counter revolutionaries and bad elements, which sneaked into the cities, are ordered to return to their hometown and be reeducated through labor before 10th of September. If they resist their residences will be sealed and they will be immediately forced to obey"¹². Many of these people already lived in the cities for two generations. Until the end of September, only in Beijing there had already been 84,000 "bad elements" deported¹³. Usually, the deportations were accompanied by fierce violence, sometimes these people – no matter if old people or children – just got murdered (Liu 1987, pp. 25-27; Barnouin, Yu 1993, p. 98). These deportations are absurd if we think about the pressure put on young relatives of class enemies who felt very humiliated when they had to fight to be allowed to take part in the patriotic revolutionary resettlement movement after 1968. From 1968 to 1971, most of power abuses, especially concerning young girls, were covered by the doctrine to become re-educated by the peasants.

⁹ Currently, there is a debate going on among China scientists on the number of excess death between 1959 and 1961. The established number of 30 million has been challenged – some vote for more, other for less. Because its not the topic here we will not get engaged in this discussion.

¹⁰ *Zhinong* or *Wunong* (support agricultural production) and *Zhi bian* (strengthen border regions) became early synonyms for resettlement policies.

¹¹ Zhou became famous for this parole just because many associated him as the only one who really cared for the economy. But after 1967, this parole was used to block the returning youth and send them back to the countryside (Sausmikat 2001, pp. 101-107).

¹² See *Red Guards Publications*, Center of Chinese Research Materials, Association of Research and Libraries. Washington 1975, Bd. 19, 6069. Quoted in Xiao (1996/97, p. 41). Also so called "rightists" were subsumed under the category of bad elements (Chan et al. 1985, p. 270).

¹³ Barnouin and Yu mention the number of 85,198 people (Barnouin, Yu 1993, p. 98).

2) 1968-1971/73: It was the proclamation in the “Renmin Ribao” (People’s Daily) of 22 of December, 1968, which first ordered all young people in the cities to turn resettlement into a mass movement. From August to December, mass mobilization of volunteers prepared the mass migration. This mass migration of urban teenagers into the underdeveloped hinterland and border regions mobilized some 17 million young people between 1968 and 1976. Some of the so-called *Zhiqing* – educated youth – were motivated by excessive idealism, some became snared in Mao Zedong’s personality cult and armed with a heroic thirst for action, others were pressured by various subtle forms of coercion. As a rule, they were no older than 20, and most of them came to spend their entire youth performing hard physical labor in the countryside. Under the parole “We also have two hands to work and do not need to stay in the cities and create chaos (*women ye you liangzhi shou, bu zai chengshi li chi naofan*) combined with Mao citations, the resettlement inherited the aspect of forced migration. Today, those who call themselves *Laosanjie*¹⁴ aim to emphasize that they went to the countryside voluntarily thus showing strong commitment to “change the backwardness of the hinterland”. Since during the 1990s it became an established taboo to mention the rebellious aspect of the *Zhiqing* generation (which would focus on the Red Guard past) – especially after 1989 – the *Laosanjie* identity were especially chosen in order to identify with the positive propagated image.

3) After 1971 – after the death of Lin Biao – and especially after the reopening of schools some had the chance to return to the cities as “worker-, peasant-, soldier”-student (*gongnongbing*). Also, the resettlement conference of 1973 condemned for the first time the rape and torture that occurred in the name of the re-education doctrine. After 1979, and especially after 1986, interpretations and discussion about the legitimacy of that mass movement were stopped (also because of the massive return of youth) and a positive evaluation of the policies dominated henceforth. The movement was split from the historical period of the Cultural Revolution and was announced as a “patriotic movement” with roots dating back long before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.

Also, conditions in the receiving areas as well as the possibilities to return changed throughout the 1960s and 1970s. It is therefore important to keep in mind that it makes a difference if women had the chance to work in army reconstruction corps (*jianshe bingtuan*), being sent to remote production units (*renmin gongshe*) or were displaced in individual farmer households (*fensan chadui*). Zhou Enlai’s argued already back in 1963 for the *fensan chadui* because it was much cheaper than the settlement in military farms. This form of resettlement was definitely the most cruel one – especially for women. The film by Joan Cheng¹⁵ “*Xiuxiu*”

¹⁴ *Laosanjie* translates into “old three school classes” and refers to the high school graduates of the classes 1966-68 who were the main target of the rustication mass movement during the Cultural Revolution. Often they also belonged to the group of Red Guards.

¹⁵ “*Xiuxiu*” was first shown on 22.2.1998 during the international film festival in Berlin. It is based on the book of the Shanghai writer Yan Geling. Yan (*1956) who grew up in Chengdu, went to dance in the army at the age of 12. In an interview with the author Yan said, that most of the suicides of female *Zhiqing* in the countryside were motivated by the lost dignity after being raped. Yan Geling herself did not had to participate in the mass migration because her brothers participated.

describes very clearly the suicidal atmosphere of the fensan chadui. I will not go into detail here since much has been written on these differences already (Bernstein 1977; Scharping 1981; Chan 1985; Liu 1987; Mitsuyuki and Selden 1988/89; Liu 1995, 1998; Shi and He 1994, 1995; Jiang and Ashley 2000; Sausmikat 2001; Yang 2000). Women with bad class backgrounds or no *guanxi* (protecting networks) to powerful people were displaced to peasant households, where they were expected to “unite” with the peasants and adapt to misogynist practices. Therefore, the women did not really have had a choice – their choices depended very much on their family background. When women met in gender advocacy projects some 20 years after their fierce struggle during the Cultural Revolution, questions of being a victim or culprit sometimes occurred to be neutralized by being committed to the female cause. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that “migration” during the Cultural Revolution always carried a certain degree of force.

