A New Feminism for China?
A Case Study of LEAN IN Circles in Mainland China

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Abstract

After the economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese women have dealt with new forms of gender-based restrictions in their career advancements. LEAN IN, a community inspired by Sheryl Sandberg’s book «Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead» published in 2013, offers professional development, support and assistance to help women deal with these challenges. It has been claimed that the American-inspired women’s groups has brought a new kind of feminism to the country. However, there has not been conducted any research to prove this statement. In this thesis, I have looked at Chinese LEAN IN groups in comparison with both Sandberg’s LEAN IN concept and feminist theory. Based on participant observations and interviews conducted with LEAN IN participants, core members and guest speakers from September 2015 to January 2016, I found that Chinese LEAN IN groups have made some changes to their work away from the original LEAN IN concept in order to adapt to national conditions. Chinese LEAN IN groups’ perspectives on feminism were different from the original LEAN IN concept based on Sheryl Sandberg’s book, but had similarities with the American LEAN IN organisation’s views. With a review of the literature on feminism in China, I discovered that the American LEAN IN organisation’s concept is corresponding with the governmental organisation All-China Women’s Federation discourse on women’s development. The LEAN IN activities also resemble women’s group meetings which occurred in the early years of the reform era. LEAN IN in China cooperates with All-China Women’s Federation, who could decide to prohibit LEAN IN in China if they step out of their discourse. I argue that this puts Chinese LEAN IN groups in a dependent relation to the All-China Women’s Federation. This research shows how a certain group of people working on women’s issues in China define feminism. It is important to understand the organisations working on women’s issues in order to learn more about the Chinese feminist situation. Studying LEAN IN as an important part of a potential Chinese feminist movement could give an indicator to where the movement is heading.
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1 Introduction

«I think I might have that way of thinking, but I am not that extreme,» explained Chen Meihui when I asked her if she considered herself a feminist.¹ Chen Meihui is one of the founders of LEAN IN Hangzhou, a group arranging meetings inspired by the book « Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead», written by Sheryl Sandberg and published in 2013. Sandberg writes that her book is «... sort of a feminist manifesto.»² and sets out to offer advice on how to break through the so-called glass ceiling, that is gender-based restrictions at the workplace. LEAN IN has grown to be popular in China, and there are LEAN IN communities in 20 cities and at 50 colleges all over the country,³ and 100,000 Chinese men and women are involved.⁴

In this study, I have looked at Chinese LEAN IN groups in comparison with both Sandberg’s LEAN IN concept and feminist theory. There are two Chinese words for the term ‘feminism’ which carry different connotations. Feminism was first translated to ‘nüquan zhuyi 女权主义’ . The word quan means power or rights, which together with women’s and -ism holds a demand for women’s political rights. ‘Nüquan zhuyi’ became a forbidden term during the first decades of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) rule, and it was considered as ‘bourgeois’ feminism of the West. A new translation of feminism was proposed in the beginning of the 1990s: ‘nüxing zhuyi 女性主义’, meaning woman- or femininity-ism. The new term emphasises gender differences rather than women’s political rights.⁵

Feminism as women’s rights is a sensitive topic in China, which became clear in September 2015 during the UN event in New York, called the «Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Commitment to Action». The Chinese president Xi Jinping and the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon co-chaired the event which marked the twentieth anniversary of UN’s «Fourth World Conference on Women» held in Beijing. In New York, Xi Jinping put forward a four-point proposal in order to promote gender equality

¹ In interview with author, January 2016, see Appendix B for more information on the informants. All quotes in Chinese are translated by author, see Appendix C, quote 1.
⁴ According to Sarah, co-founder of Lean In Beijing, in interview with author, January 2016.
worldwide: to strive for women's development, to protect women's rights and interests, to ensure sufficient basic medical services and to develop vocational and life-long education for women." Xi opened the event, saying that,

«... China will do more to enhance gender equality as its basic State policy, give play to women's important role as 'half of the sky' and support them in realizing their own dreams and aspirations in both career and life. The Chinese women, through their own development, will also play a greater part in the global women's movement and make greater contributions to gender equality in the world.»

However, while praising women’s liberation in New York, women’s activists in China were silenced by the Chinese government. According to the The Guardian, Chinese feminist organisations were ordered by security officials to refrain from any public form of activity or celebration during the UN summit in New York. In March 2015, five women’s activists were imprisoned by the Chinese government for «picking quarrels and creating a disturbance». The activists planned to distribute pamphlets raising awareness on sexual harassment on public transportation.

Due to the sensitive nature of women’s rights in China, I hypothesised that Chinese LEAN IN groups have made some changes to their work away from the original LEAN IN concept in order to adapt to the national conditions, including their perspective on feminism. Didi Kirsten Tatlow in the New York Times called the LEAN IN concept of self-development a new kind of feminism for China. In contrast to Tatlow’s statement, I argue that LEAN IN is not a new feminism for China, and that it is, in fact, quite similar to the governmental organisation All-China’s Women’s Federation’s (ACWF) feminist discourse. The Chinese

10 Branigan, «Five Chinese Feminists Held over International Women's Day Plans.»
LEAN IN events are also much like women’s group meetings which occurred in the early years of the reform era.

Through qualitative research with LEAN IN participants and core members, I have learned how Chinese LEAN IN groups carry out their activities. My guiding research question is thus: How are Chinese LEAN IN groups compared to the original American concept?

The next chapter provides a background on Chinese feminism and the current working situation for women in China. The third chapter describes the qualitative research methods I have used for this thesis; in-depth interviews and participant observations. I found it necessary to include an introduction to the Chinese social media WeChat in this chapter as well, because it has been an important part of my fieldwork. To get an understanding of both the original LEAN IN concept and LEAN IN groups of China, I have applied feminist theory as a framework to analyse my findings, which is introduced in the fourth chapter. The analysis is divided into two chapters. In chapter five, I compare Sandberg’s original LEAN IN idea with feminist theory, before I move on to analyse and compare China’s LEAN IN with Sandberg’s concept in chapter six. I conclude the thesis in chapter seven.

2 Background

In the New York Times article, Tatlow wrote that although feminism in China predates Sandberg’s LEAN IN concept, LEAN IN could have caused a new focus for the Chinese women’s movement. She saw the enthusiasm for LEAN IN in China as a possible revolution;

As the Chinese government strikes anew against freedom of speech, detaining even mild-mannered democracy activists, civil society advocates and popular public opinion leaders, might there be a feminist revolution in China before there is a democratic one?\(^\text{12}\)

The term ‘feminism’ was first translated to Chinese as ‘nüquan zhuyi’ in the turn of the twentieth-century, inspired by the idea of women’s political equality which spread during the Western women’s movement in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{12}\) Tatlow, «For China, a New Kind of Feminism.»

\(^{13}\) Min, «Duihua (Dialogue) In-Between,» 177.
Chinese women’s movement grew during the May Fourth Movement (1917-1921), when it was called for rebuilding the Chinese society and rebelling against traditions.\(^\text{14}\)

China is to some extent influenced by Confucian traditions, but I must emphasise that although Confucianism can be relevant to women’s current situation in China, it is important to have in mind that it is not the only concept that shaped Chinese society’s discourse on women. Confucianism values family relationships, and has been criticised for promoting women’s oppression, like for instance the principles of Threefold Obedience, which are introduced in the classical Confucian text «Book of Rites» (Liji 礼记). According to these principles, it is considered a virtue for women to be obedient to men;

\begin{quote}
Woman following man is the beginning of the correct relation between husband and wife; obedience to the father before marriage, to the husband after marriage, and to the son after the husband’s death.\(^\text{15}\)
\end{quote}

In a patriarchal understanding of the Threefold Obedience principles, the proper role of a woman is to be mother and wife, to serve her husband and in-laws, and to take care of the children.\(^\text{16}\) According to Valutanu, Confucian gender analogies originally emphasised differences between male and female. It was only later it developed to become a hierarchical relationship where women were subordinated to men. Valutanu described the Chinese social system as patrilineal and patriarchal, in which women traditionally belong to the ‘interior’ (the domestic area), and men to the ‘exterior’ (governance and business).\(^\text{17}\)

Today, the Chinese government seems to move closer to embracing what Bell called ‘left Confucianism’, a system that combines socialism with Confucian traditions, in which family values are important.\(^\text{18}\) The former Chinese president Hu Jintao (2003-2013) coined the term ‘harmonious society’ to describe the ideal socialist society where stability and order prevails. A harmonious family is the foundation of a harmonious society, and the family is the ‘basic


\(^{15}\) Quoted in Yuan, *Reconceiving Women’s Equality in China*, 10.


\(^{17}\) Luciana Irina Valutanu, «Confucius and Feminism,» *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012,) 132-133.

Emphasising the importance of relationships leaves people who lack family members or spouse disadvantaged. According to Chinese traditional patterns of choosing spouse, most men preferred women who had lower educational-, political- and economical positions than themselves, and most women wanted men who had higher positions and stronger abilities. Thus, highly educated women with high incomes and strong personal abilities found it harder to get married. Huang wrote that women’s position in the Chinese society has developed to become far better than before, but many women still hold a belief that men should be stronger than them. A professional, urban woman in her late twenties or early thirties who is still single, is called a «left-over woman» (sheng nü 剩女), a stigma that interferes with some women’s wish to climb the career ladder. In a recent book on women and marriage, Hong Fincher argued that the resurgence of traditional gender norms puts pressure on young, educated women to marry and to devalue their status and material well-being. Because it is expected of a man to marry down in status (i.e. economic class, social prestige and power), women make personal and financial compromises out of fear they won’t find a husband otherwise. Hong Fincher examined the ACWF’s media campaigns on leftover-women, and claimed that the ACWF attempts to stop urban, educated women from delaying marriage. According to the author, the aim of the Federation’s campaigns is to maintain social stability because single, restless men are regarded a threat to the Chinese society’s foundations. Hong Fincher argued that the ACWF (and CCP) also wish to upgrade the quality of the population, which can be done by having highly educated women give birth to children to whom they will give an optimal nurturing environment.

LEAN IN Beijing is the first LEAN IN group in China, and was formally registered as a Chinese company in February 2016 taking the name LEAN IN China (to avoid confusion I will continue to use the name LEAN IN Beijing). LEAN IN Beijing cooperates with ACWF,

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which was established by the CCP in 1949 in order to promote gender equality and represent and safeguard women’s rights and interests. During the first decades of it’s existence, ACWF exclusively defined the gender discourse in which women’s liberation was considered a part of the political class struggle. The term ‘nüquan zhuyi’ was seen as the ‘bourgeois’ feminism of the West, and it became forbidden to use it. Today, ACWF is the only mass organisation for women in China. Kjelsvik wrote that all organisational activity in China must be registered with a state institution in order to become legitimate. Their tolerance for local activities varies from collaboration to conflict, depending on whether or not the activity is considered a threat to the ACWF and/or to the CCP. Organisations who work with issues overlapping the ACWF will be counteracted, and often neglected.

The ACWF is under direct supervision of the CCP, and are thus playing a dual role of both transmitting and implementing state policy and representing women's interests. When Deng Xiaoping initiated the Opening and Reform era in 1978, China went from planned- to market economy, but kept the political ideology of socialism. Marxist thought was still dominant in the 1980s and 1990s, but many scholars disagreed with the Marxist belief that women would be liberated from subordination through institutional changes, and saw economic modernisation as women’s liberator. Scholars believe that the re-emergence of feminism was triggered during the Opening and Reform era as a part of the attempt to modernise China. Feminism was also given a new translation in this period; ‘nüxing zhuyi’. The new term created a change of focus, from gender equality (‘nüquan zhuyi’) to gender difference (‘nüxing zhuyi’). Mao Zedong established People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, and believed that women would no longer be slaves of men if they only gained economic

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24 Min, «Duihua (Dialogue) In-Between,» 177.


28 Min, «Duihua (Dialogue) In-Between», 177.
independence through paid jobs. However, most women were still the primary caretaker at home and had to deal with the double burden of domestic housework in addition to their work.\(^{30}\) It was expected of women to undertake the same labour as men. Biological sex and gender differences were ignored, and for many women’s studies scholars the Opening and Reform era made place for an awakening on gender identity awareness among women, claiming female bodily-, physiological- and psychological differences.\(^{31}\) Su and Zhang called this revived theory ‘feminist theory with Chinese socialist characteristics’. By referring to quotes from Mao Zedong, Jiang Zemin and Friedrich Engels, the authors justified a new version of Marxist feminism, and claimed that it maintains Marxist theoretical frameworks. The authors argue that as the society develops, so must the theories. In this sense, feminist theory with Chinese socialist characteristics is just a developed version of Marxist feminist theory.\(^{32}\) Some women’s studies scholars were critical to women’s economic liberation. Gao Xianxian, the Director of the Institute of Women’s studies in the Women’s Federation of Shaanxi province, was one of them. In an interview with Min Dongchao, Gao said that she was inspired by an American scholar, and saw the negative effect the market economy had on women. This led her to think that modernisation alone would not automatically solve women’s issues.\(^{33}\)

Unable to challenge the CCP’s Marxist policy on women’s liberation through class struggle, the ACWF changed their focus instead, and went from from gender equality to gender differences and self-development. ACWF still carries out Marxist policies, as proven from the latest version of the ACWF constitution;

\[
\ldots \text{ACWF will hold high the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, support the Party’s fundamental principle, fundamental itinerary, fundamental guiding principles and fundamental experience, support and develop Marxist view on}
\]

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\(^{30}\) Yuan, Reconceiving Women’s Equality in China, 60.

\(^{31}\) Min, «Awakening again».

\(^{32}\) Ruping Su and Lixi Zhang, «试析中国特色社会主义妇女理论构建中的六个关系» (Six Relationships on the Study of Women’s Theory with Chinese Characteristics,) Journal of China Women’s University, no. 3 (2013).

\(^{33}\) Min, «Awakening Again», 283.
women, carry out the basic state policy on gender equality, unite, guide numerous women at building an overall well-off society with a relatively comfortable life.34

However, a quick visit to ACWF’s current Chinese website35 shows how the renewed focus on self-development is still alive today. The website’s top banner shows four Chinese words; self-respect (zizun 自尊), self-reliance (zili 自立), self-confidence (zixin 自信) and self-improvement (ziqiang 自强). ACWF first adopted these words as their slogan, called ‘the Four Selves’, in 1983, which at first consisted of the words self-respect, self-love, self-possession and self-improvement. The slogan was renewed to what is use today during the Sixth Congress in 1989.36

Yuan called Deng Xiaoping’s Opening and Reform era the ‘dark age’ for women’s development.37 Class struggle was replaced by a wish to create a modern and powerful socialist country through rapid growth and modernisation of production. When the state retreated from the society, the new liberal economy was based the principle of equal opportunity, which worked to women’s disadvantage.38 According to Burnett, men was often considered to be more suitable for work because women were taken for granted as less capable, both physically and mentally. Men on the other hand, were believed to have greater need of income as they were presumed to be the primary breadwinner of the family.39 The privatisation of the Chinese market contributed to an increase in the gender wage gap, and women were segregated into production-type jobs. Dong, MacPhail, Bowles and Ho reported that women perceived more limited control over their work and described less job satisfaction than their male colleagues.40


35 www.women.org.cn

36 Min, «Awakening Again», 283.

37 Yuan, Reconceiving Women’s Equality in China, 76.

38 Yuan, Reconceiving Women’s Equality in China, 76.


In order to handle the issues the political reforms caused, scholars were encouraged to meet and discuss. Some women met in so-called «Women’s Popular Academic Salons» to discuss gender inequality. These salons also appeared at campuses, where female students who were worried about the effects of the reforms could gather, share complaints and analyse the emerging situation. Many of their discussions centred on translated Western feminist texts and books. In the early stage of the salons the groups invited guest speakers, created discussions groups and arranged small research projects.\(^{41}\)

A study from 2013 showed that 19 percent of Chinese female workers held a CEO title, which was above the global average of 8 percent. According to the study, the proportion of female executives was higher in non-state enterprises compared to state-owned enterprises. However, Liu mentioned that the majority of female executives could simply be daughters who have taken over the non-state family business from their fathers.\(^{42}\)

Women are represented in the Chinese workforce and in the political leadership, but there has not yet been a female member of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCCP).\(^{43}\) According to Rosen, women are given political position that are not important enough to the Central Committee, and are restricted to do women’s work such as leading the ACWF or handling family’s-, women’s- and children’s issues.\(^{44}\)

Statistics from 2012 showed that 351 million women in China were employed, accounting for 45.9 percent of the workforce. The annual income of employed women was less than 60

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\(^{42}\) Shimin Liu, «A few good women at the top: The China case,» *Business Horizons* 56, no. 4 (2013).

\(^{43}\) Benxiang Zeng, «Women’s political participation in China: Improved or not?» *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 15, no. 1 (2014).

percent than that of men’s. To give a comparative impression, 57.7 percent of American women and 68.1 percent of Norwegian women was employed the same year.

Modern women deal with social, organisational and individual obstacles in their career advancement, which have been given the term ‘glass ceiling’. Cherie D. Werhun defined the ‘glass ceiling’ as «an invisible and unbreakable barrier that prevents the advancement of women and members of ethnic and racial minority groups beyond middle management into top executive management positions, despite their qualifications.» Leung argued that Chinese labour laws and regulations reinforce the glass ceiling. Although the CCP claims to provide laws that ensure gender equality and protect women’s interests, Leung argued that the legislation is based on gender roles. Women are theoretically protected from gender-based discriminations, but the protection can be regarded as paternalistic and restrictive. Leung writes that «the modern law classifies women ... as weaker beings who need special protection and support.»

The Chinese LEAN IN participants and core members are mostly women who wish to exceed in their careers, but are working in an environment that to an extent holds them back. Chinese LEAN IN groups offer China-specific support and assistance to deal with these issues. How this has been done and how it is different from the original American way is shown in later chapters.

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3 Methodology

This research is based on qualitative fieldwork. I have participated in Chinese LEAN IN group meetings from September 2015 to January 2016, conducted interviews with core members and participants and joined their discussions on the Chinese social media WeChat. A researcher who is conducting qualitative research is gathering data about what people (including him/herself) sees, feels, hears, tastes and smells. Rather than going to the field to measure and predict, a qualitative researcher describes, interprets and analyses, and seeks depth instead of width. The understanding and representation the researcher achieves are filtered through his/her own eyes, so the researcher’s subjectivity cannot avoid shape the entire project. In the end, the final result is the researcher’s own story about the stories people have told him/her.51

The aim of using LEAN IN as a case study is to contribute with something specific to the otherwise abstract feminist theory in a Chinese context. A case study is a description of a set of events where actors have been involved in a defined situation at a particular time. A case study should support an argument, and show how general theories demonstrate themselves in particular circumstances.52

3.1 Participant Observation

Although participant observation is not a method of data collection by itself, it might give a deeper look into people’s lives. A researcher is a participant observer when s/he finds him/herself in the same position as the actors s/he is observing. This double position gives the researcher an opportunity to both observe him/herself as an participant, and to be his/her own informant.53 I participated in five meetings in Hangzhou and Beijing; three with LEAN IN Hangzhou, one with LEAN IN Tsinghua and one with LEAN IN Beijing (see appendix B for more information).

53 Tor Halfdan Aase and Erik Fossåskaret, Skapte Virkeligheter: Om Produksjon Og Tolkning Av Kvalitative Data (Created Realities: Production and Interpretation of Qualitative Data.) 2nd ed. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2014,) 63-64.
From the beginning, I presented myself as a graduate student who was writing a thesis about the Chinese LEAN IN’s activities. I established a half-local position in the LEAN IN society. It was clear that I did not have an ordinary position in their social system, but I participated in the activities like everyone else, and got a feeling of how it was like to be a part of the Chinese LEAN IN community. I also got a first-hand experience of what the guest speakers shared and how the audience responded, and when the opportunity was given I would join participants in shopping or café visits afterwards and discuss the meeting.

I was the only foreigner participating at LEAN IN Hangzhou and LEAN IN Tsinghua’s activities. Except for the language barriers I met during the interviews, I found the bias working to my advantage. It helped me make relevant contacts for interviews, because when I requested interviews, most of them already knew who I was.

3. 2 WeChat

All the LEAN IN groups I have been in touch with used the WeChat application as the main method of spreading their agenda. WeChat is a social media developed by Tencent in China and released in 2011. In the last quarter of 2015 it had 697 million monthly active users.\textsuperscript{54} WeChat is a text and voice messaging communication service, which also offers a ‘wall’ for the users to share pictures, texts and websites with their friends. There is also a subscription option where organisations and groups are given a platform to share news about their activities. Chinese LEAN IN groups informed their followers when the next activity would take place, and a few days after the even, a summary of the event was published together with pictures of the guest speakers and participants. They also publish book recommendations and articles on the subject of women and work. In addition to the public platform, LEAN IN Hangzhou and LEAN IN Tsinghua created a private group-chat for their participants. LEAN IN Hangzhou called their group ‘LEAN IN Hangzhou Family’, where people could continue discussions, ask for advice or share relevant articles.

\textsuperscript{54} Statista, «Number of monthly active WeChat users from 2nd quarter 2010 to 4th quarter 2015 (in millions).», accessed April 30, 2016, \url{http://www.statista.com/statistics/255778/number-of-active-wechat-messenger-accounts/}
3. 3 Interviews

Doing interviews is a frequently used method in social science research. There are, however, many challenges to this method. An interview is not a way to receive the informant’s subjective experience and opinion, but rather a social setting where experience and opinions are created. A person’s experience, knowledge and attitude are an expression of existing cultural discourse and collective thinking patterns. The informant’s story reflects his or her position in a social context. A common mistake for a researcher is to expect the informant to have a complete answer ready, which is available only if the researcher manages to apply the right interview methods. However, knowledge and understanding are not only transferred, but produced in an interactive communication process. The researcher is creating the content of the informant’s story, and the given information might not be as personal as one would think.

I have conducted eleven interviews with participants, founders and core members of LEAN IN groups in China, including two pilot interviews. The interviews were long and comprehensive, lasting between thirty minutes to one hour and forty-five minutes. I stayed in touch with the informants after I left China in order to get updates on their activities and work.

Many LEAN IN groups in China are registered on the American LEAN IN organisation’s website, which was where I first came in touch with the co-founder of LEAN IN Hangzhou, Chen Meihui in June 2015. I got to know other informants through LEAN IN Hangzhou’s and LEAN IN Tsinghua’s private group-chat on WeChat, and by using the well-established Chinese LEAN IN network. In order to ensure the anonymity of the informants, all names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

There is no clear distinction between members and non-members in Chinese LEAN IN groups (except for the core members). My only criteria for interviews was that the informants joined one of the WeChat group-chats and had participated in at least one activity. Except from Sarah all informants were from Mainland China. Eight of the interviews were conducted in Chinese, while Sarah’s, Zhao Li’s and Wei Lian’s interviews were held in

I have conducted semi-structured interviews; an interview style which allows the informant’s perspective on the subject of interest to unfold exactly as s/he views it. I used an interview guide containing categories and topics I wanted to explore during the interview. At the same time I remained open to ask questions that aroused in the spur of the moment or to let the informant ask me questions.

I used cumulative interview techniques during the interviews, which focuses on using information given in previous interviews in the next one. The last interview would therefore be quite different than the first. By cumulative interviewing I managed to get a better understanding of how the groups in different cities interacted.

As a non-native Chinese speaker, I met some language-barriers while conducting the interviews. I found for instance that I wasn’t able to ask as many follow-up questions as I would want, because I didn’t always understand what they were saying before I transcribed the interview. I took advantage of my foreign bias in some of the interviews, and asked the informants to translate the English word ‘feminism’ to Chinese, in order to learn which term was natural for them to use. It was quite easy to get a conversation going on the topic of LEAN IN, because the LEAN IN informants had joined the group voluntarily, motivated by passion or interest. The interviews were held in public spaces, such as cafés and university facilities, expect for Sarah’s which was conducted in her apartment. It was an informal setting allowing the interview to be like a conversation over a cup of coffee. However, being in public spaces might have affected the informant’s answer; s/he could hold back information in fear that people nearby would overhear.

4 Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is the analytical framework for this thesis, which I will introduce in this chapter. There are several different schools of feminist theory which try to offer an answer to

57 Rossman and Rallis, Learning in the Field, 177.

58 Aase and Fossåskaret, Skapte Virkeligheter, 109.
why women are oppressed. There are also different feminist disciplines which look at
different aspects of women’s subordination.

Feminism is not easy to define. On one hand, there is feminist theory which attempts to offer
an explanation to women’s oppression. On the other hand, there is feminism as a political
women’s movement.\(^{59}\) Becker differentiated between a socio-political- and personal-
psychological-spiritual discipline of feminism. The former asks questions about justice,
equality and power for women, while the latter implies empathy and compassion for both
genders, and asks for honest probing of women and men’s needs and aspirations.\(^{60}\)

The Western women’s movement is often narrated in terms of waves of feminism. The first
wave is defined by the suffrage movement with the aim of achieving votes for women in the
late nineteenth- and early twentieth century. The second wave originates in the 1960’s, which
focused on equal pay and the right for women to control their own bodies. The third wave
from the early 1990’s, sought to become more inclusive, high-lighting queer and non-white
issues. There is currently an on-going debate on whether or not we have entered a fourth
wave of feminism, which draws on social media activism.\(^{61}\)

Feminist theory is translated to «funü lilun 妇女理论» in Chinese, which translates back to
English as «women’s theory». Kou defined ‘women’s theory’ as a theory that seeks to
understand which female characteristics are given by the society, and which characteristics
are individual attributes. Kuo wrote that ‘women’s theory’ also sets out to learn who created
these cultural characteristics.\(^{62}\) This definition is similar to Saul’s, who wrote of traditional
feminists who distinguished the roles of men and women to biological and social categories.