Generation: Many scholars on China apply the term generation without differentiation. They speak of the “Cultural Revolution (CR) generation”, but this does not mean that the same historical background produces a somehow homogeneous political mainstream, since groups never been homogeneous, neither during the CR nor afterwards. But the common ground is the historical stimulus, or the “need for interpretation” of a certain experienced reality, the “generation as an actuality”. Karl Mannheim pointed out that we have to differ between people of the same age cohort and people which are influenced by the same historical event. His term “generation as an actuality” describes different “forms of the *intellectuals and social response to an historical stimulus* experienced by all in common” (Mannheim 1928/1952, p. 304). Li Cheng highlighted the importance to distinguish between political elite generation and political generation (Li 2000, pp. 1-40)¹⁶. The so-called Fourth Generation of leadership (which is said to be represented by Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao, amongst others) is defined as the “CR generation”, but Li argued that there are many subgroups inside this generation.

Therefore this term confronts two dangers: it is a political term which shall justify certain legitimacy for political power, and it brings with it the danger of ideological generalizations. Especially the members of the so-called *Zhiqing* or *Laosanjie* were highly exploited by the government during the 1990s. Some critics see already in the use of the term “generation” a power propaganda which tries to mobilize people to cultivate communist ethics and support a certain power elite¹⁷. As a result, we may observe that defining generations is not only the business of social scientists but also of politicians. It is closely linked to concepts of legitimacy and claims to power. The book by the well-known author Yang Fan *The Third Generation of the People’s Republic of China* (1991) was written, according to the foreword, to re-establish the moral legitimacy of the “Third generation of leadership” after the Tiananmen massacre.

Having said this we can use this concept for looking at the women who experienced the big resettlement program during the Cultural Revolution by

¹⁶ Li defined the Fourth Generation of leaders as born between 1941-1956.

¹⁷ Zilin Dong in Wang (1995, pp. 172-181).

keeping in mind the importance of same historical stimulus, the differentiation in subgroups, and the danger of becoming used for political and ideological reasons. Keeping this in mind it will become clear throughout the article why this generation is especially sensitive for the danger of “being used” by political power.

The beginning of a new era of women’s activism – 1980s and 1990s

The following summary will highlight some core characteristics of the new Chinese women’s activism which were led by a certain generation of women¹⁸. For a better understanding the main actors in the field of women’s activism will be introduced.

These women often had to compromise and cooperate with high level authorities in order to get permission to organize. Not-Governmental Organization as a term itself was not known at that time – but in fact these first initiatives correspond much more to the meaning of NGOs as groups getting organized to raise awareness than later NGOs which are more located in third sector economies. Nevertheless, Diana Fu very clearly analyzed the process in which some of the women’s organizations are bent to the party “cage” of discourse when trying to “give women” (especially migrants) a voice (Fu 2009, pp. 527-561). Some women were able to accept this compromise, others were not. Nevertheless we have to keep in mind that the umbrella-function of the National Women’s Federation and the integration of NGOs into the state body not always meant restriction of their authority or independency. The process of institutionalization of women’s initiatives in the long run meant a tremendous change for women.

1 Elite activism – The root for the new women’s activism of the 1980s lies in a rebellion against anachronistic ideology. The establishment of feminist studies in China – as in most of the socialist countries – had to face the same task: the struggle with the taboo to put gender or sex above the category of class. But during the reform period, the changes in the role of the state in relation to the economy and society did make it increasingly difficult for state-derived feminism to steer an upward path for women¹⁹. It was pointed out clearly by National Women’s Federation cadres, that old theories have to be renewed by paying attention to the new realities. Inside the framework of Marxism, it was encouraged to develop new approaches. Very quickly, the establishment of organizations outside the state framework (i.e. by the well-known women scholar Li Xiaojiang²⁰) challenged the official representation body for women, the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF). These developments were paralleled by the challenge of the orthodox-Marxian paradigm of class category. During the time of the hot discussions on

¹⁸ Generation is used in the sense of Karl Mannheim and corresponds with age cohorts of people born between 1948-1953.

¹⁹ For the examination of the changing role of the ACWF see Howell (2002, pp. 43-56).

²⁰ Li tried to develop her own approach to “(Chinese) Marxist women studies“ and from 1984 onwards organized some conferences and informal meetings at the Zhengzhou university which challenged the notion of the already finished liberation process of women in socialist China (Sausmikát 1995, Spakowski 1996).

Marxist humanism in 1983, women tried to develop different interpretations of the relationship between Marxism and women studies²¹. Especially during the “Second national conference on women studies theory” in 1986, it was encouraged to break taboos and criticize orthodox views. Some scholars argued that Marxism and women studies did not have anything in common, others saw women studies as a fundamentally new science and others designed Marxist women studies to develop a Marxism liberation theory (Interview of the author with Li Jingzhi, member of *Fulian*, 17.5.1993, Beijing; Du 2001, p. 145). The ACWF occupied a hybrid position towards indigenization, because on the one hand they tried to integrate women’s liberation theory into the new reform policy and highlighted women’s contributions to the economic reform process, on the other hand they had to look for a new theoretical approach to explain the gender inequity during the reform process. Without exploring the structural roots of gender inequity and revising Marxist analysis, the remaining possibility for exploring inequity was to focus on defects and weaknesses of women themselves.