\(^{59}\) Charlotte Bunch, introduction to Building Feminist Theory: Essays from Quest: A Feminist Quarterly, (New
York: Longman, 1981,) XV.

\(^{60}\) William H. Becker, «Feminism’s Personal Questions - for Men,» In Feminist Frameworks: Alternative
Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Women and Men, edited by Alison M. Jaggar and Paula S.

\(^{61}\) Elizabeth Evans and Prudence Chamberlain, «Critical Waves: Exploring Feminist Identity, Discourse and
Praxis in Western Feminism,» Social Movement Studies 14, no. 4 (2015).

\(^{62}\) Zheng Kuo, «妇女研究在中国» (Women’s studies in China,) Hebei Normal University Journal (Social
Sex is based on biological differences between men and women, while gender is based on male and female characteristics given by the society.\(^{63}\)

In this thesis, I define feminist theory as a theory with several schools that offer different explanations to women’s subordination. Feminism, on the other hand, includes both Bunch’s definition of political activism and women’s movement, and Becker’s differentiations between the socio-political- and the personal-psychological-spiritual discipline. Feminism in Chinese is translated to two different words. Yang argued that ‘nüquan zhuyi’ represents the early Western women’s movement which fought for political awareness on gender equality. ‘Nüxing zhuyi’ on the other hand, pays attention to gender differences and cultural awareness.\(^{64}\) According to this translation, and based on the informants own definitions of the two words (see section 6.8), I define ‘nüquan zhuyi’ as the political discipline of feminism and the women’s movement, and ‘nüxing zhuyi’ as a rather non-political version, similar to Becker’s personal-psychological-spiritual discipline. ‘Nüquan zhuyi’ could also be compared with Marxist feminism, which argues that external factors in the society oppress women, and women can only be liberated by seeking political rights and societal changes. ‘Nüxing zhuyi’ on the other hand, is similar to liberal feminism, which believes that feminism is not about seeking political rights, but to help and support women in a market economy where everyone is born with equal opportunities.

Marxist feminists base their theory on Friedrich Engels and «The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.» Engels blamed the capitalist system for oppressing women, claiming that the root to women’s subordination lies in private property. The oppression results from a revolutionary societal change, when the inheritance line went from maternal to paternal. At one point in history property (e.g. cattle, weapons, housing, labour power etc.) grew to surplus. The wealth was gradually taken as private property by men, who at that time had the main responsibility of agricultural tasks in the family. Due to maternal law of inheritance, the man could not inherit his property to his descendants. In order to secure the family’s property, it was required to make a change from maternal to paternal inheritance.


\(^{64}\) Liu Yang, «中国语境下的女性主义翻译研究» (Feminism Translation Studies in Chinese Context,) Foreign Language Teaching, no. 6 (2007): 60.
Women were degraded and became slaves of men; a mere instrument for reproduction. The overthrow, Engels wrote, was the «world historical defeat of the female line.»

Liberal feminists believe that capitalism will liberate women. John Stuart Mill claimed that a gender equal society will occur when freedom of individual choice and equal competition is given. Mill wrote that women were brought up to believe that their ideal characteristics and duty as a woman is to be the exact opposite of men, which is to live for others and have no life other than their affections. A woman’s character was shaped by her sexual attractiveness because she was dependent on finding a husband who would give her privilege and pleasure. Mill argued that there will be justice when humans are no longer born in a fixed social position, and when the belief that being born as a girl gives limited opportunities are abandoned.

Marxist and liberal feminism are the main theories to women’s oppression. However, according to Jaggar and Rothenberg, there are additional theories. Conservative feminists, like Sigmund Freud on penis-envy in «Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex», argue that women’s subordination is rooted in human biology, including weakness caused by female reproductive physiology. Radical feminists, as described in Shulamith Firestone’s «The Dialectic of Sex» also believe that human biology causes women’s oppression, but that features can be changed. Socialist feminists criticise Marxist feminists for being gender-blind, and radical feminism for being class-blind. Multicultural feminists believe that women’s subordination is based not only on gender, but also on race, class and sexuality. Global feminists see women’s oppression through the lens of imperialism or post-colonialism, and argue that the struggle against discrimination based on race, class, sexuality, colonialism, poverty, religion and nationality is a part of the struggle against male domination.


4. 1 Feminist Theory on Women and Work

The economic discipline of feminist theory discusses unpaid labour performed by women, such as housework and care taking. An important question is: Are women held back by barriers in the society or by barriers of the individual?

Liberal feminists believe that women will be liberated and equal to men in a capitalists system based on liberal values where everyone is given the same opportunities. Marxists feminists believe that only a change in the labour market will liberate women, because there are institutional barriers causing gender inequality. Engels claimed that the earlier division of labour between men and women was not determined by women’s position in society, and that a modern complex social division of labour has led to a lower social position for women.\(^{68}\) Saul claimed there are several institutional factors that impoverish women, like gendered division of domestic labour and the expectation of women to be the primary caretaker in the family. Statistics show that men generally earns more than women. In cases where there is a need for a parent to work less, the decision is usually based on factors such as level of income. As such, in most cases, the woman ends up being the one who has to either work less in order to be home more, or even quit her job. Women are often the primary caretakers in the family, making it hard for them to hold on to, or even obtain a high paid job as it usually comes with more responsibilities, which in turn demands more work hours. As a result, the demands for holding a high-paid job (e.g. long work-hours, travelling and be free of domestic responsibilities) are not suited for women as primary caretakers.

Saul argued that divorce has been a key force which drives women into poverty. When the court settles property, they assume that the money earned by each part is the money that s/he received from an employer - and are thus split between each parent based on their income. If the woman is the primary caretaker and earns less, she will be left with less money than her husband.\(^{69}\)

Secombe argued that the capitalist mode of production divides housewives as a «massive labouring population».\(^{70}\) Women are materially dependent on their husbands, who will

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\(^{69}\) Saul, *Feminism: Issues & Arguments*, 5-44.

redistribute the family’s income only within general contract of marriage. The housewives are placed outside of the working class, and removed from a direct relation with capital. Secombe wrote that «... it appears that he is paid for his labour (hence its importance) while she is not for hers (hence its triviality).» However, he argued that domestic labour directly contributes to the creation of commodity, because housework and care-taking are crucial in order for the husband’s wages to be converted into means of subsistence. Women will only have the opportunity to encounter the division of domestic labour when they are given the opportunity to work and to be a part of a community.

Bell Hooks agreed to some extent with liberal feminist thought, and suggested that women should rethink the nature of work, learn to value it as an expression of dignity, discipline and creativity - and not only in terms of exchange value (wages). She did not however, see work as a liberating force for women. Claiming that every woman will be liberated as long as she starts to work, ignores the fact that the vast majority of women already are working outside of the home. Their jobs have not liberate them from dependence on men, nor made them economically self-sufficient. While the feminist issues of the upper- and middle-class women could be solved by joining the workforce, it would not liberate women of the poor- and/or working-class. Some would even say that they would feel liberated by not having to work.

Sandberg’s original LEAN IN concept is similar to Hooks argument. Sandberg does not believe that having a career, or children - or both, is the right thing for everyone. She believes however, that the world will be a better place with more female leaders. Not only will the global pool of human resources improve, but every woman’s condition will be changed for the better «when there are more women in leadership roles giving strong and powerful voice to their needs and concerns.» Sandberg in « Lean in: Women, Work and the Will to Lead» acknowledges both external and internal challenges, but builds her concept on the latter, which I will analyse in the next chapters.

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71 Secombe, «The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism,» 12.
72 Secombe, «The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism,» 21.
74 Sandberg, Lean In, 8.
5 What is LEAN IN?

5.1 The Original LEAN IN Concept

Before analysing the Chinese LEAN IN groups, I will first introduce further details on the content of the book. Sheryl Sandberg is the current COO of Facebook Inc., and holds a M.B.A from Harvard Business School. She was named in Time Magazine’s list of the world 100’s most influential people in 2012\(^{75}\) and in Fortune’s list of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Business.\(^{76}\) In 2010, Sheryl Sandberg held a speech with the title «Why we have too few women leaders» at the TED Talks stage. Her TED Talk speech was developed into a book published in 2013, called «Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead». The book has been translated to twenty languages.\(^{77}\)

In 2014 «Lean In for Graduates» was published, which included the same chapters as the original book, but supplied with additional chapters discussing challenges related to graduate students who are about to go into the workforce.

«Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead» is separated into eleven chapters, excluding introduction. Sandberg uses personal work experience as anecdotes, and refers to surveys, experiments and statistics to strengthen her arguments. Then she offers advice on how to handle the challenges that holds women back from climbing the career ladder.

By asking the question «*what would you do if you weren’t afraid?*»\(^{78}\) Sandberg encourages women to dare to be more ambitious. She refers to a 2012 McKinsey survey which found that more men than women aspire to hold leadership positions. Sandberg believes that this ambition gap is to some extent rooted in external factors, such as the expectation of women to marry young, cultural messages saying pretty is more important than smart, and unwritten rules that describe aggressive and hard-working women as unlikable. Women do not expect to achieve leadership positions, which becomes of one the reasons why they don’t achieve it.


Sandberg uses the term ‘sit at the table’, both literally and figuratively, to encourage women to engage in business meetings, and to believe in their own capabilities. Women should not wait for power to be offered to them, but advocate for themselves, take risks, challenge themselves and ask for promotions; «(w)omen need to shift from thinking ‘I’m not ready to do that’ to thinking ‘I want to do that - and I’ll learn by doing it.»79

In the book, Sandberg talks about the importance of mentorship, and that women are disadvantaged because senior men tend to avoid mentoring junior women out of fear what others might thing of their relationship.

*If women try to cultivate a close relationship with a male sponsor; they risk being the target of workplace gossip. If women try to get to the top without a sponsor’s help, their careers will often stall. We cannot assume that interactions between men and women have a sexual component. And everyone involved has to make sure to behave professionally so women - and men - feel safe in all settings.80*

Chapter seven starts with an anecdote about a female colleague of Sandberg’s who asked her how to balance family and work. Her colleague had already started to make trade-offs in her job, even though she wasn’t pregnant - nor had a boyfriend;

*Women rarely make one big decision to leave the workforce. Instead, they make a lot of small decisions along the way, making accommodations and sacrifices that they believe will be required to have a family. Of all the ways women hold themselves back, perhaps the most pervasive is that they leave before they leave.81*

The focus on gender equality in Sandberg’s book is not on the expense of men. Sandberg stresses that finding a real partner in your spouse is the key to success. Women should encourage their husband to do housework, and men should encourage and help make it possible for their wives to pursue their ambitions.

A later chapter dismantles the myth of having it all (referring to a woman who has a successful career in addition to her family). Sandberg claims that perfection is the enemy, quoting Gloria Steinem: «You can’t have it all. No one can have two full-time jobs, have

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79 Sandberg, *Lean In*, 62.
80 Sandberg, *Lean In*, 73.
81 Sandberg, *Lean In*, 93.
perfect children and cook three meals and be multi-orgasmic 'til dawn ... Superwoman is the adversary of the women's movement.»

But Sandberg also received criticism for encouraging women to ‘lean in’ and overcome internal barriers as a way of solving gender inequality. Bell Hooks argued that Sandberg ignored women of colour in her definition of feminism, and that her notion about gender equality is based on the existing social system, making it seem like (white) men will « ... eagerly choose to extend the benefits of corporate capitalism to white women who have the courage to ‘lean in’.» Anne-Marie Slaughter published an article in The Atlantic in 2013 as a response to Sandberg’s TED Talk, with the title «Why Women Still Can’t Have It All.» Slaughter criticised Sandberg for overlooking external barriers, and in that way blaming women themselves for not making it to the top. She saw the way America’s economy and society are structured to hold women back. Something is sabotaging the dream of having an equal world, and,

... Sandberg thinks that “something” is an “ambition gap”—that women do not dream big enough. I am all for encouraging young women to reach for the stars. But I fear that the obstacles that keep women from reaching the top are rather more prosaic than the scope of their ambition.