This rise of academic rebellion was accompanied by the establishment of the first non-state women initiatives. They were very important for the overall development of equality in a society, where social inequalities grew rapidly with the implementation of market economy. They were also important for gender lobbying, self help, emancipation, awareness raising, and practical help in all areas of life. Therefore, they pioneered a new era in Chinese political history and played a crucial role for the emergence of participatory spaces in the China of the 1980s and 1990s.

The women who started these initiatives all had experienced the Cultural Revolution and most of them the displacements and migration to the hinterland. One of the first established initiatives was the *Non-governmental women studies research association* (led by Li Xiaojiang, Zhengzhou 1985, *Funü yanjiu minjian tuanti*) (Sausmikat 1995). Other followed: The *Shaanxi Women’s Marriage and Family Research Association* in 1986 (led by Gao Xiaoxian), the *Jinglun Family Center* (a hotline for victims of domestic violence and legal problems (founded by Chen Yiyun in 1988), the *Beijing women’s studies center’s hotline* (1991, a hotline for women who have difficulties in coping with the fast economic and social change, later called “MAPLE”) (Sausmikat 2001, *Nüxing yanjiu* 1992, pp. 22-23, Croll 1995, pp. 173-174), the *Forum for Rural Women* in 1993 (Xie Lihua, former journalist, *Nongjia nü baishitong*) or the *Club for Female Migrants (Dagongmei zhi jia)* – initiated by the same group of activists. Also, the first hotline for homosexuals started during the first half of the 1990s. During these years, women tried to organize outside the state framework. The very first starting point of the non-state initiatives was a clear bottom-up initiative to fight for the right to openly name gender inequalities. Since there were no external donors the initiatives could rely only on the urban university resources.

²¹ It is remarkable that in one of the first post-Cultural Revolution conferences, organized by the journal *Women of China* in 1984, the most prominent protagonist for reforming Marxism in order to promote democracy in China, the high ranking cadre, Yu Guanyuan, was the keynote speaker.

2 Self-help initiatives – Many self-help initiatives started, such as telephone hotlines, which were also affiliated mostly with universities and served as early organizing and networking method. They were targeted at psychological and practical counselling, focussed on topics such as health (but also female suicide) (Gao 2001, pp. 196-197), family conflicts, divorce, domestic violence and employment or educational training, especially for female migrants (or returned *zhiqing*). In fact they were the immediate reaction to the swelling migrants in the cities – they addressed problems women who formerly were sent down to the countryside could understand very easily. In the beginning, the MAPLE centre did not rely on state institutions like the Women’s Federation or the Youth League which managed to organize 3000 Hotlines by 2004. MAPLE started to work with a staff of 12 volunteers, and by 2000, there were already more than 100 women working in more than 5 different hotlines.

3 The UN conference converted state institutions into non-profit organizations (NPOs) and helped the state to regain control over non-state movements – Inside China, the influence of the Beijing conference on Chinese women is judged very diverse. Many saw overwhelmingly positive effects and benefits (Liu 2001, pp. 141-157; Zhang 2001, pp. 159-179; Spakowski 2005, pp. 47-65). The NGO-Forum of the World conference enabled Chinese women to interact with international women NGOs without leaving the country, fostered knowledge exchange, awareness raising and produced manifold co-operations. The Forum marked the beginning of much more independence from the state through foreign donorship. By the end of the 1990s, there should have been around 2000 women’s associations (Jin 2001, p. 131). After the UN conference, the founding of women’s groups was approved by the authorities without larger complications – all kinds of female associations were established (of women judges, women prosecutors, and women doctors).

Other criticise this event strongly – among them one of the pioneers of the first non-state initiatives of the 1980s. Li Xiaojiang interpreted the whole event as a huge propaganda event for a government which until that specific date ignored gender inequalities (Li 1996, pp. 97-99). For her, the conference marked a fundamental turning point for the development of women’s activism in China. It can even be argued that the UN conference did not strengthen but weakened independent groups.

In fact, this conference had tremendous impact on bottom-up movements. Since that conference, the National Women’s Federation named itself the “biggest NPO of the world”. Lipinski (2006) interprets this proclamation as a method to address the new task of the former mass organization. Since the Federation was challenged with the task of establishing itself as a modern organization which represents the interests of all Chinese women it was necessary to conquer the NGO realm of women’s organizations. Simultaneously, they wanted to become a responsible “partner of the international development cooperation” (Lipinski 2006, p. 8). Very quickly, the National Women’s Federation became an umbrella organization which pressed for reforms on the legal side (the first law entirely devoted to women’s rights dates from 1991) and simultaneously tried to redefine itself as the protector for “informal and more vulnerable new social organizations” (Croll 2001, p. 35).

4 Limited success for women NPOs – Today, 15 years later, hopes and projections of Chinese women associations have vanished. With the overall “strong hand” on any kind of Civil Society Organization also women NGOs have felt the growing control of the state. Only some of the early initiatives have grown enormously and opened up several new initiatives. One example is Xie Lihua’s NGO “Rural women knowing all”. Besides a journal for female migrants this project managed to establish several small side projects aimed at the empowerment of women: micro finance projects, projects for rising literacy rates and migrant initiatives. Also, a direct outcome of the NGO-forum of the UN conference was the women’s media watch network, initiated again by Xie Lihua and organized by her colleagues Feng Yuan and Guo Yanqiu. This network was one of the rare networks fully obligated to gender awareness-raising. They publicized many judicial cases which evidenced the existence of the misogynist attitudes in the Chinese society as well as in the political and social structures. Six years later, in 2001, Xie and her colleagues founded the “Cultural Development Centre for Rural Women”. Today, they have 43 full-time staff, in 2005 they managed to mobilize 2.5 Million Yuan (or US\$313.000). Another example of successful expansion is the Legal Counselling Centre at Beijing University, which takes a leading position in channelling new laws in favour of women.

5 State as the dominant facilitator in the field – Cooperation with the All-China Women’s Federation very often provided the necessary resources for the start-up. Nevertheless, the fact that the Federation itself is officially accepted as an NPO makes it especially difficult to speak of “independent women NPOs” in China. The old capacity building approach of the 1980s to “improve the quality of the women” (*tigao suzhi*²²) has not really changed until today. The governmental investments in the rural health and educational sector have had a strong effect in improving women’s status, but only in regions which were categorized as “very poor”. In most other regions the basic fight for survival provides an argument for further postponing gender sensitive policies.

Biographical experience and social activism

Keeping in mind this development, we can argue that the pioneering non-state women organizations are built on two pillars: university activities to challenge the states’ monopoly on defining liberation and self-help agencies for women who had a migration background. When women began to organize they had just returned from a long and bitter journey to revolution. As elaborated above, the term “generation” has to be used carefully. The women in question were “born” in the same “historical location”, which was characterized by a non-democratic, political environment. The social and political transformations planned by Mao and his followers were meant to be a concern of *several generations*. They learned many lessons important for their future life course. Two should be highlighted here (based on biographical interviews conducted between 1995-2001):

²² On the usage of the term *suzhi* as instrument of propaganda see especially Spakowski (2005, pp. 465-481).

1. They learned not to trust party propaganda. This is especially true for women who first believed in the revolutionary course and later experienced a kind of awakening by facing harsh realities. These people were chosen to become the “new vanguard of revolution”. They were engaged in the factional fights in the cities and later on were ordered to settle down in the countryside to be re-educated by the peasants. Young girls and women who arrived in the countryside just a few years after the big famine often had to realize that their arrival did not mean help but more burden and hunger for them. Also the death of Lin Biao in 1971 led to a widespread disillusionment among the Mao-believers. Later on, some of them even realized how they had been misused as political instruments by the elite in power. Moreover, after years of Spartan life in the countryside, these women suddenly found themselves in a society where femininity was again reemphasized, not only as a result of the rise of the consumer society but also because the government had decided to rehabilitate motherhood and housework as “typically female” occupations.

2. They learned how to fight for survival. Many women experienced deprivation, rape, punishment of all kinds, and humiliation by forced marriages. Even before forced migration and the start of mass migration, forced marriages were the reason why many of the female patriotic volunteers returned to the cities very quickly. During the 1980s they again had to fight humiliating stereotypes and criminalization. The term *zhiqing* even became a curse word. Again, many experienced sexual exploitation when they looked for ways to leave the wilderness. In the early 1980s, the National Women’s Federation even called for a stop of violence against women. Nevertheless, members of this generation reject to reflect on this aspect (and criticise movies like the above mentioned “Xiuxiu”) because they do not want to become stigmatized²³.

As mentioned above, it is not my ambition to generalize the experience of a whole generation of women. In my former publications I described in detail the different reflections which are either based in different biographical experiences or in the different strategies to cope with the present. The two “lessons learned” mentioned here just pinpoint two extremes on the continuum of chances to integrate their experiences into a changing society which only accepted a limited space for the diversity of experiences. When the main message the propaganda machine produces focuses on the “third generation of revolutionaries” who fought for the modernization of the country, the highly controversial character (Red Guard/ *Zhiqing*) as well as the gender aspect (oppression of sex identities) and the deportation belonged to the sensitive part of remembering.

A crucial question therefore was if they could re-enter urban society – either by mobilizing “social capital” (or resources) or by integrating into the highly advertised group of revolutionaries. Generally speaking, identification as a “victim” or an agent of history determined the initial move to become active. We will see in the case studies which fields of action were chosen by whom. How did

²³ Some interviewees even described the complicated return procedures as much more difficult and traumatic than their rustication. More detailed discussion on the stereotypes can be found in Sausmikat 2002.

women behave who strongly identified with state-propagated generation collective of *Laosanjie*? How do women organize who were strongly traumatized by violence and had no possibility to integrate into the collective of heroes? How do women organize who managed to build up a career inside the system and later were identified as culprit? We cannot address here the complexity of questions – but we will make a first attempt.

The women who first became active after the Cultural Revolution started as an elite closed circle. During the 1980s, they were confronted with a fierce struggle to return to the cities, find a job, and make a living. As we have learned above, most of the first women's organisations focussed on rural issues or started as hotlines, especially for women migrating to the cities. Most of these actions were genuinely established by these women. As a very first attempt to categorize the different political actions of women who belong to the same generation we can identify three different kinds of actions:

- Women with former powerful ties in the political hierarchy managed to establish their own women's organization (Li Xiaojiang, Xie Lihua)
- Women who started to form any kind of collective to survive in the cities (collective self-help initiatives)
- Women who integrated their personal displacement experiences into their professions (writers, researchers).