Rosa Brooks wrote in The Washington Post that ‘leaning in’ was damaging to women, and if women are to gain an equal share of leadership positions, they need to fight for the right to ‘put our feet up’;

Long ago, before Sandberg’s book «LEAN IN» convinced me to change my ways, I had a life. I had friends, family, children. I had hobbies. I had a job, too, of course, but I also took occasional vacations, knocked off work at a sensible hour and got eight hours of sleep each night. Then I read “LEAN IN” and realized that I was self-sabotaging slacker ... And I realized that I hated Sheryl Sandberg. Because, of course, I was miserable.
5. 2 The American LEAN IN Organisation and LEAN IN Circles

In this thesis, I refer to Sandberg’s book as the original LEAN IN concept, as opposed to the American LEAN IN non-profit organisation, founded by Sheryl Sandberg and Rachel Thomas in March 2013. The organisation offers education and a LEAN IN community consisting of ‘circles’. Unlike the original LEAN IN concept as presented in Sandberg’s book, the organisation solely deal with self-development and overcoming internal barriers. Political activism is not a part of the organisation’s work.

On the last page of her book, Sandberg invites men and women to enter the American LEAN IN organisation’s website and continue discussions on gender equality. The website offers inspirational stories of people who have ‘leaned in’, and articles that cover topics relevant to the organisation’s work. That includes news updates on LEAN IN activities, celebrities’ stories and self-help articles for both men and women, mothers and fathers.

Sandberg also encourages the reader to create and/or join a local LEAN IN circle, a «... small groups who meet regularly to learn and grow together. Circles are as unique as the individuals who start them, but they all share a common bond: the power of peer support.»

The LEAN IN organisation recommends a LEAN IN circle to be small, consisting of eight to twelve members. They also advise the circle members to meet ten times a year, and to name a moderator who will run the meetings. Meeting guides are provided on the website. They are strictly structured, and it is advised to use a timer; each point on the agenda has been given a suggested timeframe. Before the meeting, the members are asked to watch a short film clip published on the website. At the meeting, the film is discussed, and personal experience is shared. The goal is for the individual to find behavioural patterns, to discuss the disadvantages of these patterns and find strategies to change what doesn’t work.

I met with LEAN IN Stavanger in Norway, January 2015. They structured their meetings exactly like the organisation suggests. Their group consisted of eight women who worked in

86 www.leanin.org


local oil-companies where the majority of the employees were male. LEAN IN ‘circles’ are not only for women. The New York Times wrote about Mark Feng, who had initiated an Asian-American LEAN IN ‘circle’ with classmates from Harvard Business School.90

Most of the LEAN IN groups I worked with in China did not arrange their meetings like the organisation suggests. Rather than arranging structured meetings for small groups, they organised large events open for everyone to participate. I explain the structure of Chinese LEAN IN groups in section 6.1.

5.3 LEAN IN and Feminist Theory

I argue that Sandberg’s book shares both Marxist and liberal feminist perspectives, but that the LEAN IN organisation is based solely on the liberal belief that overcoming internal barriers will liberate women. Sheryl Sandberg does not discuss the root of women’s oppression in «LEAN IN: Women, Work and the Will to Lead», but calls herself a proud feminist, and encourages the reader to embrace the label as well. She writes that the genre of her book is «... sort of a feminist manifesto.»91 Sandberg does not define feminism herself, but refers to a definition that was given in a survey, where a feminist is «...someone who believes in social, political, and economic equality for the sexes.»92

Marxist feminist perspectives consider external barriers such as institutional and political structures as women’s oppression’s main factor. Sandberg also recognises external barriers as women’s oppressor, and acknowledges a need for continues feminist political activism. Sandberg writes about her college years when she thought that the 1960s and 1970s feminist struggles had achieved gender equality, and there was nothing left for her generation to fight for.93 After twenty years in the workforce, however, Sandberg argues there are still too few female leaders, and that «...it is time for us to face the fact that our revolution has stalled.»94

91 Sandberg, Lean In, 10.
92 Sandberg, Lean In, 159.
93 Sandberg, Lean In, 143.
94 Sandberg, Lean In, 7.
She believes that external barriers like sexism, discrimination, sexual harassment, lack of work flexibility, access to child care, and parental leave are creating an external glass-ceiling. Although Sandberg refers to a definition of feminism that implies political activism, but bases her concept on liberal feminist beliefs. Sandberg argues that overcoming external factors is important, but internal obstacles deserve more attention because they are under the individual’s control. She calls the relation between external and internal barriers a ‘chicken-and-egg situation’; the chicken is the belief that overcoming internal barriers will help tearing down external barriers. The egg is the belief that eliminating external barriers is needed in order to get women in to leadership positions. LEAN IN is based on the idea of the chicken; getting rid of internal barriers. Sandberg writes; «I am encouraging women to address the chicken, but I fully support those who are focusing on the egg.»

Sandberg believes that by changing their mindsets, women can liberate themselves and break through the glass-ceiling. The book encourages women to increase their self-confidence (‘sit at the table’), to ask their partners to take more responsibility at home, and to not hold themselves to unattainable standards (‘the myth of doing it all’). Sandberg, like John Stuart Mill, believes that children are raised to believe they have different opportunities based on their gender. Cultural messages that tell women and girls how they should behave causes women to hold themselves back from being ambitious. Internal barriers contribute as much as external barriers in subordinating women, and the main focus of the American LEAN IN organisation’s concept is on internal barriers and individual liberation.

6 LEAN IN in Mainland China

«Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead» was translated and published in China in 2013, holding the Chinese title «Xiangqian yibu: nüxing, gongzuo ji lingdao yizhi 向前一步：女性，工作及领导意志». The book’s title translates back to English as ‘take a step forward’. The translated Chinese version of «Lean In for Graduates» was published a year

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95 Sandberg, Lean In, 9.
96 Sandberg, Lean In, 9.
97 Sandberg, Lean In, 19.
later, keeping the original Chinese title, but adding «Lean In for Graduates» in English to the cover.  

When Sandberg gives statistics from the USA in the English version, the Chinese translation includes numbers from China. For instance, when Sandberg gives the percentage of female students at American universities, the Chinese translation is followed by the number of female students holding a Master’s degree at Chinese universities. These numbers are taken from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) report «Education at a Glance» from 2012. In this chapter I analyse China’s LEAN IN groups with the original LEAN IN concept promoted by Sandberg’s book and the American LEAN IN organisation.

6.1 Chinese LEAN IN Groups

Rather than holding small group meetings, most Chinese LEAN IN groups hosts larger events open for everyone to join. I use the term ‘group’ when referring to Chinese LEAN IN ‘circles’ because of this difference. There was also a confusion on the LEAN IN terminology among the informants, which I will return to in section 6.7.

There are LEAN IN communities in 20 cities and at 50 colleges in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Shenzhen, Wuhan, Suzhou, Guangzhou, Xi’an, and Ürümqi. LEAN IN Beijing was the first LEAN IN group in China, established by ten women in 2013. The group started off as a traditional ‘circle’, and developed to become a formally registered company in February 2016, taking the name LEAN IN China (to avoid confusion I will continue to use the name LEAN IN Beijing). Sarah is the co-founder of LEAN IN Beijing, and had already read the English version of «LEAN IN: Women, Work and the Will to Lead» when she met the other LEAN IN Beijing founders and decided to start a circle;

«We met at a bar and they were saying that they were thinking of forming a circle, and then we had our first meeting, and that was it. But the interesting thing about how the circle became a community and an organisation and a platform, was because we did a survey, and then in the survey Chinese women told us that they had three main challenges. They lacked self-confidence, they didn’t have approachable

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100 Sandberg, Lean In, 5.
role models, and they weren’t able to socialise easily outside of their normal social circles. So we decided to make an outward facing community.”

Sarah and LEAN IN Beijing are currently working on including other Chinese LEAN IN groups to their organisational structure. LEAN IN Beijing has also initiated LEAN IN groups in Mongolia, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, and is currently working on starting groups in India and Pakistan.

LEAN IN Beijing has created four different categories in which they organise their activities. The mentorship program invites professional women to mentor other women, soft skills training takes the form of seminars which are held by invited coaches, supportive networks events are structured like a bigger circle meeting similar to Sandberg’s idea of a LEAN IN group, and the leadership series are lectures held by powerful women who share their personal experience. LEAN IN Beijing arranges in average one activity a week, but this varies; there have been periods with up to six activities on seven days. They do not receive donations, and they keep LEAN IN Beijing sustainable by charging the participants for some of the events.

LEAN IN Hangzhou was established in May 2015 by Chen Meihui and her friend, which later developed to become a group of five core members. The number of participants has grown rapidly; when I first joined their private group-chat on Wechat September 19th 2015 the group consisted of 49 people. On May 25, 2016 there were 274. LEAN IN Hangzhou arrange activities approximately once a month in a form similar to LEAN IN Beijing’s leadership series. Up till now the events have been built around one or several guest speakers. One exception is where the signed up participants where offered a make-over followed by a photoshoot.

One of the group members that hosted LEAN IN Beijing’s first public event went on to establish a LEAN IN college platform, and later the group LEAN IN Tsinghua. When she graduated from Tsinghua University last year, the moderator position was given to Tang Ya, a Tsinghua University Ph.D student. LEAN IN MBA was established by Jiang Shuang in 2014, who had experienced depression and wanted to help promote other women’s well-being. Jiang Shuang first joined a LEAN IN group in Beijing who called itself LEAN IN Think

101 In interview with author January 2016. Sarah’s interview was conducted in English, no translations.
Tank but recently changed its name to LEAN IN SynTech. Jiang later establish a group on the university where she was a student. LEAN IN MBA focused mainly on female MBA students at Tsinghua University in Beijing, but Jiang Shuang considered developing the group and open up for other women to participate.

Wang Lanfang considered the LEAN IN group meetings to be the most important aspect of the concept;

«Because women actually have some — it doesn’t matter if it is at work or in life or regarding emotions, (women can’t) discuss with men. And — but if you don’t have a positive organisation, when women are doing these things, you will on the contrary become negative ... So it is just like, when you are entering the group, you will realise they will give a lot of good advice, and some good plans for action, and even look at your problem from different profession’s view. This is pretty important.» 102

The encouragement and emotional support LEAN IN group meetings provide is a crucial part of the concept. Sarah said; «I think that’s the beauty of it. People cry at me all the time, it really freaks me out actually. But I am grateful that they trust me.» 103

As both a participant and observer, I too felt the support LEAN IN group meetings offer. I experienced the LEAN IN spirit at LEAN IN Beijing’s event in January 2016. I was talking to Huang Liling, when the famous guest speaker Hong Huang entered the room. «Go talk to her! Introduce yourself and say that you want to talk to her about your thesis,» said Huang Liling encouraging. I immediately got starstruck and felt uncomfortable, and tried to continue our conversation hoping that Huang would forget. She did not, and kept an eye on Hong Huang. «Now!» she said suddenly, and pushed me of my chair. When I came back, she patted me on my back and said «good job.» When I later raised my hand during Hong Huang’s speech, Huang Liling grabbed my elbow and pushed it higher. After the meeting was over, I joined Huang Liling and her friend shopping. Huang’s friend held a Master’s degree in law and worked as a prosecutor in court. She wanted to go to the USA to get her PhD, but her friends and family did not encourage her. She was already 28 years old, and they wanted her to get married. Huang’s friend liked to go to LEAN IN meetings because they reminded her of her goal, and encouraged her to pursue her dream.

102 In interview with the author December 2015. Appendix C, quote 3.
103 In interview with author January 2016.
I had signed up to participate at LEAN IN Hangzhou’s activity in November 2015. On this event, the participants were given advice about how to dress for work. Afterwards, we were styled and photographed by professionals, and the photos were given to us afterwards to be used in your work situations. Earlier experiences told me that being the only foreigner would give me unwanted attention. I expected the make-up artist and the people around to comment my big nose and other foreign facial characteristics. My body physic is quite different from the average Chinese type - especially my height and shoe size, and I feared that I wouldn’t fit the clothes the stylist dressed me. I soon realised that the other participants felt insecure as well. One woman poked her stomach and said she had to loose weight. Another woman complained about her height, saying that the clothes would be too big for her. But we were continuously told how beautiful we were standing in front of the camera, looking like a model, and the environment was informal and empowering. I felt more confident, and I could imagine what the LEAN IN meetings meant for the participants.

6. 2 Strategies

Sarah’s main goal for LEAN IN in China was to help women overcome internal barriers, and to provide China-specific professional support and assistance. She did not wish to approach the goal based on political rights, but rather from a talent- and economical perspective. She believed that empowering women and maximising their potential would advantage companies, the society and the country. By unlocking women’s potential China will move forward;

«… to me (it) is the first step ... Society takes a long time to change, and I don't think thats really our goal because it is very hard to change others. But what we can do is to at least try to change ourselves, and that won’t solve all issues, you will still face societal pressures, you will still face barriers and unhelpful mindsets. But I think all of our effort now is providing people with tools to overcome these internal barriers and there are certain ways you can do that. There is obviously supporting networks, right? Which is what our community tries to be ... What is missing, and yes, we can talk about women’s external barriers, but I think they are all linked; women’s internal barriers, self-development is linked to professional development. If you don't think you can become the CEO, then you won’t be the CEO.»\footnote{In interview with author January 2016.}
Huang Liling established LEAN IN Guiyang in 2014. She argued that the people of Guiyang met different challenges in their daily lives, so LEAN IN Guiyang’s strategies would thus be different from other, bigger cities’ LEAN IN groups. The events LEAN IN Guiyang arranged did not only reach out to women. It wasn’t as much as empowering women at work as it was encouraging and helping people out of their comfort-zones. Huang described the LEAN IN Guiyang’s participants as people who lived an OK life in which they are comfortable in, so they didn’t have the drive to change is to something better;

«We want them (LEAN IN Guiyang participants) to have a particular knowledge, particular consciousness, and for the women to positively move upwards … if they can make friends, now that’s actually a really good thing, obviously our deepest goal is that — we see Guiyang having a lot of impoverishment, and being backward. People from outside; NGO’s or public charity organisations, are helping, but because they are too far away they do not have the opportunity to come and help and solve problems quickly. So after we gathered the local people of Guiyang and made a group and did some public welfare within our power, that is, (arranging) projects that makes people help local, backward people — because I have seen a lot of poverty and backwardness, and we want to go and change (this). This is an ideal.»

6. 3 LEAN IN Participants as Chinese ‘Middle Class’

Sandberg emphasises in her book that she was aware that her advice would be most relevant to women who already had entered the labour market and had a choice on how much, when and where to work. Most of the Chinese LEAN IN participants, core members and guest speakers belong to the commonly defined Chinese ‘middle class’ (maybe with the exception of LEAN IN Guiyang). Sarah also considered the participants of China’s LEAN IN to belong to the middle class, and saw it as a powerful method of helping other women;

«… what I think is important is that when you empower this middle class and above to have more influence, more power and more sources, then you hopefully use the power of this middle-class and above, and of the powerful, to help the rest. And for me that is very, very powerful because women need to help each other more. Women need to help each other more, no-one else is going to do it for us, we can’t just — all the NGOs and government and aid money in the world cannot solve the problems of the world’s women.»

106 Sandberg, Lean In, 10.
107 In interview with author January 2016.
It is not easy to define ‘middle class’ in general terms. Jie Chen wrote about two different approaches to identifying ‘middle class’ in China. The subjective approach identifies the ‘middle class’ according to the individual’s belief or perception that s/he belongs to the middle class in the society. The objective approach argues that a ‘middle class’ is mainly determined by some key objective socioeconomic indicators, such as income, education, and occupation. Chen and Qin wrote that ‘middle class’ is a large group of people in the middle of a societal hierarchy, which can be defined in various ways based on three components; class (economic position), status (social prestige) and power.

My informants belonging to the commonly defined Chinese ‘middle class’ is reflected in their higher educational background, which according to Jie Chen’s subjective approach gives them social status. According to Lee and Brinton, the educational systems of East Asia are highly competitive and hierarchically structured. The competition is fuelled by the widespread popular belief that a degree from a prestigious university sets you on the track of upward mobility through status, class, and income. According to the Shanghai ranking of Chinese universities from 2015, Tsinghua University was rated as the best university in China. Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, which Wang Lanfan graduated from, is on third place. In Lee and Brinton’s eyes, some of the LEAN IN participants’ and core members’ educational background gives them societal status.

Six of the informants had studied abroad; two in Canada, two in London and two in the USA. Jiang Shuang took her degree at Tsinghua University, but spent a semester abroad in the USA as an exchange student. Studying abroad is expensive. According to a survey on international education conducted by HSBC in 2014, the USA and the United Kingdom are respectively on third and fourth place when it comes to annual costs for overseas students, making the total

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109 Chen Chen and Bo Qin, “The Emergence of China’s Middle Class: Social Mobility in a Rapidly Urbanizing Economy,” Habitat International 44, (2014).


cost of 36,564 USD in the USA and 35,045 USD in the United Kingdom.\footnote{HSBC, «International Education,» accessed April 25, 2016, http://www.hsbc.com/news-and-insight/2014/international-education?WT.ac=HGHQ_Hn2.0_On.} For comparison, the average annual income the same year was 93,006 CNY (app. 14,300 USD) in Beijing and 56,571 CNY (app. 8,700 USD) in Zhejiang province.\footnote{National Bureau of Statistics of China, «Average Wage of Employed Persons in Urban Units by Status of Registration,» accessed April 25, 2016, http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2014/indexeh.htm.} Jiang Shuang paid 100,000 CNY a year for Tsinghua’s MBA program. The remaining informants had taken their degrees at Chinese universities, which are no less expensive. Considering these numbers, I assume that the informants come from families with high incomes which put them in an economic position that belongs to either the Chinese ‘middle class’, or even ‘upper class’.

6. 4 LEAN IN Men

LEAN IN is not for women only, shown with earlier examples of men establishing LEAN IN groups in the USA. Most of the participants in the LEAN IN meetings I participated in consisted largely of women ranging from age twenty to mid-thirties. There were, however, a couple of male participants present at every event. One of the men at LEAN IN Tsinghua’a meeting in October 2015 was invited by a female participant who was his fiancée. They were both busy with their own careers, and she was worried how that would affect their lives as a married couple. She asked one of the guest speakers for advice about how to organise their routines and what to expect when they later on would have a child.

There were about eight male participants at LEAN IN Hangzhou’s December meeting. One of the male participants was invited by his friend, who was one of the core members of LEAN IN Hangzhou. When he found that LEAN IN was originally a women’s group, he blurted out «this is awkward.» I spoke with Song Bo in January 2016, when he had only participated at one LEAN IN Hangzhou so far, which was the December meeting. He had been engaged in the private group-chat on WeChat for several months, but thought that most of LEAN IN Hangzhou’s meetings were only suitable for women. The meeting in December was the first that matched his interests.

Half of LEAN IN Beijing’s mentors were male, and Sarah wanted to bring in more men to the LEAN IN network. She was sceptical of having mixed gender groups, because she
wanted the community to be all female in order to create a safe space for women, and a place where they can meet other women similar to themselves.

«... now that we are established, I think that I want to bring more males in to support. We need to think about how that works, because you don't want this to become just like dating. Dating is fine, but I don't want us to become a dating network.»114

Both Li Yuan and Chen Meihui reckoned that some men joined LEAN IN Hangzhou’s meetings because they were looking for girlfriends. Li Yuan saw it as a good sign; these men liked strong women who was ambitious and had her own opinions, which was why they went to LEAN IN to find them.

6.5 Network

LEAN IN Beijing cooperates with the American LEAN IN organisation, and Sheryl Sandberg has visited Beijing several times; first to promote her book in September 2013115, and in June 2015 when she held a speech at Tsinghua University’s graduation ceremony.116

The LEAN IN network is closely intertwined, and most of the informants I spoke with knew about each other. They also kept a close professional relationship, helping each other out.

Chen Meihui explained LEAN IN Hangzhou’s relationship with LEAN IN Beijing;

«They will give us some guidance, like if there are some activities we can’t do because it might be sensitive. They also have a large resources when it comes to guest speakers, and they will say ‘Why don’t you and this guest speaker arrange an activity together?’. They (LEAN IN BEIJING) are sometimes willing to go to different cities and speak to women who are interested in .... She (Sarah) is very supportive, she will often ask us how we are doing or if there are any problems.»117

Huang Liling saw the relationship between LEAN IN groups in China as equal, saying that LEAN IN Beijing was not considered ‘the boss’ of the other groups. The same went for the

114 In interview with author January 2016.


117 In interview with the author January 2016. Appendix C, quote 5.
relationship between LEAN IN in China and the American LEAN IN organisation; they were equal. Sarah said that they were currently cooperating with the American LEAN IN organisation, but that she wanted to separate LEAN IN in China from them in the future:

«I need to be very careful about our image in China. It used to be seen as — we are inspired by the book and her (Sheryl Sandberg), but we run completely independently, and our finances are independent. I don't want there to be any accusations that we are funded by the US and controlled by the US, because we are not ... We are not trying to cause trouble in China, so I am very conscious of that. In China you always have to be careful.»

Milwertz wrote that feminists in China who challenged historically dominant patriarchal ideologies and practices were routinely accused of adopting a Western ideology that was incompatible with their local cultures. Separating LEAN IN Beijing with the American LEAN IN organisation could be a strategy for sustaining LEAN IN Beijing’s connections with the ACWF. Sarah said she didn’t want to be accused of being controlled by the American LEAN IN organisation.

LEAN IN Beijing also works with the Beijing Women’s Federation, a local branch of the ACWF. Women of China, ACWF’s English online news outlet has published several articles regarding China’s LEAN IN’s work and events, which could indicate their approval of LEAN IN. They have also published a book review from 2013 on Sheryl Sandberg’s book «Lean In: Women, work and the Will to Lead.» The news agency Xinhua named Sheryl Sandberg a «famous advocate for women's rights and interests.» According to the same article, the book had been re-printed six times in approximately two months. Sarah expressed that she wanted to establish collaboration with the ACWF on a national level and with the Chinese

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118 In interview with author January 2016.

119 Milwertz, Beijing Women Organizing for Change, 20.

120 See for example Wu, «Beijing Lean In Organization,» Willborn, «Author Joy Chen Meets Fans in Beijing,» and Willborn, «Lean in Beijing Opens Survey of Women in Workforce».


government. Sarah wants LEAN IN Beijing to embrace the role as a social enterprise, and avoid working like a NGO;

«We operate in the way a non-profit operates, in the sense that we have events, some are free some are not. So we make some revenues from events to keep us going, to keep us sustainable, and I think that is the road we want to go. We don’t want to be an NGO who accepts donations.»

6.6 Chinese LEAN IN Groups and Sandberg’s Provided Material

Even though the American LEAN IN organisation encourages their followers to use the material published on their website, none of the LEAN IN groups in China took use of any articles nor meeting-guides.

At the first LEAN IN meeting I attended, the guest speaker asked the audience consisting of approximately 40 participants, how many had read Sandberg’s «Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead». About eight people raised their hands. Of the informants I interviewed, none of them had read «Lean In for Graduates». Nine informants had read «Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead»; four of them read it in Chinese and four of them in English. Li Yuan had read it in both languages. Wei Lian had read the English version three times, while others said they would often return to the book and re-read passages. Wei Lian wanted LEAN IN Hangzhou to take more use of the books in the meetings;

«I think we should continue to work on the book club thing, and we should bring in more people to read this book. And maybe go through chapter by chapter and see how everyone thinks of what she mentions in the book. Really grasp the spirit, you know, really study in depth ... Otherwise I think the event will be - it’s really free, this is needed, right? But I’m thinking, people should first really understand the book, respect the book. But not study the book as a bible, you know what I mean? Not just stick on whatever is mentioned in the book, but really imagine and use the book well, and then we can have events, like social events, and openly discuss something else outside the book. The first step should be to discuss the content of the book, that should be the foundation. Everyone comes to the LEAN IN program should at least know about this book, read the summary of the book.»

The other informants weren’t that enthusiastic about including more of the book in their meetings. Huang Liling emphasised that her own LEAN IN group did not want to base their

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124 In interview with author January 2016.
125 In interview with author January 2016. Wei Lian’s interview was conducted in English, no translations.
meetings on the book, but rather extract the things they felt was applicable to themselves as Chinese women.

Most of the informants had entered the American LEAN IN organisation’s website, but the available material had so far not been used in their meetings. Tang Ya said she would consider using the material in the future, while Jiang Shuang believed it was not of any good use; «I will read it sometimes, but not much, because I think the local conditions are so different.» Chen Meihui shared Jiang Shuang’s argument, and did not include the provided material when choosing topics for LEAN IN Hangzhou’s meetings:

«It could be cultural differences, but the material also touches upon persons or companies, and people here could think that they don’t know anything about them, and it would be difficult for them to sympathise, so we will take more measures to suit to the local conditions, saying like ‘here I choose some stories or materials that people from here will be more familiar with’, this way I think people will understand more.»

Li Yuan, who was responsible for writing the articles published on LEAN IN Hangzhou’s WeChat platform, was reluctant to re-publish the material from the American LEAN IN website. She wanted LEAN IN Hangzhou’s published material to be original;

«Earlier, before I took over, because they were busy they would translate other’s material and publish (it), or directly use other’s material. But then, the click-through rate was pretty low, and every time they published they would only get ten-something readers. I think as LEAN IN Hangzhou, we should make some changes to suit local (conditions) … Using other’s material won’t be so related — of course it is LEAN IN headquarters, of course it is very good material, but … LEAN IN Hangzhou is LEAN IN Hangzhou, so doing our own original thing is best, doesn’t matter if it is written by you or me, as long as you can’t find it elsewhere.»