Let us examine each action individually.

1) The two protagonists Li Xiaojiang (born 1951) and Xie Lihua (born 1952) perhaps represent two antagonistic directions of becoming active. If we examine the career of both women we can depict certain leadership qualities: both managed to become group leaders in the countryside. But here the similarities already end. Li grew up in an urban academic environment within a leading cadre family with connection to the US. Xie was born in the countryside and suffered from being the second daughter of a relatively poor peasant family in Shandong, having to subordinate to her younger brother.

Also, both belonged to very different class categories. Whereas Li managed to escape the destiny of "black classes" by strategically using her family networks, Xie was not under pressure to whitewash her class background. She became a Red Guard leader in her secondary school, did not participate in the mass migration movement and went to the countryside as a member of the army. Li's father was paraded in the streets by young Red Guards humiliated by the cap and a placard around his neck identifying him as enemy of the revolution. Xie went to the *jianshe bingtuan* – to the reconstruction army camps in South Yunnan – a much better choice compared to the displacement of urban youth to remote individual farmer s households. Li "was assigned to settle down in the rural areas", as she herself wrote (Li 1994, p. 110), and tried to steel herself to show she would become as strong and powerful as men. Finally she managed to become a production team leader.

During the Cultural Revolution both made the crucial experience which finally led them to become leaders for the women movement. Both had to cope with the task of behaving like men and even be tougher than them. Both wanted to be strong and "never shed tears" (Li 1994, p. 110) while enduring hardship, physical torturous work or deprivation.

What did they do in the 1980s?

Both began their careers in the first half of the 1980s. Whereas Li belonged to the first batch of students in 1978 and managed to teach at Zhengzhou University since 1982, Xie returned to the city in 1984, part time went to university, part time worked as a reporter for the party magazine *Women's Daily* (*funü ribao*). Li was very quickly promoted to the position of assistant professor in the university her parents belonged to.

These two women had a very different approach to women's liberation: Whereas Xie belongs to the group of women who think "strategically"²⁴ and closely cooperated with the Women's Federation (in fact Xie was part of them), Li after a few attempts very early rejected cooperation. Xie believed in the necessity to first liberate the rural women which meant to educate them. Li's departure was the superstructure (*Überbau*). She established her own women's research institute to challenge fundamental assumption of the party state and criticised the socialist "top-down" liberation by the party. Whereas Xie very easily could integrate in the dominant discourse of the generation as "the backbone of the country" because they "modernized" the country, Li refused to integrate in any kind of mainstream debate. In a way Xie's chosen path confirms some of my former findings on the powerful attraction to belong to the patriotic collective of "modernizers". Especially women who narrated their life as being ruled by the strong identification with the former revolutionary movement and who managed to gain access to powerful positions during the 1970s demonstrated the belief of being chosen to help the hinterland and deliver development aid (Sausmikat 2001, p. 272-276). Xie left the *Women's Daily* and in 1993 established her own magazine *Rural women knowing all* (*nongjia nü baishitong*), which also was administered under the umbrella of the Federation. In the first edition²⁵ she declared that the aim of that publication is "to raise the ability for competition of rural women" which again corresponds with the Federation's aim to raise the "*suzhil* quality" of women for competing in the market²⁶.

Xie tried to establish a voice or a lobby for rural women and her approach very much resembles classical capacity building and development aid. This magazine, as well as the numerous follow-up projects (including a training centre for rural women, migrants club, and research on female suicides), were a big success and are still very much welcomed by the huge target group of rural women and female migrants. In 2005, Xie even was proposed for the Nobel Peace Prize. Her association perfectly fits into the so-called "second type" of Chinese civil society organizations, characterized by Kang Xiaogang as follows: limited preferential treatment in taxation, large gap between the supply of and demand for NGO services, resources primarily come from overseas, mobilization top-down intervention to improve human welfare, cooperation with local governments and international NGOs (Kang 2001). Ironically, Xie as a former Red Guard, is training

²⁴ For a more detailed elaboration on that *celüexing*/strategic, see Hsiung et al. (2001, pp. 11-12).

²⁵ First edition of *Nong jia nü baishi tong* (1993), p. 64.

²⁶ The national campaign "Double study, double competition (*shuangxue, shuangbi*)" had already started in 1989 (Zheng 1996, pp. 3-10).

today rural women to become village heads. In some cases the top-down design of bringing rural women in leading political positions collided with the intrinsic need of the selected women. The top-down measures to ensure or enforce participation do not always meet the needs of young rural women (Liu 2008).

Li as a pioneer of the women's movement cared very much about gender identity questions and the agency question. In her view it was necessary to awaken the women and foster a self-liberation of women who experienced top-down liberation. She mainly engaged in the challenging of socialist emancipation theories and linked the development of women's studies in China directly with the experiences of her generation. In her view, women of the older generation received a good education but had to suffer from realization of their abilities because of the "Great Leap Forward". The younger generation (she does not specify cohorts) sees women's emancipation as something given and lack social commitment. The generation "in between" – her generation – had suffered from the Cultural Revolution, getting no formal education, and when married again being absolutely dependent on the husband. Several historical antagonisms can be found in this generation, as she said (Li 1988, p. 26). Following this argument she declared that this would be the reason why this generation would be the "backbone of the socialist construction" – a statement very typical for many of my interviewees (Li 1988, p. 26). But – we have to keep in mind that these statements were products of their time – made at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. The debate developed from more historical or political topics like women's lib movement or marriage and family to more fundamental questions of systematic renewal of society (Frick 1995, pp. 11-42). Later on, she widened her argument and became one of the most powerful advocates for "localized" women studies. She not only being a critic of the UN-world conference on women but additionally looking for creating a specific "Chinese feminism" which perceives women's studies in China only as part of the more encompassing "study of humanity" (*renxue*) (Spakowski 2011, p. 40).