6. 7 LEAN IN Terminology

The American LEAN IN organisation calls small groups of LEAN IN participants ‘circles’. A group of local LEAN IN circles in the same city that exchange ideas, network and hosts large

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126 In interview with the author January 2016. Appendix C, quote 7.
127 In interview with the author January 2016. Appendix C, quote 8.
events together are called ‘chapters’. A campus chapter is a student-run organisation that hosts events to bring circles and campus communities together.129

The terms ‘circle’ and ‘chapter’ was used freely by the informants. One of the LEAN IN Hangzhou founders called the five core members as her LEAN IN ‘circle’, while Li Yuan included the entire group of participants to the term. Chen Meihui thought of LEAN IN Hangzhou as a ‘chapter’;

«We make up a city. First, (we) wish to spread the concept through every kind of activities, and have guest speakers share and tell everyone about the LEAN IN spirit. I think after this, I hope that people — after even more people get to know each other, they might approve to establish some — lower, smaller circles who will interact.»130

Wei Lian used the term ‘circle’ in a different way. After she read «LEAN IN: Women, Work and the Will to Lead», she shared the ideas with others who had similar values and background. This came to be her LEAN IN ‘circle’:

Wei Lian: ... And then it started to become a circle - that happened before I met with a LEAN IN circle.
Selstø: So you started to create your own circle? 
Wei Lian: Yes, unofficial circle. I shared the book instantly - every page I read I highlighted the sentences I really liked, and then every post that I shared I would see a lot of people "liking" it.
Selstø: On WeChat? 
Wei Lian: Yeah, on WeChat, and they would comment on that.
Selstø: So you had regular meetings?
Wei Lian: No - just randomly talk about it, and post whenever I felt like it, and have casual conversations on WeChat.131

Sarah thought that ‘circles’ in the original LEAN IN sense was not suitable for the Chinese context. She found that LEAN IN Beijing had limited success with organising traditional LEAN IN circles because, according to her, the Chinese «just wanted to make everything big».132 Huang Liling on the other side, found great use of arranging smaller ‘circle’ meetings. She and her friends would meet at a café every other week and talk about problems or challenges they dealt with at work or in their lives, and together try to solve these issues.

129 Lean In Circles, «Together We're Better».
130 In interview with the author January 2016. Appendix C, quote 10.
131 In interview with author January 2016.
132 In interview with author January 2016.
They would be between six and seven women at each meeting, which Huang Liling called her own LEAN IN ‘circle’. They arranged these meetings in addition to LEAN IN Beijing’s events because they wanted to put the LEAN IN ideas into practice, and not just sit and listen to other people talk.

One of the founders of LEAN IN Syntech would distance herself from using the terms ‘circle’ and ‘chapter’ because she believed it wasn’t relevant to a Chinese context;

«I can’t tell you about the differences between LEAN IN circle(s) and chapter(s), because what we do is not just spreading LEAN IN’s idea and information in China, we want to create our own value of professional women in China, and solve the issue for Chinese women, not just be a channel for spreading a role model’s idea from Western worlds, which might not perfect(ly) match with the local women in China.»\(^{133}\)

Although some of the informants seemed willing to separate their work from the American LEAN IN concept, I found a conflict between the informants’s eagerness to create their own Chinese LEAN IN version, and the interest many of them seemed to have in Western culture.

I first met Zhao Li at LEAN IN Hangzhou’s meeting in November 2015. The LEAN IN Hangzhou’s organisers had invited a clothing distributor, a make-up artist and a photographer. The participant had payed 188 CNY to be styled and photographed by professionals. The clothing distributor gave tips on how to dress for work, and the participants later received their photo which could be used in their CV’s. Zhao Li was working with the clothing distributor, and said that their clothes were more ‘grown-up’ and similar to Western clothing style. She believed that Chinese women dressed too casual and too cute for work, and wanted to teach Chinese women how to dress more like Western professional women.

Most of the informants had studied abroad. Those who hadn’t, had travelled in other countries. The informants who gave their interviews in Chinese would still use English words. The same went for the guest speakers. One of the guest speakers at LEAN IN Hangzhou’s meeting in December 2015, would often repeat Chinese words in English. For instance, one of her sentences was «this is more [peaceful], peaceful» (zhege shi bijiao anquan, peaceful). Some Chinese people choose their own English name in addition to their native name. The LEAN IN participants and core members

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\(^{133}\) Lean In Syntech founder, in WeChat message to author, January 19th, 2016.
would often use these English names to identify themselves on WeChat, and I overheard several times that they called each other by their English names.

Some of the informants did not identify themselves as Chinese. Zhao Li lived three years in France before she moved to the USA to study. She believed she had been influenced by her stay abroad, and did not consider herself a traditional Chinese person. Zhao Li had already established personal values similar to Sandberg’s, so when she read her book it only confirmed what she already believed in. Li Yuan, who had studied at a Canadian university, also considered herself to be influenced by Canadian culture. Although she had been interested in women’s rights since she was little, her involvement started after she interviewed Canadian women’s activist, which influenced her to read Sheryl Sandberg’s book in the first place.

Wei Lian, who had lived in Canada for several years, used the term ‘we’ when she talked about Canadians. She didn’t see herself as a typical Chinese person, neither a typical ‘Western person’, but said in her interview that she was influenced by Western values;

«When I was in Canada, I was really accepting their mindset, equality, and you know, be more involved, be a leader in your life ... So that’s one of the culture shocks I felt. I think LEAN IN helped me, as I said, I started to reflect by myself. I was thinking "Did I do something wrong? Did I believe, whatever I believed before, was not applicable in China?". So I was in a doubting moment, and then I picked up the book, and then I think the book also gave me the strength to continue believe in the values that I had.»134

6. 8 The Informants’ Perspective on Feminism

The informants used both ‘nüquan zhuyi’ and ‘nuxing zhuyi’ to translate ‘feminism’. I found that the informants linked ‘nüquan zhuyi’ with something extreme and radical. The informants defined the two terms in different ways, and few of them saw feminism as something that corresponded with their identity and interest.

At the first LEAN IN Hangzhou meeting I attended in September 2016, Wei Lian was one of the guest speakers, and talked about UN Women’s campaign «He for She». The campaign

134 In interview with author January 2016.
invite men and women around the world to stand together and create gender equality. Wei Lian told the audience,

«I am not a feminist. I think women’s rights, this feminism, the use of this word or the current society’s understanding (of the term) actually could be a bit extreme. Actually, I think women’s rights are exactly what I want to seek. There is also people who says that whether it is women’s rights or gender equality, this concept is really under the big scope of human rights, but it could be that sometimes when we look at human rights, human rights activism, which are both sensitive (topics), we will have some fear that it (women’s rights) is a part (of human rights). Today, I only want to talk about economic rights and the current — what we can do in our current lives, and how we can stand on our own feet, and be able to find our own rights.»

Few of the informants would identify themselves as feminists. Although Zhao Li agreed with feminism, she would not call herself a feminist (‘nüquan zhuyi zhe’) because it spoke against her personality; «I can still be very soft, and I respect my husband, and you know, you can -- you still enjoy the benefits of being a girl, you can be girly, you don't have to like arrrgr (growls), like that.» Wei Lian saw ‘nüquan zhuyi’ as something that didn’t correspond to her interests; « … I wouldn't use that word to describe me, I would just say I am more into equality, and then gender equality is part of the human rights, right? So I am more interested in that topic.»

Jiang saw ‘nüquan zhuyi’ as something that was linked to gender equality, which fought for women’s rights in every aspects of the society. ‘Nüxing zhuyi’ on the other hand, was not saying that women had to make a stand against men, but to propose a principle where women should care for themselves, and to help and support each other;

«It is just like the old saying, ‘three women are enough for drama’, it seems like it is saying that where there are many women there’s an issue, it is like the imperial dramas, (where women) fight and scheme against each other. But I don’t think it is like that when women are together. When women are together they definitely have to support each other and grow together.»

136 In LEAN IN Hangzhou’s meeting September 2015. Appendix C, quote 11.
137 In interview with author January 2016. Zhao Li’s interview was conducted in English, no translations.
138 In interview with the author January 2016.
139 In interview with the author January 2016. Appendix C, quote 12.
Chen Meihui’s feminist identity was, according to herself, not so extreme. She believed that women can do what men, and that women should strive for the same rights and interest as men do. Chen defined ‘nüquan zhuyi’ as something which believed that «women should definitely be stronger than men.»¹⁴⁰ She believed people would think of you as a ‘control freak’ who fought for rights and interests with a strong dominance if you called yourself a ‘nüquan zhuyi zhe’ in China;

«This way, I think (feminism) has some negative connotations, but I think that in China we don’t have what Europe and America have — it could be that when it comes to feminism, people’s way of thinking aren’t that extreme, I think, it seems quite good.»¹⁴¹

Tang Ya did call herself a feminist (nüquan zhuyi zhe), but like Chen Meihui emphasised that it was in a non-radical sense. Tang Ya said that ‘nüquan zhuyi’ was conceived as a radical term, but she rather thought of it as promoting gender equality. She defined the radical version of ‘nüquan zhuyi’ as «more crazy». When I asked her if she thought ‘nüxing zhuyi’ was a better word, she answered; «I actually think it’s not important how we choose to address this concept.»¹⁴²

Song Bo would not call himself a feminist (nüquan zhuyi zhe), but said he wasn’t really clear what feminism actually meant. He also saw problems with having two Chinese words for the term ‘feminism’;

«You can’t take the meaning of ‘nüquan zhuyi’ and change it to a new word ... I don’t say if you are a ‘nüquan zhuyi zhe’ or not, we say ‘do you support gender equality or not’. Then people will say they do, but then they are in fact a disguised ‘nüquan zhuyi zhe’.»¹⁴³

Both Wei Lian and Zhao Li thought of ‘nüquan zhuyi’ as something that wasn’t very welcomed in China. Zhao explained;

«It doesn’t do you any good in life or work. Unless you are working in human rights, then you need to position yourself as a feminist. I don’t know. But I wouldn’t go out

¹⁴² In interview with the author January 2016. Appendix C, quote 15.
¹⁴³ In interview with the author January 2016. Appendix C, quote 16.
and promote (her start-up company), and then I say, "hey, I'm a feminist!" It doesn't really help."\textsuperscript{144}

I met with Yang Jinjing a couple of hours before I attended an activity LEAN IN Beijing was co-hosting with Young China Watchers, a group of young professional training new China thought-leaders.\textsuperscript{145} The guest speaker was Hong Huang, a known controversial media figure who was invited to discuss how Chinese women can succeed in life. I told Yang that I was going to the event, and Yang responded «Hong does not fit with LEAN IN's work, she will turn it into a feminist thing! I still think women should be gentle, and not as direct as she is.»\textsuperscript{146} When I asked her if she regarded herself as a feminist, she answered; «my friends see me as a feminist, but I still think of myself as a little girl.»\textsuperscript{147} Yang didn’t consider LEAN IN a feminist (‘nüquan zhuyi’) activity, because to her ‘nüquan zhuyi’ was about countering men and women, which implied that one person was situated over the other;

«A lot of people think you are talking about fighting to get to a higher position than men when you say 'nüquan zhuyi', but it's not actually like that. I think women's rights is just what LEAN IN emphasises; that you shouldn’t be too dependent, rely too much on others, or that you should not put too much focus on external — outcomes.»\textsuperscript{148}

When Sarah talked with people who were unfamiliar with the LEAN IN concept, she would tell them that LEAN IN is a ‘nüxing’ organisation and not ‘nüquan’. Sarah would identify herself as a feminist, but emphasised the importance of strategy when working with women’s issues in China; «... while I do believe in women’s rights and I fight for them, which makes me a feminist -- the way you fight for them is important. I feel that pointing fingers isn't going to get you anywhere.»\textsuperscript{149}

Sarah believed that feminism as an objective word promoting women’s rights. However, she believed ‘nüquan’ in China was associated with ways of achieving political rights, which was

\textsuperscript{144} In interview with author January 2016.


\textsuperscript{146} Shared after the interview, no translation.

\textsuperscript{147} In interview with the author January 2016. Appendix C, quote 17.

\textsuperscript{148} In interview with the author January 2016. Appendix C, quote 18.

\textsuperscript{149} In interview with author January 2016.
why most people wouldn’t embrace the term. Huang Liling also considered ‘nüquan’ a sensitive word, and avoided using the term. Like Sarah, she described LEAN IN Guiyang as a ‘nüxing’ organisation;

«‘nüquan zhuyi’ is a sensitive word in China, it’s just like human rights — women’s rights, so we promote ‘nüxing’ (zhuyi), it is just like — we only wish for equality. Just like LEAN IN Guiyang; we set up a platform, and let everyone be aware (that) it is not like just because I’m a woman I can wait for a man to earn me money and use that as an excuse, but it is the opposite; it is because I’m a woman I have to bring my advantages into play, and positively move upwards. No matter whether it is regarding your work or your family, or even regarding your life — it is a kind of upgrade.»

7 Concluding Remarks: A New Feminism for China?

In this thesis I have looked at LEAN IN groups as a case study of feminism in China. I have compared Chinese LEAN IN groups with both Sandberg’s concept and feminist theory. I hypothesised that the Chinese LEAN IN groups had made changes from Sandberg’s original idea to their organisational structure, content and perspective on feminism in order to adapt to the Chinese context where women’s issues are considered political sensitive.

Didi Kristen Tatlow wrote in the New York Times that LEAN IN was a new feminism for China. My findings indicate the contrary. Their perspective on feminism was different from the original LEAN IN concept based on Sheryl Sandberg’s book «Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead», but was similar to the American LEAN IN organisation’s view. Sandberg’s book shares both Marxist and liberal feminist perspectives, while she bases the LEAN IN concept and organisation solely on the liberal belief that overcoming internal barriers will liberate women.

Some of the informants did not identify themselves as typical Chinese, and felt influenced by Western values. It could be argued that these statements show that the informants do not see the LEAN IN concept as Chinese, since the origin of this concept has its roots in the USA. Despite LEAN IN’s Western origin, this thesis has shown that the concept itself is not new nor unfamiliar to the Chinese. LEAN IN’s is similar to the content of ACWF’s slogan ‘the Four Selves’. The focus on self-development resembles the American LEAN IN

organisation’s concept, and the so-called «Women’s Popular Academic Salons» are not unlike the Chinese LEAN IN groups’ meetings.

Chinese LEAN IN groups structured their meetings in open events, rather than small, private discussions. The Chinese LEAN IN groups were in fact different from the original LEAN IN idea in so many ways that it is natural to ask whether or not the Chinese LEAN IN groups can still be called ‘LEAN IN’. However, compared to the American LEAN IN organisation’s feminist standpoints, the Chinese LEAN IN’s core feminist principles remain the same. The American LEAN IN organisation encourages women to overcome inner obstacles, and offers professional development and support. Although Sandberg acknowledges external barriers (‘nüquan zhuyi’) in her book «Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead>, the American LEAN IN organisation is solely based on overcoming internal barriers (‘nüxing zhuyi’). The Chinese LEAN IN groups I worked with shared the American LEAN IN organisation’s focus. The groups (except for LEAN IN Guiyang) were also similar to the American LEAN IN in the way they reached out to the Chinese middle-class women, and saw it as a strategy to help other women. Sheryl Sandberg didn’t concentrate her LEAN IN idea on women only and welcomed men to join LEAN IN groups as well. Several men participated at the Chinese LEAN IN events I visited, which could indicate that the LEAN IN concept - and maybe even career guidance and self-development in general, could attract by both genders.

LEAN IN Beijing has a relationship with both the American LEAN IN organisation and the ACWF. Unlike Sheryl Sandberg in her book, Chinese LEAN IN groups have avoided the issue of institutional structures oppressing women. Some informants even expressed a wish to cut the cord with the American LEAN IN organisation entirely, which could be a matter of survival. LEAN IN Beijing is formally registered as a company, which could allow them to work under different conditions than organisations working with women’s issues. Nevertheless, ACWF could decide to prohibit LEAN IN in China if they step out of ACWF’s discourse on women’s development. This makes Chinese LEAN IN groups dependent on the ACWF.

There are limitations to this study. I cannot tell if the Chinese LEAN IN groups differentiates themselves from the American LEAN IN organisation because they want to stay within the ACWF’s discourse, or simply because they consider it a better way to carry out the LEAN IN
idea in a Chinese context. It is also potentially problematic to generalise this fieldwork’s findings to all the Chinese LEAN IN groups, as I have only conducted research with a few of them. I base my knowledge on LEAN IN Beijing on Sarah’s interview alone, and I consider her statements important and relevant as she is the leader of her group. It is plausible that LEAN IN Beijing will integrate all LEAN IN groups in China to one company, which Sarah could possibly lead. There are, however, ten co-founders of LEAN IN Beijing, whose opinions and future plans could be quite different from Sarah’s. It is also a weak point that only one of the informants are male.

Through my fieldwork I have discovered important issues of Chinese feminism. There has not been conducted any academic research on LEAN IN in China before. I hope this thesis has contributed with new insights and aspects to Chinese women’s studies. My research shows how a certain group of people working on women’s issues in China define feminism. This could be an important indicator on how women’s position in society is seen, and how women can be liberated - if considered oppressed. It is important to understand the organisations that are working on women’s issues in order to learn more about the Chinese feminist situation. Studying LEAN IN as an important part of a potential Chinese feminist movement could give an indicator to where the movement is heading.

As LEAN IN in China is an ongoing phenomenon, this research has provided an understanding to their feminist perspectives which could be a starting point for later research. It also raises questions for further discussions. Should feminist activity be localised and adjusted to specific conditions of a region, and what happens if it is? In the Chinese context, how can women’s rights be advocated in an environment where the main feminist discourse avoids political activism? Is it only the middle-class women (and men) who can lead the women’s movement and open up a new era of gender equality in China? And could LEAN IN in China and their use of social media - in this case, WeChat, indicate that a fourth, and maybe different wave of feminism is about to break?
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Chen, Chen and Bo Qin. «The Emergence of China's Middle Class: Social Mobility in a Rapidly Urbanizing Economy.» Habitat International 44 (2014): 528-35.


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Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. Background

1.1 How old are you? (你今年几岁了?)
1.2 Please talk about your educational background. (请说一下你的教育背景.)
1.3 Please talk about your current job. (请说一下你的工作.)
   1.3.1 Do you like your job? Why (not)? 喜欢你的工作吗? 为什么不?
   1.3.2 What is your future dream for your career? (你的职场的未来梦想是什么?)

1.4 Please talk about your family. (请说一下你的家庭.)
   1.4.1 Do you have siblings? (有兄弟姐妹吗?)
   1.4.2 Did your parents work when you were younger? (你小的时候你的父母都有工作吗?)
   1.4.3 Are you married? (If yes, go to 1.5) (你结婚了吗? (有:1.5)
   1.4.4 Do you want to get married? Why (not)? (你想结婚吗? 为什么不?)
   1.4.4.1 What criteria do you have for your boy/girlfriend? (你对男女朋友有什么要求?)
   1.4.5 Do you have kids? (If yes, go to 1.6) (你有孩子? (有:1.6))

1.5 Married or in a cohabitant relationship: (结婚了/有男女朋友)
   1.5.1 Who takes care of the housework? (谁做家务?)
   1.5.2 Who administer the household’s economy? (谁管理家庭的经济?)

1.6 Has kids: (有孩子)
   1.6.1 How many children do you have? (几个孩子?)
   1.6.2 How old are the children? (孩子几岁?)
   1.6.3 Who takes care of the children during the day? (白天时谁照顾孩子?)
   1.6.4 Who plays with the children? (谁跟着孩子去玩?)
   1.6.5 Who help the children with homework? (谁帮助孩子做作业?)

2. LEAN IN book
2.1 Have you read the LEAN IN book? (LEAN IN书你读过吗?)
   2.1.1 How many times have you read it? (读了几次?)
   2.1.2 Did you read it in English or Chinese? (你读的是英文的还是中文的?)
   2.1.3 Have you read ‘LEAN IN for Graduates’? (你读过LEAN IN for Graduates吗?)
   2.1.4 Where did you buy it/borrow it? (在哪里买/借的?)
   2.1.5 Why did you pick it up? (你怎么会看这本书?)
2.2 Sandberg’s book offers a lot of advice, (Sandberg的书提供很多建议,)
   2.2.1 Which is most meaningful to you? (对你来说, 哪个建议最有意义, 有道理?)
   2.2.2 Have you carried out an advice? (这些建议你去做了吗?)
   2.2.3 Which advice? Please talk about how you did it (哪一个建议?请说说怎么做)
   2.2.4 How does it affect your daily life? (LEAN IN LEAN IN怎么影响你的日常?)

3. LEAN IN online
3.1 On WeChat, do you subscribe to other LEAN IN groups? (在微信, 你订阅其他的LEAN IN组织吗?)
3.2 Have you entered LEAN IN’s website? (LEAN IN 的网站, 你上过吗?)
   3.2.1 Have you read the website’s material? (你读过网站的材料吗?)
   3.2.2 Have you used the website’s material? (你用过网站的材料吗?)

For group leaders/organisers:
L4. Lean In meetings
L4.1 Why did you establish a LEAN IN group? (你为什么建立了一个LEAN IN组织?)
L4.2 How do you propagate your LEAN IN group? (你们怎么宣传你的LEAN IN组织?)
L4.3 Do you have relations to LEAN IN Beijing? (你们跟LEAN IN北京有关系吗?)
L4.4 How do you find people to participate at your meetings? (你们怎么找想参加活动的人?)
L4.5 When you are planning your next activity … (你们计划下个活动的时候 …)
   L4.5.1 How do you choose the topic? (怎么选择话题?)
   L4.5.2 Will you use the LEAN IN book or the material provided by the LEAN IN website when you choose topics? (选择话题的时候, 会用LEAN IN的书或者LEAN IN的网站的材料吗?)
   L4.5.3 How do you find guest speakers? (你们怎么找嘉宾?)
   L4.5.4 Which criteria do you have for the guest speakers? (对他们有什么标准?)
L4.5 What have you learned from arranging these activities? Please talk about your good and bad experiences. (组织这些活动, 你有什么体会? 你能说说你经历的酸甜苦辣吗?)

For participants:
P4. Lean In meetings
P4.1 When was the first time you participated in a LEAN IN meeting? (你第一次参与LEAN IN的活动是什么时候的?)
P4.2 How many times have you participated? (你参与过几次?)
P4.2 How do you find your LEAN IN group? (你怎么找到你的LEAN IN组织?)
P4.3 Why do you participate in LEAN IN meetings? (你为什么参与LEAN IN的活动?)
P4.4 Are you going alone or with friends? (你是一个人来还是跟朋友来?)
  P4.4.1 Would you invite your friends to go? (你会请朋友跟着你过来吗?)
P4.5 What have you learned from participating at these events? What have these meetings bring about? (参加这些活动你有什么体会? 参加这些活动给你带来什么?)
## Appendix B: Primary Sources

### 1. Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>(Fictional) Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Lean In group/position</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Interview length</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Degree of education</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wang Lanfang</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Lean In Hangzhou, participant</td>
<td>5.12.2015</td>
<td>28 minutes</td>
<td>APP Development</td>
<td>Master (England)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Li Yuan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Lean In Hangzhou, core member</td>
<td>8.12.2015</td>
<td>1 hour 40 minutes</td>
<td>Currently unemployed</td>
<td>Bachelor (Canada)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Wei Lian (Interview in English)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Lean In Hangzhou, participant and guest speaker</td>
<td>6.1.2016</td>
<td>1 hour 26 minutes</td>
<td>Hangzhou government, UN, He for She campaign</td>
<td>Bachelor (Canada)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Zhao Li (Interview in English)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Lean In Hangzhou, participant and guest speaker</td>
<td>7.1.2016</td>
<td>49 minutes</td>
<td>CEO of a start-up</td>
<td>Master (USA)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Chen Meihui</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Lean In Hangzhou, founder</td>
<td>9.1.2016</td>
<td>48 minutes</td>
<td>APP Development</td>
<td>Bachelor (USA)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Yang Jinjing</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Lean In Tsinghua, participant</td>
<td>12.1.2016</td>
<td>56 minutes</td>
<td>Freelancer</td>
<td>Master (China)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Huang Liling</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Lean In Guiyang, founder, Lean In Beijing, participant</td>
<td>12.1.2016</td>
<td>36 minutes</td>
<td>Beijing government</td>
<td>Bachelor (China)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Sarah (Interview in English)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Lean In Beijing, founder</td>
<td>13.1.2016</td>
<td>1 hour 2 minutes</td>
<td>Lean In Beijing</td>
<td>Bachelor (London)</td>
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<td>In a relationship</td>
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<td>14.1.2016</td>
<td>59 minutes</td>
<td>Student</td>
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<td>Jiang Shuang</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Lean In MBA, founder, Lean In Think Tank, participant</td>
<td>14.01.2016</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>MBA (China)</td>
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### 2. Participated LEAN IN Meetings and Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>GUEST SPEAKER(S)</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1  | 19. September 2015    | Lean In Hangzhou       | «Women's leader ability and career gender equality» | - Initiator of UN’s #HeforShe campaign in Hangzhou  
- CEO of an investment company                                                                                                                                                                               | App. 40, among them 2 men                                                       |
| 2  | 17. October 2015      | Lean In Tsinghua       | The importance of finding the right partner       | - A married couple, both entrepreneurs, founder and CEO of «Miss Mama»  
- Economist, married to an Italian economy professor (not present)  
- Married couple, both lawyers                                                                                                                                                                           | App. 24, among them 2 men (more men joins in in the end of the meeting)         |
| 3  | 28. November 2015     | Lean In Hangzhou       | «Create your career essence»                      | - BQ (clothing distributor)  
- Catch (photographer)                                                                                                                                                                                      | 10, all women (not incl. the people working for the present companies)         |
| 4  | 12. December 2015     | Lean In Hangzhou       | «Want to change profession? Want to throw up your job and take on another? You are anxious, lets talk together how one should adapt» | - Woman working in HR in an internet company  
- CEO in a HR company  
- Woman working in HR, educated in USA                                                                                                                                                                  | App. 30, among them 8-10 men                                                    |
| 5  | 12. January           | Lean In Beijing (co-hosted with Youth China Watchers) | «Discuss how Chinese women can succeed»           | - Hong Huang                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 50+, men and women (more women than men, 60/40), Chinese and foreigners       |
Appendix C: Translated Quotes

1. Page 11
**English translation:** «I think I might have that way of thinking, but I am not that extreme.»
**Chinese:** 我觉得自己可能会有这一种想法，但也不是非常的极端.