Therefore, she neither integrated in the modernization paradigm for this generation nor cooperated with existing state bodies for women's issues. Li represents all the women who were not willing to integrate into the mainstream propaganda of the 1990s and therefore were marginalized inside the women's movement. Nevertheless, after experiencing confrontation not only with the Federation, the state and the international community, she again relied on the same strategies which rescued her before – her specific *guanxi*. With the help of old networks she managed to open up her own "independent" research centre in Dalian.

Both life courses have been strongly influenced and characterized by the gender identification question resulting from their resettlement experiences. But perhaps stronger have been the lessons learned in the relationship with state authorities. Both leading women activists exemplify two ways how to arrange with the new post-revolutionary setting. Whereas Li developed a kind of "self-strengthening" psychology which later on also influenced her concept of a "Chinese feminism" becoming a powerful counterpart of Western feminism, Xie managed to smoothly integrate in mainstream discourses and develop her own modernization path for

women. Both strategies also reflect in a broader sense the political discussion in the intellectual elite how to arrange with the Western forces.

2) Many women who first got active in the hotlines were also women who formerly were displaced to the countryside and later managed to return into the cities. Their first motive was to help women with common destinies as well as other migrant women. In 1991, the Beijing women's studies centre hotline – later MAPLE – was set up for women who couldn't cope with the adaption to the city life or who needed other psychological help (Sausmikat 1993, p. 58). They tried to “assist women especially under the age of 30 who are captured between tradition and new chances” and to support “independent decisions” for developing strong self consciousness (Interviews 1994; Croll 1995, pp. 173-174). Also, Xie Lihua's “Dagongmei's home” claimed to empower migrant women. Other women's NGOs which started as hotlines were the Jinglun Family Centre (founded 1988 by Prof. Chen Yiyun) and the Legal Counselling Centre for Women and Children in Yunnan/ Xishuangbanna.

For many who sought help it was important to know that the association was not linked to the National Women's Federation. For the customers, the atmosphere of trust was essential, often they wanted to remain anonymous and be sure that their conversation will not be controlled by state organs. Only under these conditions, an individual private space without social or moral constraints could have been opened. In 1994, Long Sihai, the former director of the Legal Counselling Centre for Women and Children in Xishuangbanna (Yunnan), told me for example that women who wanted to get divorced (a major problem for women who originally came from the cities and wanted to return) can get moral support, practical advice and psychological help whereas the Women's Federation office clerks would criticize these women for their failed marriage. Therefore, people like Ms Deng who worked for MAPLE, consciously decided to work for a non-state organization.

Ms Deng²⁷ was one of the women I interviewed over a period of three years. She is the daughter of a cadre who was condemned during the first month of the Cultural Revolution. She belonged to the “black classes” and the group of deportees 1966, suffered from public humiliations. Even more drastically than in the case of Li she was openly humiliated together with her mother, paraded through the streets with a poster around the neck and the yin-yang haircut. She was deported to the countryside, raped and rescued herself by marrying a handicapped peasant. For her, the displacement was identical with a deadly peril, living in a city meant protection of her womanhood. In order to return to the city she divorced and married again in the city. But this marriage also did not last, later she married a third time. Her daughter is from her first husband. For Ms Deng the pure physical humiliation as a woman is reigning her memory – she is narrating her life from the position of a “true victim” – somebody who beyond any doubt can claim to belong to the groups of the victims. Ci Jiwei explained “...the body is ever sensitive to pain, and pain dictates its own laws of memory and forgetfulness” (Ci 1994, p. 97). The activity in the newly established hotline centre in Beijing gave her a strong

²⁷ Name changed.

sense of belonging and self-consciousness, where she – as she said – had the feeling that she was able to advocate the women’s concern. At that time, these concerns were quite conservative speaking from a European standpoint. She was proud to exhibit her sense for aesthetics, to openly advertise femininity, to show motherly love, or to speak about marriage frustration. But for China, this new “femininity” showed that these women managed to cope with the new urban city life and represented models for new market society modern women.

Another aspect was the new “memory collective” which can be established through these hotlines. Similar to Guo Xiaoxian’s Shaanxi hotline or the early Legal Counselling Centre of Guo Jianmei, women found a new familiarity and home among these women of their generation. Since they created a link between the urban and the rural communities by giving advice also to many former *Zhiqing* who did not manage to return to the cities, they represented a powerful force which united past and present.