2. Page 17-18
**English translation:** … ACWF will hold high the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, support the Party’s fundamental principle, fundamental itinerary, fundamental guiding principles and fundamental experience, support and develop Marxist view on women, carry out the basic state policy on gender equality, unite, guide numerous women at building an overall well-off society with a relatively comfortable life.
**Chinese:** … 妇女联合会要高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜，坚持党的基本理论、基本路线、基本纲领和基本经验，坚持和发展马克思主义妇女观，贯彻男女平等基本国策，团结、引导广大妇女在全面建设小康社会.

3. Page 38
**English translation:** «Because women actually have some — it doesn’t matter if it is at work or in life or regarding emotions, (women can’t) discuss with men. And — but if you don’t have a positive organisation, when women are doing these things, you will on the contrary become negative … So it is just like, when you are entering the group, you will realise they will give a lot of good advice, and some good plans for action, and even look at your problem from different profession’s view. This is pretty important.»
**Chinese:** 因为女性其实有一些不管是职场，生活还是情感不会跟男性去讨论，你吧。然后，但是如果没有一个很positive的一个组织，女性在做这个事情的时候，你反而被 — —你反而会 negative … 就是说，当你走到那个组织里面去你会发现她们给你很多 good advice，给你好的建议，还有好的几个方案，甚至于是从不同职业的角度去看到你的问题。这个还蛮重要的.

4. Page 40
**English translation:** «We want them (LEAN IN Guiyang participants) to have a particular knowledge, particular consciousness, and for the women to positively move upwards … if they can make friends, now that’s actually a really good thing, obviously our deepest goal is that — we see Guiyang having a lot of impoverishment, and being backward. People from outside; NGO’s or public charity organisations, are helping, but because they are too far away they do not have the opportunity to come and help and solve problems quickly. So after we gathered the local people of Guiyang and made a group and did some public welfare within our power, that is, (arranging) projects that makes people help local, backward people — because I have seen a lot of poverty and backwardness, and we want to go and change (this). This is an ideal».
**Chinese:** 我们希望他是有一定知识，有一定意识，还有一些— — 积极向上的女性吧，通过把她 们形成一个良好的圈子，如果她们能成为一朋友，那其实是很好的事情，当然更深层的目标是 我们看到贵州有很多贫困，落后的事情，那么外地的可能外面的NGO或者慈善公益组织她们 是帮忙，但是因为离他太远了，她们可能没有办法很快得去帮他解决，那我们把这一群贵阳当 地的人集结起来以后，做一些力所能及的公益，就是落地的项目让大家去帮助当地的人，因为 我们看到了很多贫困落后的事情，我们想要去改变。这个是一个理想.

5. Page 43
**English translation:** «They will give us some guidance, like if there is some activities we can’t do because it might be sensitive. They also have a large resources when it comes to guest speakers, and they will say ‘Why don’t you and this guest speaker arrange an activity together?’ : They (LEAN IN BEIJING) are sometimes willing to go to different cities and speak to women who are interested in
She (Sarah) is very supportive, she will often ask us how we are doing or if there are any problems.

Chinese: 然后她们这边会给我们一些，就是- - - 指引，就比如说可能这些活动不是可以去做
的，这些可能会有一些sensitive.. - 的，然后或者是她们会有一些嘉宾的资源，会说，”这个嘉
宾要不要大家一起来做一个活动” 这样子，或者是她们甚至有时候(Sarah)会愿意去不同的城
市，去见到每个城市对有感兴趣的学生跟她们讲。(Sarah)现在在做全职，她全职在做LEAN
IN，所以她对这一块- - - 她对每个城市的发展都很- - - 都很支持，然后经常会跟我们聊起来
说，“怎么样啊”，或者是问题。

6. Page 44
English translation: «famous advocate for women’s rights and interests.»
Chinese: 同时她也是位著名的女性权益倡导者。

7. Page 46
English translation: «I will read it sometimes, but not much, because I think the local conditions are
so different.»
Chinese: 有的时候会看，但是看的不多，因为我觉得国情还是不太一样。

8. Page 46
English translation: «It could be cultural differences, but the material also touches upon persons or
companies, and people here could think that they don’t know anything about them, and it would be
difficult for them to sympathise, so we will take more measures to suit to the local conditions, saying
like ‘here I chose some stories or materials that people from here will be more familiar with’, this way I
think people will understand more.»
Chinese: 可能文化上差异，然后包括大家比如说它里面一些材料涉及到一些人公司什么的，可
能大家这边的就会觉得，“我不知道”，会有一些可能比较难产生共鸣，然后所以我们会更多
得去因地制宜，就是说，“在这边我可能会选一些这边大家都很熟悉的一些故事啊，或者是
材料，这样去说的话，我觉得大家会- - 大家会更- - 就是更了解一些。

9. Page 46
English translation: «Earlier, before I took over, because they were busy they would translate other’s
material and publish (it), or directly use other’s material. But then, the click-through rate was pretty
low, and every time they published they would only get ten-something readers. I think as LEAN IN
Hangzhou, we should make some changes to suit local (conditions) … Using other’s material won’t
be so related — of course it is LEAN IN headquarters, of course it is very good material, but …
LEAN IN Hangzhou is LEAN IN Hangzhou, so doing our own original thing is best, doesn’t matter if
it is written by you or me, as long as you can’t find it elsewhere.»
Chinese: 因为之前我还没有接手的时候，她们因为很忙还要做活动什么的，她们也在做这个东
西她们经常会用一些翻译的，或者是直接用别人的material，那样的话，点击率还低的，那种
事?，只有十几个- - - 每次发了就是十几个个几十个的点击率，我觉得如果需要这样已经是
LEAN IN杭州的话，那我们就做区域化的很本地化的一些东西，你有原创他要贴近这个杭州人
这边的一些事情，所以我觉得如果去借用别人的话，可能- - 就是不是那么related，虽然
是- - 当然是LEAN IN总部，当然是很好的material，但是，人家已经可以从其他地方看到了
为什么还要来LEAN IN杭州看，那LEAN IN杭州既然是LEAN IN杭州那就做自己原创的东西就好
了，所以我其实是满坚持每次都是要原创，不管是你Sofie给我写的东西是原创，或者是我自
己原创，就是我们- - 其他地方看不到的东西。
10. Page 47

**English translation:** «We make up a city. First, (we) wish to spread the concept through every kind of activities, and have guest speakers share and tell everyone about the LEAN IN spirit. I think after this, I hope that people — after even more people get to know each other, they might approve to establish some — lower, smaller circles who will interact.»

**Chinese:** 希望能够把这些--就是这个理念先去铺开来，通过各种各样的活动，嘉宾的分享去把LEAN IN的精神去告诉大家。然后我觉得在这样之后，就是希望大家之间能够更多的人认识之后可能会一些会愿意再成立一些，下面的一些小的circle再去做一些互动。

11. Page 50

**English translation:** I am not a feminist. I think women’s rights, this feminism, the use of this word or the current society’s understanding (of the term) actually could be a bit extreme. Actually, I think women’s rights are exactly what I want to seek. There is also people who says that whether it is women’s rights or gender equality, this concept is really under the big scope of human rights, but it could be that sometimes when we look at human rights, human rights activism, which are both sensitive (topics), we will have some fear that it (women’s rights) is a part (of human rights). Today, I only want to talk about economic rights and the current — what we can do in our current lives, and how we can stand on our own feet, and be able to find our own rights.

**Chinese:** 我不是女权主。我觉得女权这个feminism它其实这个用词或者说现在在社会上的理解可能有点儿偏激。其实我认为女性权就是我想要去追求的，也有人说，女权也好，女性男性平等也好，这个概念其实是在很大的一个人权的范围之下的。但是可能有一些时候我们找到人权啊，人权运动啊，都有点敏感。那我们有一点怕(它)是一个part，我只是今天讲一个利权跟现在。。。现在的生活当中我们能做什么，然后我们怎么样自力，然后能够找到自己的权利。

12. Page 50

**English translation:** «It is just like the old saying, ‘three women are enough for drama’, it seems like it is saying that where there are many women there’s an issue, it is like the imperial dramas, (where women) fight and scheme against each other. But I don’t think it is like that when women are together. When women are together they definitely have to support each other and grow together.»

**Chinese:** 因为就是老话说，三个女人一-只怕戏嘛，一一台戏嘛，就是--好像一说女生多的地方就有纠纷啊什么这样，会各种，就是宫廷戏，勾心斗角，但是我觉得就是现在这种新女性相互在一起就不是这样的，就是女生在一起一定要互相support，然后就是共同成长这种。

13. Page 51

**English translation:** «women should definitely be stronger than men.»

**Chinese:** 女生一定会比男生强或什么。

14. Page 51

**English translation:** «This way, I think (feminism) has some negative connotations, but I think that in China we don’t have what Europe and America have — it could be that when it comes to feminism, people’s way of thinking aren’t that extreme, I think, it seems quite good.»

**Chinese:** 我觉得这样子就会可能会一点--稍微有点儿贬义，可是我个人觉得在中国可能没有像在欧美那么的--就是可能大家对女权主义者的想法可能没有那么的极端，我感觉，好像还好。

15. Page 51

**English translation:** «I actually think it’s not important how we choose to address this concept.»

**Chinese:** 但是其实我觉得这个概念的名词怎么样去称呼它并不重要。
16. Page 51

**English translation:** «You can’t take the meaning of ‘nüquan zhuyi’ and change it to a new word … I don’t say if you are a ‘nüquan zhuyi zhe’ or not, we say ‘do you support gender equality or not’. Then people will say they do, but then they are in fact a disguised ‘nüquan zhuyi zhe’.”

**Chinese:** 你不能把女权主义里面的词换成另外一个词，比如说女权主义，我不讲你是不是女权主义者，我们讲你是不是支持男女平等，这个时候大家会说我是这个时候其实也就变相支持了你作为女权主义我说ok 男女平等之后我们还应该为妇女争取更大的权益.

17. Page 52

**English translation:** «My friends see me as a feminist, but I still think of myself as a little girl.»

**Chinese:** 因为我的朋友会觉得我有一点女权主义者，但是我自己觉得我其实内心还是一个小女生.

18. Page 52

**English translation:** «A lot of people think you are talking about fighting to get to a higher position than men when you say ‘nüquan zhuyi’, but it’s not actually like that. I think women’s rights is just what LEAN IN emphasises; that you shouldn’t be too dependent, rely too much on others, or that you should not put too much focus on external — outcomes.»

**Chinese:**很多人一说女权主义所有人会觉得你是在跟男人争一个高位，所以- - 但其实并不是，我觉得女权就是LEAN IN强调的就是不要太仰(仗)，就是太依靠，或者是你不要把过多的那种- - 关注点放在在外的，对- - outcomes.

19. Page 53

**English translation:** «‘nüquan zhuyi’ is a sensitive word in China, it’s just like human rights — women’s rights, so we promote ‘nüxing’ (zhuyi), it is just like — we only wish for equality. Just like LEAN IN Guiyang; we set up a platform, and let everyone be aware (that) it is not like just because I’m a woman I can wait for a man to earn me money and use that as an excuse, but it is the opposite; it is because I’m a woman I have to bring my advantages into play, and positively move upwards. No matter whether it is regarding your work or your family, or even regarding your life, it is a kind of upgrade.»

**Chinese:** 女权主义在中国是一个敏感词汇，就是人权啊，女权啊，我们所以提的是女性，就是只是希望有这么一个平台，我只说LEAN IN贵阳，搭建这一个平台，然后让大家有一种意识是，不是因为我是女性，所以我就可以等着男人挣钱，我就可以就是各种借口，而反而是因为女性我没有我们更要发挥自己的优势，所以积极向上，对你的工作也好，对你的家庭也好，甚至一些生活里面也好，是一种有效的提升.