3) During the 1990s, the migration experience was also integrated into the individual professions of women of this generation. This was especially the case within the academies and in literature. One example is the research project on “School education for rural girls in the Northwestern areas”. This project was organised by the Beijing University Women’s Research Centre, the Chinese Foundation for the Development of Children and Youth and the Research Centre for Development. One of the core initiators of that project belonged to the group of girls who believed in the revolutionary mass movement, participated in the “big exchange of revolutionary ideas” (*da chuanlian*) and together with her schoolmates went to the countryside to settle down in the remote area. The most suffering part for her had been to stop school education. Having experienced this restriction, and after being contacted by others who felt the need to care for the women in the region where they formerly were sent to, she felt obliged to commit herself for that cause. She stated: “Once you manage to provide national school education for all girls, this will be the solution for all women problems in the backward areas” (Zang 1994, p. 46). More recent examples include research projects of formerly *Zhiqing* women dealing with female workers rights and the situation of migrant workers, political participation of women (Li Huiying), the feminization of agricultural labour (Zuo 2005) or the sexual division of labour (Jin 2002, 2006). Some of these women even analyse the period of the Cultural Revolution under gender aspects (like Jin Yihong, Zuo Jiping). There are several other women who cannot all be mentioned here.

In literature, it was much more complicated. As Emily Honig already pointed out the first half of the 1990s saw the birth of the memoir literature type which coincided with the explosion of sex literature – “how to do it, with whom it is appropriate, and at what age it is acceptable” (Honig 2003, pp. 143-175). This produced – to use Honig’s words – a “sexing of the Cultural Revolution” where personal testimonies and reflections produced sexual histories. This observation may be only half-true because not all literature which was available in the West was also available for the Chinese readership in mainland China. Nevertheless, female writers of that generation already during the 1980s started to write about sex and sexuality. Many of the first pioneer female writers of that generation

rejected to be labelled as “feminist” because they wanted to be seen as writers and not as writing on behalf of a certain interest group, or, as Zhang Kangkang put it, felt that this term was pathological²⁸. Since there was a strong tendency to break with traditional taboos concerning sexuality and oppression of women in the countryside, critics felt that this literature was putting a strong bias on this generation. There was also the critique that the “wound literature” or “reportage literature” of the 1980s creates the false image of women of this generation. Others were afraid that their readership would suffer or narrow down from this labeling. Nevertheless, one of these writers, Lu Xing'er²⁹, became well known as representing the “feminist literature” because she focused very early on topics like love, marriage, and sexuality of the female migrated youth (Leung 1994, p. 134; Sheng 1995, p. 838). She addressed problems of abortion, the difficulty of women who experienced forced migration to develop emotional empathy, and the specific characteristics of female intellectuals of this generation. She describes the typical crises of women of this generation: divorce and/or marriage for returning to the cities, fight for education, difficulties to combine the old “fighter/ soldier” identification with motherly duties and the lost of belief in happiness (Lu 1987a, Lu 1987b).

The other side of the coin was the stigmatization of women of this generation by their male counterparts. *Zhiqing* women became tragic heroes and were used as an “excuse” for this exploited generation. Similar to the Hitler children soldiers of the German *Flakhelfer* generation (born between 1926-30), who were described as tragic heroes of blind patriotism by German memoir literature³⁰, women protagonists of the *Zhiqing* generation were martyrs of the “good cause of patriotism”. Psychologically, they served a “healing patriotism”³¹. These tragic heroes were bare of any kind of personality and navigated directly into a useless death. Kong Jiasheng is an example: His women heroes were directed by the purpose to highlight tragedy and heroism. Female heroism is clearly distinguished from male heroism: “I believe women can endure hunger and cold better than men. Another factor in my thinking was that women symbolize the power to continue the human race”³². The “moral integrity” of these women was characterized in their endurance of hardship and deprivation (*zhidao chiku*) and their distinction as obedient and loyal work force. Women of this generation criticized this stigmatization and highlighted their responsibility towards their children and the

²⁸ For a detailed discussion of the term “women’s literature” (*nüxing wenxue*) see Sausmikat (1995, pp. 169-175). Around the mid 1990s it was agreed that this term could be applied to all literature written by women (Sheng et al. 1995, pp. 803-854).

²⁹ Lu Xing'er (1949-2004), sister of Lu Tianming, left her hometown Shanghai in 1968 and in 1978 managed to move to Beijing and study at the central academy of drama (Leung 1994, pp. 133-143).

³⁰ Bude (1987, p. 196ff) analysed the development of German memoir literature as well as sociological research on the *Flakhelfer* generation. This generation was commanded to the “suicide mission” shortly before the loss of the war during their youth.

³¹ This is following the interpretation of Lucian W. Pye and Anne Thurston (Pye 1986, p. 606).

³² Kong Jiasheng in Leung (1994, p. 77).

future generations. They want to hand down their ambition and stamina³³. This generation is highly stigmatized and misused by official propaganda.

Only before this background it is perspicuous that many female writers of the so-called “new realism” want to portray the “average women as counter-image to the well-merchandized heroes and to portray female protagonists who do not fit into stereotyped images³⁴.

Conclusion

Remembering is understanding (Today, we are threatened by losing the existence of history itself, as far as it can be understood and therefore be remembered, Hannah Arendt, 1951)

On the 26th of March 2011 all member of the sent-down youth generation must have felt like returning to Cultural Revolutionary times: cadres in Chongqing were ordered to “go down to the countryside” to “work, live and eat” together with the peasants. The quick rising of the Maoist camp in the party consists of many people belonging to the sent-down youth generation. Even the next president Xi Jinping belongs to that generation – at the age of 15 he was sent down from Beijing to the province of Shaanxi to perform hard manual labor.

This message reminds us of the power of “memory collectives”. How can these old Cultural Revolutionary slogans find their way into the highly modernized China of the year 2011? Why do these policies still bear so much attraction? This time, people who formerly were sent-down are the ones who now send-down.

If we turn to the social activism of women of this generation we have analyzed a distinctive relation between the biographical experience and the level of action. Being part of a generation which is strongly influenced in its youth by experiences of political hysteria and mass migration can form collective bonds in very different directions. Here we only have highlighted three levels of action which are triggered by the experience of involuntarily migration as well as mass migration: mobilize to raise the level of gender consciousness, organize for mutual support, write and research for public reflection.

The Cultural Revolution with its misogynist practices and the mass migration policies both formed a specific affinity for Chinese women to be sensitive for gender discrimination. Therefore, they developed a strong need to become active as long as they sensed the political space and the necessary resources for any kind of activism. Mostly it started out as self-help but later on developed as empowering networks for mutual support. Finally, public reflection on this highly stigmatized group led to defence actions of women who want to counterbalance stigmatization. Again, many feel obliged to reproduce the lessons they learned for the younger generation.

³³ Title of the special edition of the *Zhongguo Funü* 1994, No. 1-12.

³⁴ One example is the writer Chi Li (born in 1957), who created the figure of Lala in *You are like a river* (*Ni shi yi tiao he*, 1991). This woman is neither soft nor motherly, nor devotional and altruistic (Müller 1996, pp. 164-65). Chi Li herself went to the countryside in 1974 and was discriminated against because of the bad class background of her father who was labeled a “rightist” (Sheng et al. eds. 1995, pp. 1000-1010).

One specifically interesting aspect discussed here is the relationship between biographically formed political consciousness and the relationship with the nation-state or party authorities. These women managed to become independent idea or knowledge entrepreneurs of their own cause which has its roots in a fundamental scepticism towards state-led movements, especially concerning women's liberation.

Wei Shiqin directly links the new era of women's movement to the experiences made during the Cultural Revolution. For her, the most important lesson learned during these years was to enable women to independently earn their own living and which in her view is the most important accomplishment for the integration of women into the modernization process (Wei 1995, p. 196). Wei rejects any explanation which uses the argument of efficiency to lay off women during times of economic crisis. For her, this kind of argument is based on the same mistaken logic which was the root for the mass migration movement: "During the Cultural Revolution, aims like equal rights, full employment and sufficient food were substituted by personality cult, privileges of political status, the big social gap between the "five red elements" and the "nine black elements", and the forced migration of students, civil clerks, academics, men and women with their children, who had to hunger and do useless sometimes destructive work. (...) The alleged antagonism between women's employment and efficiency actually do not exist" (Wei 1995, p. 195).

This quote once again highlights the importance to reconnect personal experiences and policy programs related to gender policies. If we lean back and try to summarize the developments in women activism throughout the past 20-25 years we clearly can depict the integration of most of the women NGOs into the overall trend to subsume non-governmental organizations into the third sector welfare, development and poverty alleviation programs. The 2009 anthology of *Chinese women NGOs* edited by Gao Xiaoxian (Shaanxi research association for women and family) and Xie Lihua wants to put emphasis on the fact that mature and premature women NGOs have to alliance and learn from each other in order to promote gender equality (Gao, Xie 2009). Gao Xiaoxian highlighted that the characteristics of contemporary women's movement in China is among other to make use of the resources in the existing system and push for the incorporation of feminist issues into the mainstream discourse (like building a harmonious society and construct a new socialist countryside)³⁵.

This also reflects the urgency of policies dealing with the increasing impoverishment of especially the female population in China. The most recent international symposium "Chinese women organizing: Looking back, looking forward" in July 2010 in Beijing put a clear emphasis on rural women and migrants as well as on the discussion and display of activities concerning ethnic minorities.

³⁵http://www.eu-china.net/web/cms/upload/pdf/nachrichten/2010_05_13_wien_29092009_xiaoxian_gao.pdf, [cited 20.11.2010].

Simultaneously, networking and the state-of-the-art concerning the implementation of Gender studies into the curricula still was very high on the agenda.

Therefore, the current dominant women NGOs do fit very well in the states program to “establish a harmonious society” and fulfil their social welfare function. The critical phase of the WAD conferences (women in development) seems to be concluded³⁶.

As analysed above this direction of activism is led by women who learned how to compromise and think pragmatically. Fundamental questions important for effective gender equality like deprivation of rights, no equal access to land rights or corrupt economic or political practices are usually not tackled. These dominant voices are accompanied by the group of rebellious women who do not shy away from confrontations. They fight for clearly defined bottom-up approaches. Only very few of the earlier bottom-up initiatives managed to survive. One sad example is the Centre for Women’s Law Studies and Legal Services, which recently got shot down but continues to work under different label. True independence from the state only possible with strong alliances – the example of Li Xiaojiang’s long enduring fight for setting up independent institutions has shown that. Therefore, on the level of mobilization for gender awareness we find two poles of incorporated non-confrontative and confrontative initiatives. The success of these initiatives will again rely on the ability to meet biographical experiences of the generations to come.

Finally, this generation of women can be claimed to give rise to a new era of women activism in China by developing their own different coping strategies to their experienced of state-induced migration.

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³⁶ Zhang Naihua was the first who fostered the introduction of the WAD perspective. Later, Du Fangqin, Jin Yihong, Liu Bohong and other followed (Du 1993; Jin, Liu 1998).

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